Mentoring for Sustaining and Maintaining Professionalism in Nigerian Academic Libraries

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Abstract

Rationale of Study – This paper highlights the usefulness of mentoring in sustaining professionalism among academic librarians in Nigeria. The paper identifies who a librarian is, the cardinal elements of a profession, the code of ethics of librarianship and why it is important for librarians to follow the rules and regulations of the profession.

Methodology – A quantitative research design was selected for this study to investigate the views of librarians on mentoring for sustaining professionalism in Nigerian academic libraries. The study used questionnaires to collect data which was analysed quantitatively.

Findings – The key findings showed that majority of the respondents are into one form of mentoring. Results also showed that there are benefits in mentoring and it should be encouraged and sustained for professional development. The paper concludes that mentoring is a tool needed for building future librarians and required for taking the profession to its expected destination.

Implications – The results of the study will help librarians and library associations to appreciation and encourage mentoring in the profession and do all to sustain professionalism through mentoring.

Originality – The paper's contribution to knowledge lies in its evidence to support the position that librarians need mentoring to facilitate productivity and professionalism in academic libraries.

Keywords

1 Introduction

Mentoring is an invaluable tool for career development for library and information professionals. It is a recognised way of facilitating learning in the workplace and designed to make use of guided learning with a view to developing the knowledge and skills required for high performance (Mathews & Crow, 2003). Mentoring programmes offer an established, verified, and proven best practice to enhance organisational and individual learning (Goodyear, 2006). It can be used for a librarian's professional development or as a tool to enhance the organisation's goals or library workforce development activities. Training physically, socially, intellectually and mentally is essential in facilitating not only the level of productivity, but also the development of personnel in any organisation. The need for improved productivity has become universally accepted; it depends on efficient and effective training.

The library is a cultural, educational and scientific secondary institution that organises the public use of published works. There are various departments in the library such as circulation, cataloguing, reference, serials, acquisitions, collection development and Information technology (IT). Individuals of various cadres work in the library to make it achieve the set goals. These individuals could be professional librarians, paraprofessionals and other supportive staff. A librarian is trained in information organisation and retrieval, and will often have specialised training in a particular type of library or function. An academic library is important to university education. The purpose of an academic library is to support the teaching and research of the university; it is an integral part of a university or college administered to meet the information, research and curriculum needs of its students, faculty and staff. Librarians, as prominent and professional library workers, need formal and informal training to be able to gain knowledge that puts them in control.

The specific objectives of this study were to ascertain whether academic librarians in Nigeria have mentors; identify the objectives of the mentoring relationship; explore ways of sustaining mentoring in librarianship; and analyse who an ideal mentor is.

2 Methodology

A quantitative research design was selected for this study to investigate the views of librarians towards mentoring for sustaining professionalism in Nigerian academic libraries. The study used questionnaires to collect data. The questionnaire was developed

and administered using Google forms. The Google forms link was shared to the librarians through social media such as WhatsApp pages of library associations and emails. The questionnaire was sent out and I waited for two weeks to work on the data. The population and sample consist of 24 respondents from different parts of Nigeria.

3 Literature review

This section presents a review of literature on the mentorship in librarianship. The section is structured according to the objectives of the study.

3.1 Conceptualising librarianship as a profession

Many people engage in various pursuits in life. Politicians, administrators, farmers, industrialists, housewives, shopkeepers, bus drivers, craftsmen, carpenters, teachers, librarians, accountants, doctors, nurses and many others are all engaged in special tasks during their day-to-day lives, but not all of them are professionals. Professionalism refers to the conduct, aims, or qualities which characterise or make a profession or professional. Qualities of professionals are competence, objectivity and integrity. Amarasinghe (1993) cited in Gallaba (2009) lists some features which identify professionals. They are being identifiable by reference to some register or record; being recognised by having special skills and learning in some field of activity in which the public needs protection against incompetence; the standards of skill and learning are being prescribed by the profession itself; holding forth themselves as being willing and ready to serve the public; being voluntarily submitting themselves to standards of ethical conduct beyond those required from the ordinary citizen by law; undertaking to accept personal responsibilities to those whom they serve for their actions and to their profession for maintaining public confidence.

