International Journal of Women in Technical Education and Employment
ISSN: 2811-1567. Volume 3 – Issue 1. July 2022
https://fpiwitedjournal.federalpolyilaro.edu.ng

The Role of Career Mentorship in Overcoming Challenges Facing Female Construction Professionals: A Nigerian Perspective

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ARTICLE HISTORY
Received: june 22, 2022
Revised: June 29, 2022
Accepted: July 14, 2022

Abstract

Women's underrepresentation in the construction business in Nigeria has been a cause of concern. Female construction professionals have historically had difficulty participating in and developing their careers in the building and construction industry. Researchers, on the other hand, are developing frameworks to address these difficulties, one of which is career mentoring. This research looked into the influence of career mentorship in increasing female professionals' involvement and progress in Nigeria's construction sector. In this study, the survey approach was applied (questionnaire). 100 persons were provided with a link to the e-questionnaire, and 78 responses were gathered and examined. The study included women and female students from the professions of Quantity Surveying, Town Planning, Building, Civil Engineering, and Architecture. The two primary issues with the largest percentages of replies were an inhospitable working environment for women and a conflict between work and home duties. Mentors, according to 85.7% of respondents, were responsible for their engagement and success in the Nigerian construction industry. Career mentoring is a long-term approach for ensuring female professionals' participation and progress in the construction industry, according to the findings. Other frameworks' development and investigation will go a long way toward filling the gap in terms of complementing applications.

Keywords: *Career Advancement, Mentoring, Construction Professionals, Career Challenges.*

Citation
Ojelabi E. & Nnebue, W. (2022). The Role of Career Mentorship in Overcoming Challenges Facing Female Construction Professionals; a Nigerian Perspective. *International Journal of Women in Technical Education and Employment*, 3(1), 47-55

Introduction

Construction encompasses all infrastructures, highways, and buildings, making it a significant facet of society. Construction is a broad phrase that covers a broad range of building and construction-related activities (Vainikoko, 2017). Given the size of the building business, which is the second largest after the health industry, it is referred to as the construction industry at a higher level, which includes architecture, engineering, estate management, town planning, and so on. Furthermore, the construction business may be divided into two categories: private and public entities. The other category is to support the industry by the facility it is being developed for, which includes commercial, industrial, and residential buildings.

The construction business is a big and male-dominated industry globally, and women are underrepresented in the construction and facility industry in Nigeria (Richard et al 2016). Raising the percentage of women in the building sector has been suggested as a way to build a sustainable building and construction industry that respects issues of gender and equity. To address the issue of low female participation in the construction sector, past research has argued that mentoring is critical for the industry's development of leaders (Rogers, 2007). Women's experiences show that they face challenges as they advance in their careers, which is consistent with Ginige et al (2007) argument that one of the problems facing today's construction industry is its inability to attract young women to pursue careers in the industry, as well as a lack of

professional women who can influence younger women in developing those careers.

Mentoring entails instructing, knowledge transfer, and influencing others. Women who mentor in the construction business should motivate and assist other women to pursue careers in the field. Mentoring them on career pathways that the mentor has pursued and other prospects in the construction sector is also an option. Career participation and advancement are a significant part of every person's life, as everyone aspires to a long-term career that may be built through time. As a result, mentoring is a critical tool for increasing women's professional involvement and advancement in the construction industry (Kram, 1985). A senior and highly experienced professional takes on the role of guiding or putting in line a junior staff member in a sector through career mentorship (Kelly Creighton, 2019). Its purpose is to guarantee that junior employees avoid costly mistakes, advance faster in their careers, and eventually become mentors in their chosen field.

According to Adeyemi et al. (2006), there is a lack of research on women's engagement in the Nigerian construction industry; hence it is necessary to conduct one.

The goal of this study is to identify the significance of career mentorship in boosting female involvement and advancement in Nigeria's construction industry, as well as to propose solutions to the problems that have hampered female participation and advancement. This research aims to examine the role of mentorship in boosting the career progress of young females/women in the building and construction industry in Nigeria. The specific objectives of this research study are.

- To investigate the challenges faced by young females in the building and construction industry in Nigeria.
- To examine the role of mentorship in helping young females overcome career challenges in the building and construction industry in Nigeria.
- To investigate how mentorship has helped the career progress of young females in the building and construction industry.

