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## Mentorship as a Catalyst for Harnessing Digital Technologies by Polytechnic Librarians in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Arising from the constant evolution of information access and management, the integration of digital tools becomes imperative for enhancing library services and supporting academic success. Therefore, this paper explores the concept of mentorship in empowering librarians to effectively utilise digital technologies within Nigerian polytechnic libraries. The paper highlights the benefits and challenges of mentorship faced by librarians, including inadequate training and resources, and positions mentorship as a crucial strategy for professional development. Through qualitative analysis of mentorship programmes and their impact on librarians' competencies, the study demonstrates that structured mentorship engenders skill acquisition, confidence, and innovative practices. Ultimately, this paper advocates for the establishment of mentorship frameworks for polytechnic librarians in Nigeria to adopt, which is matchmaking **where** mentees are paired with mentors based on common interests, career development needs, and expertise that not only enhances librarians' technological proficiency but also promotes a culture of continuous learning and adaptation in the digital age.*

**Keywords:** Mentorship, Catalyst, Librarians, Polytechnic Libraries, Digital Technologies

### Introduction

Polytechnic libraries are a type of academic libraries typically found in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. They are saddled with the responsibility of supporting the academic and research needs of students and faculty in the aforementioned fields. One of the key features and functions of polytechnic libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is harnessing and providing digital resources for library users in their community. In order to meet the information needs of polytechnic library users, there is the need for professional librarians to be involved in carrying

out various tasks to meet these information needs. A librarian is a professional that has acquired a degree in library and information science, and over time developed various skills in the field of librarianship; however, in order to hone and perfect these requisite library and information skills, there is a need for mentorship from more experienced colleagues.

Mentorship is a relationship where someone with more experience, knowledge, or skills (the mentor) provides guidance, support, and advice to someone who is less experienced and willing to grow in a particular area (the mentee). It is a way to accelerate learning, build confidence, and help the mentee navigate challenges or opportunities in their personal or professional life. Mentorship can take many forms, ranging from formal programmes in workplaces or educational institutions to informal relationships that develop naturally. Whether in a professional setting or personal life, mentorship has the propensity of serving as an invaluable tool for growth and development. Essentially, it can assume the role of a catalyst to facilitate the rapid growth and development of librarians in their profession.

In the light of this, this paper therefore seeks to examine and discuss the concept of mentorship, and characteristics of a good mentor as well as the benefits and challenges of mentorship in this dispensation of digital technologies.

### **Concept of Mentorship**

Mentorship is a mutually beneficial learning partnership between a mentor and a mentee that utilises the expertise and experience of appropriately qualified professionals. The main goal of mentorship is to help someone with less expertise in a profession advance in their career (Chopra, Arora, & Saint 2018). According to Udo-Anyanwu (2022), mentoring is a learning process that leads to development and it is based on a personal relationship where an experienced person acts as a mentor and helps another less experienced person referred to as mentee develop as a professional in a bid to achieve professional goals. In this regard, Adetayo, Oketunji and Hamzat (2023), affirms that mentorship is a process in which seasoned individuals serve as counselors, offering career advice and psychological support to assist their protégés grow both personally and professionally. However, for the purposes of this paper, mentoring is defined as a time bound collaborative learning process where the mentor facilitates a conscious transfer of knowledge in a bid to drive professional growth and enhance the career productivity of the mentee(s).

Mentorship could occur in both formal and informal settings. It could also be from a superior to a junior or it could be from peers. As noted by Management Mentors (2018), mentoring occurs when an experienced person assists another in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth. A skilled and competent employee gains experience through a good working relationship with a more experienced superior. According to Geraci & Thyphen (2017), mentoring could include a range of tasks such as counseling, teaching, coaching, advocating, sponsoring, and role modeling in addition to helping with personal growth and striking a balance between work and life. In traditional mentorship, which happens to be the most common form, a more experienced librarian guides a less experienced colleague in several work contexts such as task execution, research process, expert review of manuscript among others. It typically involves direct; one-on-one interactions focused on skill development and career guidance. In the context of research, mentoring includes monthly meetings with mentees to offer support with tasks including obtaining grant money and publishing in prestigious publications (Byington & Keenan, 2017; Anyaegbu and Mbanefo-ogene, 2020).