Professionals belong to one association or the other either according to the nature of their duties or as a group under one umbrella. They acquire different skills and knowledge to accomplish their tasks. The duties of librarians are to provide services to the public. There are also ethical standards for librarians. Every profession has a specific period of training which makes the professional skilled in a particular activity. A profession is a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification. Professionals are considered experts in their chosen fields which are governed by a code of ethics and members are committed to the occupation as a means of interest and livelihood.

Professional librarians should be able to articulate the vision, mission and direction of their libraries. They have to learn and keep learning new skills to help them assist readers and seekers of information most especially in this information technology age. Librarianship as a profession is therefore devoted to applying theory and technology to the creation, selection, organization, management, preservation, dissemination and utilization of collections of information in all formats. Librarianship is a profession and like other professions, it is guided by codes and ethnics, which are rules and values in a professional setting.

3.2 Code and ethics of librarianship

The word ethics originated from the Greek word 'ethos' meaning character, norms, morals and ideals prevailing in a group or society. There are attitudes saturating the culture of a group of persons, with obedience to certain values. They include a definite tradition and sharing in customs and experiences.

Bhatia (2004) describes ethics as a mass of moral principles or sets of values about what conduct ought to be. It gives an idea on what is right or wrong, true or false, fair or unfair, just or unjust, proper or improper, for example punctuality, honesty, obedience, equality, fairness, respect and then doing the right thing. Individuals disagree among themselves about what is right and what is wrong, and even when they agree it can be for different reasons. In some societies, this disagreement is considered as normal, and it does not affect the rights of others. In some traditional societies, there is greater agreement on ethics and social pressure to act in certain ways rather than others. In such societies, culture and religion play a leading role in determining moral conduct (Williams, 2005).

Library and information science (LIS) profession is for public service and requires high standards of honesty, integrity and character. Librarians are all required to abide by ethics as well. Librarians are expected to perform their duties in an ethical manner. Codes of professional ethics provide librarians with guiding principles and norms to proffer solutions to various problems while on duty. The code of conduct lays down the librarians moral responsibilities towards users, information resources, society and the profession. According to Koehler & Pemberton (2000), there are six major elements relevant to information professional's code of ethics: concern with the rights and privileges of patrons; selection, access, professional practice and relationships; responsibilities to employers; and social and legal responsibilities. The main object of the

code of conduct is to guide librarians in maintaining ethical standard in his relationship with users, profession, colleagues, society, information resources and oneself. It also helps to clarify their professional rights, privileges, obligations/responsibilities and their legal bases.

A code of ethics provides a guide of dealing with ethical situations which arises in the course of the job. There are many ethical issues that librarians must deal with when providing information services in libraries. Issues relating to equity of access, intellectual freedom, censorship/privacy, intellectual property and many others are the major ethical challenges.

3.3 Professional ethics of librarianship

Professional ethics is the group of standards relating to the activities of professionals. Every profession should have an ethical code. The code verbalises the ethics. Such a code promotes and guarantees ethics. It assures the members of the profession and the public of a standard of professional relationships. The code serves as a guide. All members of a profession are expected to adhere to the ethical code. Librarianship profession has to enforce its ethics. Librarians are to adhere to the ethical standards by following the rules and showing respect to the profession. However, to maintain all the standards and rules of the profession, mentoring cannot be over-emphasised and is actually essential. Effective mentoring is crucial to the growth and success of librarianship as a profession.

The codes and ethics of librarianship culled from the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) website (2012) are as follows; "to provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and organised resources, equitable service policies; equitable access and accurate, unbiased and courteous responses to all requests; to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources; to protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted; to recognize and respect intellectual property rights; to treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions; to avoid advancing private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or the employing institutions; to distinguish between personal convictions and professional duties and disallow personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of the

institutions or the provision of access to their information resources; and to strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing library professionals' knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers and by fostering the aspirations of the potential members of the profession."

Professional responsibilities may or may not be classified. It is expected that more experienced colleagues in librarianship will train future generations of librarians, not only in the classroom but also through interactions. Today, information is dynamic and relevant to human endeavour. Therefore, there is a need for librarians to be well trained, and nurtured for better delivery of professional services, hence, the need for mentoring and promotion of mentoring in librarianship.

3.4 Mentoring and mentoring relationships in academic libraries

A mentor is a trainer, a senior and experienced person in a company or organisation who gives guidance and training to a less experienced colleague. A mentor is a skilled adviser and supporter; somebody, usually older and more knowledgeable, who advises and guides a younger, less qualified person (Oladele & Oyelude, 2010).