Challenges Faced by Female Construction Professionals

The previous study on the obstacles encountered by female professionals in the construction industry in countries other than Nigeria identified a series of issues; while it may not be the same in every way, there are likely similarities between struggles experienced in Nigeria and other nations. Listed below is a summary of these issues:

Female Executive Staff Training

The problem of female executive staff training is a defining challenge faced by employees and employers, particularly those in the construction industry; globally, there continues to be a lack of female development in terms of skills and training. In Nigeria, however, the situation is considerably worse; women are significantly underrepresented in the construction industry, particularly in high-ranking positions. Organizations globally are tasked with developing their female executives through career mentoring programs to successfully manage this challenge; these challenges boil down to the following:

- Employers do not understand how to prepare female individuals adequately for leading roles.
- Insufficient standardization across institutions.
- Low rates of female participation.
- Limited access and affordable opportunities resulting from barriers such as occupational safety legislation that prevents women from entering certain occupations.
- Lack of knowledge about technical qualifications required to enter certain occupations.
- Lack of exposure to senior male role models both physically and intellectually.

Ahuja and Kumari (2012) posited that most training that could boost the professional progress of female construction workers takes place in remote places and sometimes through on-the-job training.

Work-Family Commitment Conflict

The global construction industry places little or no appreciation on some issues that are related to the

combination of family and work, and as such, some women do not attend to opportunities and training or rise to their responsibilities due to the commitments that come from family life; hence, some take breaks too often while some leave their careers early. Female construction professionals use an "either-or" paradigm in administering their careers and family (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020). It is rather alarming that Xie, Xia and Yang (2022) found that work-family conflict affects the safety behaviour of workers in the construction industry. Scholars recommend that work-family balance should be maintained by workers, leading to a compelling improvement in the safety attitudes of workers.

Inconducive Site Conditions

Having female staff at any construction site has always been seen as a burden to the contractor because they must provide additional facilities to assure quality treatment of female employees. Contractors spend extra money on these personnel's guest cottages and restrooms (Powell, Galea & Salignac, 2018). Both female employees working on the sites and executives run across this problem of an unwelcoming environment. Basic hygiene, child care, and first aid are not given much thought in a number of the building sectors around the world (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020; Baruch, 2010).

Wage and Promotion Disparity between Female and Male Construction Professionals

Oftentimes, the disparity against females in the workplace shows in the wages or salaries given to them compared to their male counterparts. Wage disparity has been an issue of concern not only in construction but in many countries and sectors globally (Shrestha et al., 2020). Barnabas et al., (2009) found out that men employed in the construction sector earn one and a half times what the female employees and workers in the industry earn; sometimes, it is even below the government standard minimum wage.

In real-life scenarios, women employees in the construction industry are seen doing most of the physical and intensive labour on sites, carrying building materials to higher floors; despite this, it is still assumed that women cannot undertake or endure long hours of physical activities at the building site (Ahuja & Kumari, 2012). Furthermore, construction sites are crowded with male employees; because the majority of them do not want females or women professionals to be supervisors over them, they, therefore, seek covert ways of phasing out the women from occupying or being promoted to higher positions (Barnabas et al., 2009). Previous research by Hodgkinson (2006) showed that in New Zealand, 46% of building contractors state that women do not possess physical energy or strength and men who are construction workers feel that women workers are not fit for the sector physically. This agrees with the work of Devi and Golden (2019) that mentioned gender inequality as one of the top challenges facing construction workers generally.

Accidents, Injuries and Medical Eventualities

The occurrence of accidents and physical injuries at building sites seem to be unavoidable, and female construction employees are at risk more than their male counterparts (Lette et al., 2018). A study conducted by Baruah (2010) about workers in a building site revealed that 51% of women surveyed had sustained one physical injury or the other during their engagement compared to 13% of men surveyed. When asked about the challenges associated with the job, a higher percentage of women (about 89%) mentioned that physical problems connected to their job. Some women reported chronic aches on their backs due to heavy lifting.

Poor Knowledge of Professional Structure and Rights

Most women who are working in the construction industry are unaware of the various structures of union activities and rights. According to the study undertaken by Barnabas et al., (2009), one-third of the women in construction that were sampled are aware of female construction union activities and a lean number of one out of ten belongs to the group, having become members. Those who have got the benefits of the union at any point in time are quite negligible. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of the function of labour unions in advancing the well-being of working-class individuals (Devi & Golden, 2019).