### **The Situation of mentorship in Nigerian Academic Libraries**

The concept of mentorship remains a focal point in the field of librarianship. According to Ojei *et al* (2019), the development of a librarian as a human capital can take varying dimensions inclusive of interactive workshops, case study, conferences, self-study, participating in a discussion group, accessing online and print-based resources, on-the-job training (OJT), classroom lecturing method, study visits, case history methods, electronic teaching media, seminars, consultants and special training, formal training, staff-in-house training and mentoring; Jimmy *et al* (2017) also identified different ways of mentoring to include: library conference, library seminar, library workshop, library visit, library orientation, and one on one talk.

As noted by Ekechukwu and Horsfall (2015), mentoring in academic libraries may improve a person's dedication to the team, provide them more understanding of how the library operates, and foster better communication inside the library. Additionally, it raises performance success levels, provides an opportunity for networking with other members of the library network, and helps to build organisational culture. By building a supportive environment, mentorship programmes can significantly improve librarians' efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery (Anyaegbu and Wali, 2019)



The importance of this concept to the field is also evident in literature of librarianship as various studies have been carried out to investigate the subject. Such studies include Njoku (2017), Enweani (2019), Oluwabiya (2020), Oketunji and Hamzat (2023) and Musa *et al* (2024). The summary of the findings reveal that librarians received a mix of informal and formal mentorship; with more librarians receiving informal mentorship. The studies further established that the foremost objective of mentoring is for professional development and improvement in expertise while internship opportunities and in-service training remain the major mentoring programmes among librarians. All these studies were also unanimous in their conclusion that mentoring has high influence on service delivery and performance improvement of librarians.

It is, however, important to stress that the introduction of the digital era in libraries, with the need to computerise most of the routine operations, has changed the way traditional librarians work. Nowadays, librarians use technologies to acquire, catalogue, preserve, distill, and provide reference services and so on. As such, for librarians to be up to date, they need to be as savvy as the clients they serve and the most productive and effective way for librarians to stay relevant is to seek out proper mentorship opportunities (Nwabueze and Njideka, 2016; Anuradha (2017).

### **Digital Technology Empowerment for Librarians in Polytechnic Libraries through Mentorship**

Digital technologies are seen as the range of technologies, tools, services and applications using various types of hardware and software to facilitate services or activities by electronic means to create, store, process, transmit, and display information (Ayandokun, 2022). The integration of digital technologies in Nigerian polytechnic libraries has significantly transformed their roles and services in several ways. Dedhia and Kamlesh, (2023) and Francis (2024) indicated the ways digital technologies are reshaping libraries include digital collections and e-resources, online catalogues, discovery tools, information literacy and training, virtual reference services, and digital archiving and preservation among others. Observations show that many polytechnic libraries subscribe to electronic databases that offer access to academic journals, articles, and other scholarly materials essential for research just as they deploy modern integrated library management system to streamline library operations such as cataloguing, circulation, inventory management. Digital libraries and repositories are now becoming popular among polytechnics while libraries now offer online tutorials and workshops to help students develop information literacy skills, such as research strategies and citation management. Also, virtual reference services



through chatbots or live chat options now allow users to seek assistance remotely. In the same vein, libraries now manage digital repositories for preserving and providing access to academic works, theses, and other institutional outputs. TET-Fund has recently carried out a project of digitization of doctoral thesis, dissertations and other indigenous academic resources which will help to boost global visibility of the polytechnic's intellectual repository.