Mentoring is defined as a one-to-one relationship in which an expert or a senior person voluntarily gives time to teach, support, and encourage another (Santamaria, 2003). The concept of mentoring relates to emotional support and guidance usually given by a mature individual to a younger person called a mentee. According to Zachary (2002), mentoring passes on knowledge of subjects, facilitates personal development, encourages wise choices, and helps the mentee to make decisions.

Mentoring is a matter of sharing with others what one has learned in a manner and form that makes it understandable and useful to them. However way mentoring is done, its roots are in sharing experience and expertise. It requires looking back to see what people have learned; what they "did right"; what they could recommend to others and what they will do differently if they were starting again. Another broader definition of mentoring is an arrangement where someone helps a mentee learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone (Bell, 2000). In an organisational sense this researcher states, "All mentors are not supervisors or managers, but all effective supervisors and managers should be mentors. Mentoring must become that part of every leader's role that has growth as its primary component" (Bell, 2000, p.2).

Law (2001) states that mentoring is providing perspective on the profession, issue, or career direction and encouraging professional growth. For example, library orientation programmes or induction programmes where new or existing members can refer to for guidance or direction is better described as providing professional support. This can be a valuable factor of the agenda. A winning mentor is characterised as accommodating, patient, esteemed and respected, a person who is ready to share their experiences, and who facilitates personal and professional growth in the mentee. On the surface the mentee is the person mentoring is planned for. Remarkably, a mentoring relationship can be as much for the mentor as well as the mentee (Oladele & Oyelude 2010).

Associations are starting to realise the importance of mentoring due to the changes in job tasks that are imposed on librarians and the realisation that mentoring is a means of developing professional growth, and ultimately sustaining a profession. However, any mentoring programme that promotes professional growth and fosters relationships between members should not only strengthen the association but as well as the mentor/mentee.

Johnson and Ridley (2004) identify elements for mentees from literature. These include accelerated promotion rates and career mobility; enhanced professional competence; improved levels of career satisfaction; a sense of greater acceptance within their organisation and profession; and decreased job stress. In addition, Johnson and Ridley (2004) list benefits to mentors identified in the literature such as personal satisfaction and fulfilment; career revitalisation; recognition by their organisation for developing capacity; and the joy of shaping future generations.

3.5 Characteristics of a good mentor

A good mentor in librarianship is wise, well informed, thoughtful, nice and influential. She or he understands all of the social and political aspects of library science and their implications as well as the issues and nuances of all subfields in the discipline. A good mentors is sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee and understands how best to build on the former and build up the latter; is in a position to supervise and advance the career of the mentee at every phase; and must be an expert in the profession. The mentor must have passed through different stages in the profession and advanced successfully. Effective mentors must evaluate the various kinds of information and knowledge and share experience that the mentee does not have. A mentor must have

passion for his/her work. It is important to share and encourage excitement in the mentee. This will change the orientation of the mentee and help him/her to be positive.

Mentoring takes time and effort. The time-frame should be agreed on by the mentor and the mentee. Although mentoring is not generally rewarded, the joy comes from the satisfaction that one is helping to build another promising librarian. A sense of humour can help both the mentor and mentee through difficult times; a mentor needs a positive attitude in order to support the mentee in his/her chosen career. The mentor needs the right attitude regarding his or her own decisions; a mentor must not be easily discouraged. The ability to learn something fast differs from person to person. Mentors should appreciate that fact and be able to get along with the mentee whatever the case may be. A mentor must be a good model to follow. Mentees learn from the examples set by their mentors. Therefore, professional standards and the expectations are expressed consciously and unconsciously by examples. A mentor must have an open mind without any bias. A good mentor must not exhibit gender or ethnic biases.

The winner of the AuthorAID mentor of the year-2016 award, Dr Barbara Burmen from Kenya gives her tips for mentors and mentees who use the AuthorAID platform to enhance their research career. Having been both a research mentor and mentee, she found mentoring relationships to be mutually beneficial professional relationships (Burmen, 2016). The tips are as elaborated hereunder:

1. Initiating the mentoring relationship: A mentee needs to recognise the need to acquire knowledge and skills, and a mentor needs to be eager to share the knowledge gained from their years of experience. Mentees should identify a specific area of need and several prospective mentors who possess the right skills. This will guide the mentor's response and allow mentees to benefit from different view-points and experiences. Mentors should signify their availability (or unavailability) as soon as possible to allow the mentee to seek out another mentor in good time.