Methods

Research Design

When determining if research methodologies are qualitative or quantitative, they can be classified. Although mixed methods research is included in this category, most studies are quantitative or qualitative, according to Saunders, et al. (2016). As defined by Takey and de Carvalho (2015), the quantitative method is statistical, and thus the procedure of hypothesis generation is a scientific way of interpreting a condition. However, instead of the disadvantages associated with quantitative methods, the qualitative method focuses on creating a spectrum of opinions and perspectives on the research topic which may not give a conclusive end. According to Daniel (2016), a quantitative strategy aims to examine a current finding to confirm or refute it, while a qualitative approach aims to discover what is still to be investigated.

This research will be quantitative in nature because the technique is focused on the observation of a novel topic domain rather than the evaluation of an existent result or assumption. Because the overall strategy of the study examines the impact of mentorship in increasing the career growth of young females/women in Nigeria's building and construction business, the study will be quantitative.

Data Sample Collection

The proposed population for the survey that was carried out for this study includes undergraduate studying courses that fall under the construction sector in the Nigerian colleges and universities and professionals in the construction industry, most especially females. To get real-time responses about the realities of the female professionals in the field in the construction sector, priority is given to the professionals more than the students. The range of disciplines of these professionals in the construction industry includes architecture, town planning, building, civil engineering and quantity surveying. Also, respondents must be those who have at least one year of practice in the industry. As soon as these conditions were met, the link to the e-questionnaire was therefore sent to them.

Instrument of Data Collection

For the sake of better coverage of the professionals, the questionnaire survey was deemed to be appropriate and adequate, therefore it was used. The numerical data was compiled and obtained using the Google form tool. The survey however contained multiple choice questions in which respondents can choose more than one option to fully capture their responses and experience in the industry. The quantitative data were analyzed by the descriptive statistical analysis and the result was presented in percentages.

Research Validity and Reliability

While research validity emphasizes verifying the validity of the test instruments, research reliability focuses on ensuring the dependability of the responses received through the test instruments. Face validity is employed in this study to guarantee the validity of the research test instrument. Face validity is a personal assessment of how transparent or pertinent a test is to the research objective or inquiries it is meant to address. The face validity of the test instrument (survey questions) utilized in this study is ensured using the arbitrary judgment of experienced academics with experience conducting research of this kind (Mohajan, 2017).

On the other hand, parallel form dependability is employed to guarantee the veracity of the data gathered. Parallel form reliability is the process of testing a single objective using numerous sets of questions. The survey questions for this study had the same questions being presented in the different texts under several investigational parts. This was quite helpful in judging the accuracy of the respondents' answers (Mohajan, 2017).

Results and Discussion

The selected professionals who met the conditions for participation in this survey, professionals who have architecture, town planning, quantity surveying, building and civil engineering as their disciplines form the target population of this survey. The electronic link to the questionnaire was sent to one hundred professionals and a total of seven eight of them responded, indicating that 78% of the target population was later used in the analysis. There were 32.1% female respondents, and 67.9 % are male,

indicating that 25 females and 53 males responded respectively.

There are challenges facing the women in the Indian construction industry that were itemized by Ahuja and Kumari (2012) and these formed the variables that were assessed in the section on the challenges faced by women in the Nigerian construction industry. The results of the data collected and analyzed on the challenges faced by respondents are presented below.

Table 1: Challenges faced by respondents in their career journey (Source: Authors' compilation)

Variables	Percentage
Injuries and other medical conditions	7.7%
Inability to undergo further training	14.3%
The disparity in promotions for women construction workers	8.8%
The disparity in wages of male and female construction workers	15.4%
Site conditions are not conducive for women	24.2%
The conflict between work and family commitments	28.6%
Fatigue	1%

Out of all the variables tested, the conflict between family and work commitment happens to be the highest-ranking challenge that women in construction face, followed by inconducive site conditions and gender wage disparity. The work of Adogbo, Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2015) give credence to these findings. In their work, a framework for attracting and retaining women in the construction industry, these scholars recognized some barriers to the progress of female workers and the first three barriers according to the data collected is that construction job positions are very competitive in nature, secondly, they are stressful and highly demanding and thirdly, they are involving long work hours. The findings of Adogbo, Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2015) explain why the conflict between work and family commitment ranks highest. The stressful, demanding and long hours of work would lead to an imbalance between work and family.