With the availability of digital technologies in polytechnic library, mentorship plays a key role by helping polytechnic librarians have fair knowledge of these technologies and effectively utilise them. Mentorship strategies such as assistance in skill development, professional growth, career guidance, fostering connections, research guidance, emotional support and confidence building all work together to produce a vibrant polytechnic librarian that can stand tall in the face of challenges in his or her work life. Experienced polytechnic librarians can guide less experienced colleagues through modern library systems which will help them remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century library. Mentorship provides a platform where mentors guide mentees on important career paths such as job applications, and interview preparation, helping them increase their chances of advancement. Mentorship also help build professional relationships between mentor and mentee that can lead to collaborations. These collaborations can range from publishing articles, attending conferences and workshops together. Such collaboration can enhance professional growth and lead to overall quality of library services available in Nigerian polytechnics libraries.

Mentors can serve as an emotional support system for mentees, helping them manage work stress and maintain a stable work-life balance. Experienced librarians who serve as mentors can share knowledge about current trends and innovations in library and information science, thereby encouraging mentees to stay up-to-date, in carrying out their services leading to more effective and efficient service delivery.

### **Challenges of Mentorship in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries**

- 1. Inadequate Funding and Institutional Support:** inadequate funding of mentorship programmes in polytechnic is one of the major problems mentorship faces, this is because mentorship requires a lot of financial commitment to be able to thrive well in the present Nigerian economy.

2. **Cultural Barrier and Gender difference:** Nigeria has diverse norms, values, communication style and belief system, which significantly influence the relationship between a mentor and a mentee; however, the pairing of a female and male mentor and mentee can be misinterpreted in some cultures, therefore slowing down the pace of mentorship, as some partners won't allow their spouse to be mentored by an opposite gender.
3. **Too much Work-load and Time constraint:** Oftentimes, a heavy work-load can lead to job stress which most times affect the behaviour of an individual. Hence too much work load may not allow the mentee have enough time to learn from the mentor, since he or she is always busy with office work. Workload can also impede career development of a polytechnic librarian.
4. **Inadequate Information Communication Technology (ICT) Skills:** ICT skills are very necessary for harnessing digital technologies by polytechnic librarians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however some librarians who are mentors are not well equipped with the requisite skills to peruse the digital platforms thereby posing a very serious challenge for mentees to be able to learn fast from them. This deficiency by some experienced librarians constitutes a major concern and needs to be addressed through training and retraining of mentors.
5. **Inadequate training for Mentors:** due to unstructured mentorship programmes in some polytechnics, training of mentors has been neglected, thereby making mentors to lack some basic mentorship skills such as empathy, effective communication skill and ability to support mentee career development (Neyer and Yellinek, 2011).

## Conclusion

Mentorship as a catalyst is a powerful instrument that can empower 21<sup>st</sup> century polytechnic librarians to effectively harness digital technologies. Mentorship provides adequate guidance from mentors to mentees thereby fostering innovation, promoting continuous learning, and equipping polytechnic librarians with skills and confidence to penetrate the complexities of the digital landscape. As a result, polytechnic libraries in Nigeria can enhance their services, support academic success, and remain relevant in an increasingly digital world through effective implementation and practice of mentorship programmes.



## **Recommendations**

1. Establishment of Matchmaking Mentorship Programme in polytechnic libraries across Nigeria: The researchers strongly recommend that polytechnics in Nigeria should set up a structure for a defined matchmaking mentorship programme in their institutions as this will go a long way to facilitate skill development in digital technologies which will ultimately improve service delivery in these institutions.
2. Partnership: Polytechnic libraries should partner with ICT experts, such as software developers, web designers, and digital resource providers to integrate cutting-edge technologies and resources into their mentorship initiatives.
3. Support from Government, agencies, and institutions: The need for adequate provision of financial resources is imperative for effective implementation of mentorship programmes. Therefore, government, agencies, and institutions should help provide the necessary support in the form of funding, policy frameworks, and incentives to encourage mentorship programmes in Nigerian polytechnic libraries. This gesture will help sustain long-term development in the digital transformation of polytechnic libraries across Nigeria.

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