2. In the course of the mentoring relationship: Both mentor and mentee should be open to learning from each other as they both come to the relationship with various experiences and views. Mentors should have the capacity to conceptualise the information the mentee may have received from other mentors; after all it is possible that different mentors will have different points of view. It is possible that there will be failures in the mentoring

relationship. The mentor and mentee should agree on a realistic time frame in which to operate. In the event that a mentee does not meet some expectations but shows a willingness to mend the relationship, a mentor should accord him or her another opportunity.

3. Ending the mentoring relationship: Both mentors and mentees should point out their desire to end the mentoring relationship if need be. One of the reasons mentoring relationships break down is that either or both parties suddenly go cold after showing an interest in working together.

4. At the end of the mentoring relationship: Mentees should inform mentors of the result of their work together; for instance publication of an article, conclusion of a doctoral or Masters' thesis and the like. Mentors should be allowed to document the mentoring relationship as an activity on their resumes. Making progress both parties may either go their separate ways or seek out possible future collaborations.

3.6 Librarianship in Nigeria

Librarianship is not new in Nigeria, its history dates back to the 1900s. The UNESCO Seminar of 1953 in Ibadan brought a change to Librarianship in Nigeria leading to the establishment of libraries all over West Africa. It was the beginning of the West African Library Association (WALA). The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) was established in 1962 and it is growing steadily in numbers and in strength. The NLA is the national umbrella for all librarians in Nigeria. The NLA has a chapter in each state of the federation as well as the Federal Capital Territory. The Association also has thirteen registered professional sections, each looking after its own interest. The sections are Academic and Research Libraries (ARLS), Association of Government Libraries (AGOL), Association of Women Librarians in Nigeria (AWLIN), Cataloguing Classification and Indexing (CAT & CLASS), Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL), National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE), Public Libraries Section (PLS), Information Technology Section (LITT), Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA), Association of Libraries for Visually Handicapped (ALVH), Preservation and Conservation Section (PAC) and Medical Libraries Section (MLA-NG).

The creation of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) Decree in June 1995 and the inauguration of the Council by the then Minister of Education on 28th May 2002 brought an improvement to the management of librarianship in Nigeria. The NLA

successfully influenced the federal government in inaugurating the LRCN to enable it perform its functions of regulating the practice of the library and information profession in the country. The LRCN registers qualified librarians regularly by conducting induction ceremonies. The Council also organises workshops and conferences.

As indicated on its web site (https://nla.ng/about-nla/) the NLA's objectives are "to unite persons interested in libraries, librarianship and information services; safeguard and promote the professional interests of librarians; promote the establishment and development of libraries and information centres; watch legislation affecting libraries and assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries within Nigeria; promote and encourage bibliographical study, research and library cooperation; and perform all lawful things as are incidental and conducive to the attainment of the above objectives."

4 Findings and discussions

From Figure 1, the data collected showed that 87% of the respondents are from academic libraries. The research is actually on academic librarians.
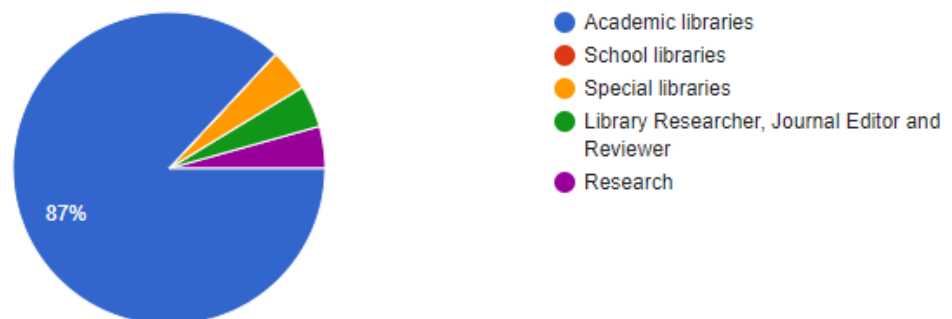