However, on the issue of gender wage disparity which came third with 15.4% among the tested variables of career challenges, it has been a long-term issue in the workplace. The United Kingdom as a developed country is trying hard to close the gap in its economy whereas the work of Shrestha et al., (2020) affirms strongly that the gap also exists in the construction industry. Another challenge which comes after the wage gap is the inability to go for further training which is quite linked to the commitments these women have in their families.

How the respondents to the challenges faced in their careers were assessed as well. Forty-five per cent of the professionals responded with a resilient approach, thereby weathering the challenges, 27% of them were indifferent towards the challenges, and then about 15% of them withdraw. These three high-ranking responses to the external challenges or barriers are quite intrinsic, borne out of internal factors. For those who are resilient, it is an indication of their ability to withstand pressure, which was mentioned in the work of Adogbo, Ibrahim and Ibrahim, (2015).

Table 2: How respondents addressed the challenges faced in their careers. (Source: Author's compilation)

`	Percentage
Withdrawal	14.5%
Resilience	45.2%
Indifference	27.4%
Patience	1.613%
Finding solutions to the challenges faced to prevent them from reoccurring.	1.613%
Adjustments	1.613%

Get them solved	1.613%
Planning my work time well	1.613%
Do it nevertheless	1.613%
Continuation	1.613%
Intervene	1.613%

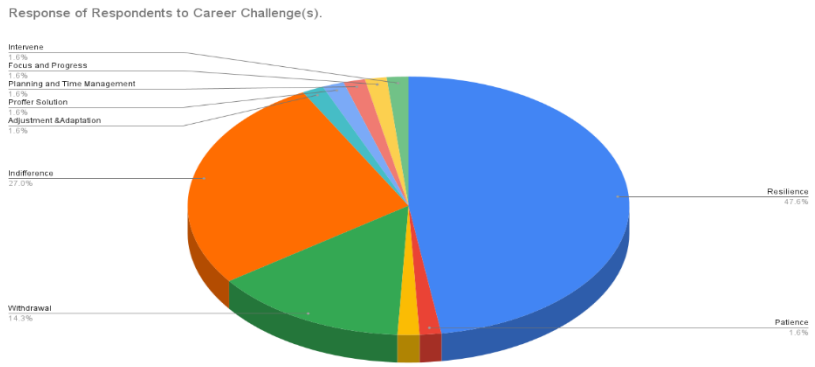

Chart 1: Career Challenges (Source: Author's Compilation)

In terms of mentorship, 75% have career mentors all respondents, and a whopping 74% of these have male career mentors while only 13% have female career mentors and 11% have both male and female mentors. This gives credence to the fact that the construction industry is full of male workers more than female workers (Akinlolu & Haupt, 2020). Therefore, it is logical that the number of male career mentors would be more than the number of female mentors.

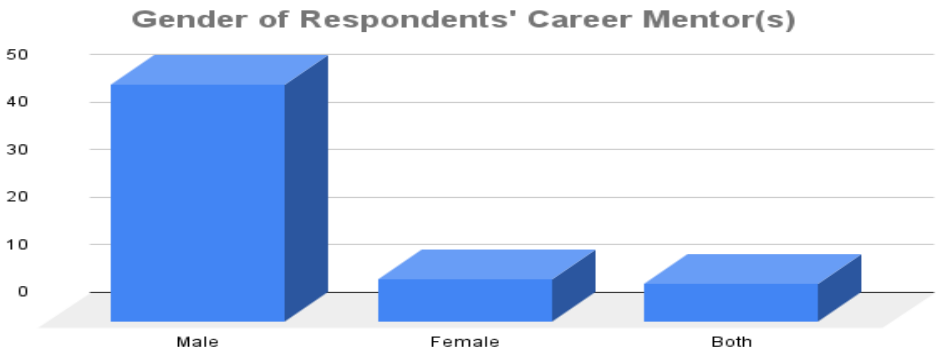

Chart 2: Gender of Respondent's Career Mentors (Source: Author's Compilation)

49% prefer a male career mentor while 40% are indifferent about the gender of their mentor. This is likely due to the prevalence of male mentors in the construction industry (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020). The fact that female graduates whose discipline or course of study falls into building and construction are not given opportunities as male graduates have impacted the rise of large numbers of experienced male construction professionals who are qualified to be mentors (Adogbo, Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2015). Therefore, the preference given to male mentors by respondents is not out of place.

78% of the respondents agreed that their mentors have taken steps in the past to advance their careers. This shows there is a positive correlation between career progress and mentoring. According to the study conducted by Rosa et al., (2017), the work was

centred on discovering strategies that could enhance the development of women's careers in the construction industry. The study gave a bold conclusion that adopting a role model or having a mentor in the industry is the most appropriate strategy for career development in the Australian construction industry. Yokwana (2015) affirmed that mentors should be able to help mentees through the process of self-discovery to the end that their productivity might be enhanced.

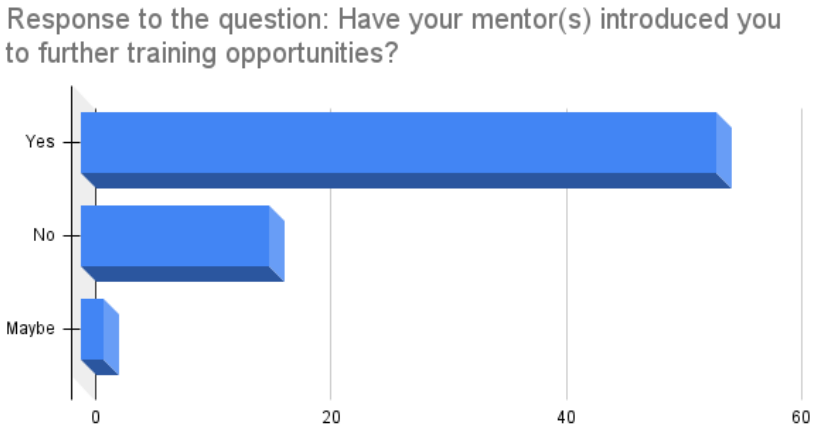

Chart 3: Displaying if Respondents' Mentors Have Introduced Them to Training Opportunities (Source: Author's Compilation)

Furthermore, 75% have been introduced to further training opportunities by their mentors, 55% constantly talk about their strengths and limitations with their mentors and 85% agreed that mentorship has advanced their career prospects. This result is consistent with the work of Vainikolo (2017) that states that mentorship programs are effective in achieving empowerment for the mentee. Moreover, Russel (2006) opined that mentor give mentees the needed cushion for transitions from the theoretical knowledge they acquired during school into workplace practice as a means to achieving their career objectives.

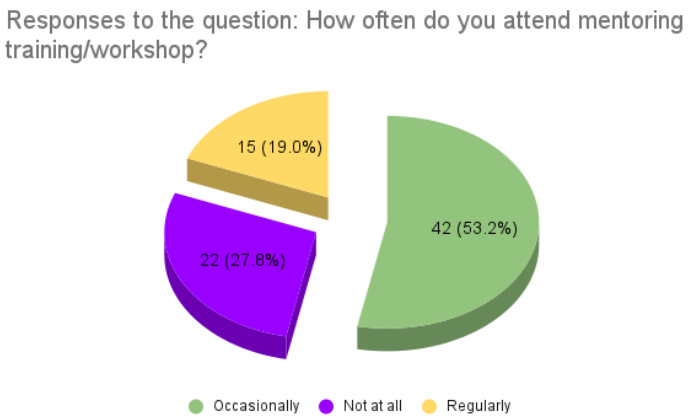

Chart 4: Frequency of Respondents' Attendance at Training/Workshops (Source: Author's Compilation)

Conclusion

This study examined the numerous challenges confronting females in the Nigerian construction industry and the role of mentorship in mitigating these challenges and improving career development. The survey discovered there are barriers to be addressed for female professionals to reach their full potential. The conflict between work and family responsibilities, unfavourable working circumstances for women, income difference between male and female workers, inability to pursue additional training, inequality in advancement, accidents and medical issues, and exhaustion are among the challenges cited by respondents. Respondents also showed that their predominant response to these challenges is resilience, indifference and withdrawal. According to the survey, mentorship is essential in resolving workplace-related issues for women in the construction industry. Furthermore, the predominance of male mentors suggests that women in the construction industry have been marginalized, which should be addressed if women in the industry would work under the supervision of qualified male mentors.

Other tactics for overcoming career problems and advancing one's career, other than mentoring, should be examined in the future, and their significant impact on issues thoroughly investigated. The empirical results of favourable strategies would be enough to forge a synergistic role with the results from this study (mentoring) in crafting a career path for female folks in the construction industry in Nigeria, overcoming challenges and boosting career development. Furthermore, we strongly recommend that regulatory and professional bodies organize mentoring programs for female construction industry professionals in Nigeria and ensure the smooth onboarding of new and upcoming female professionals in the construction industry

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