Figure 1: Type of Library

Figure 2 revealed that 82.6% answered Yes, which shows they have a mentor in the profession and 17.4% of the respondents answered No which is an indication that they don't have a mentor.
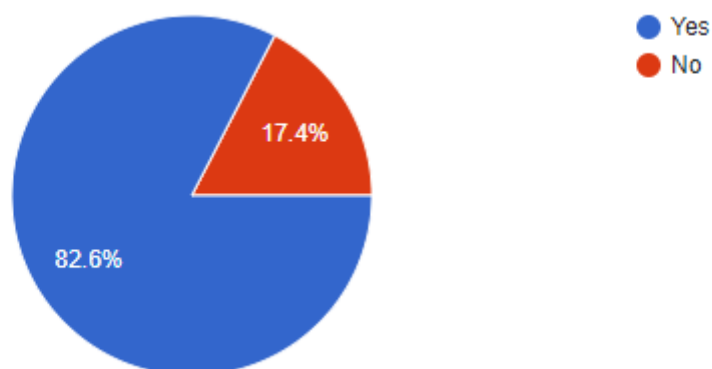
Figure 2: Mentor in the profession

Figure 3 presents the results of the study on the objective of the mentoring relationship. 91.3% stated that it is for professional development; 87% of the respondents said it is to become an expert on the job; 73.9% responded that it is to do a better research; 39.1% opined that it is to get grant and fellowships while 4.3% said it is to be able to avoid pitfalls in the profession and some to be able to mentor others.
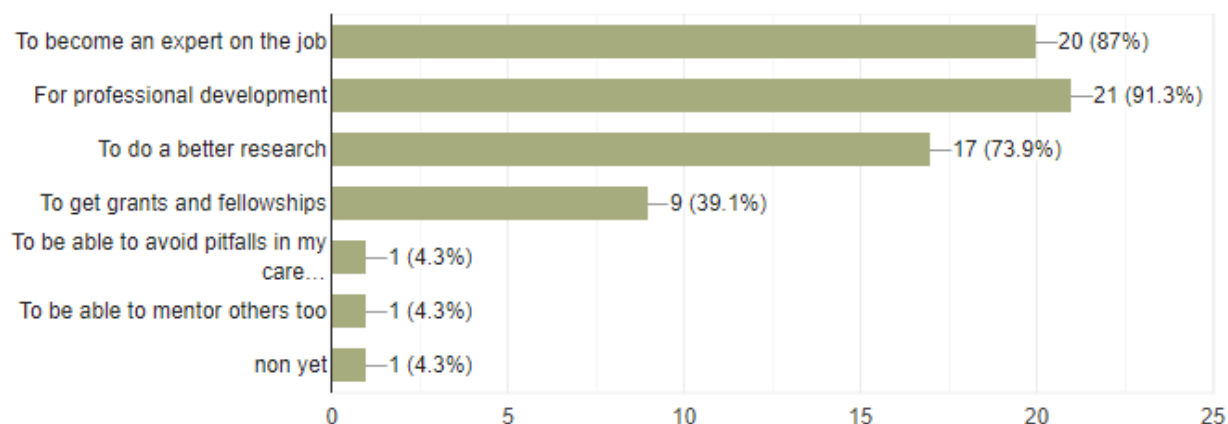

Figure 3: Objective of the mentoring relationship for academic librarians

Table 1 presents the views of the respondents on the benefits of mentoring relationship for academic librarians.

Table 1: Benefits of the mentoring relationship for academic librarians

Mentoring helps to improve the efficiency of a librarian because with guidance and mentoring from someone who is more experienced, librarians learn to do things the right way without making many mistakes. They become a better version of themselves.

Helps in making one learn the ropes faster.
Contributes to professional development and getting to the peak of one's career.
Empowers practitioners to stand on their own and develop new professional skills.
Increases one's knowledge base.

Figure 4 presents results on the library association which the respondents belong to. Accordingly, 61% of the respondents belong to Nigerian Library Association (NLA) while 13% belong to NLA IT section; 9%% of the respondents belong to Cataloguing and Classification Section (CAT & CLASS); 5% belong to Preservation and Conservation Section (PAC) and 4% belong to School Libraries and 4% belong to Medical Libraries Association (MLA).   Another 4% belong to International associations such as IFLA and IASSIST.
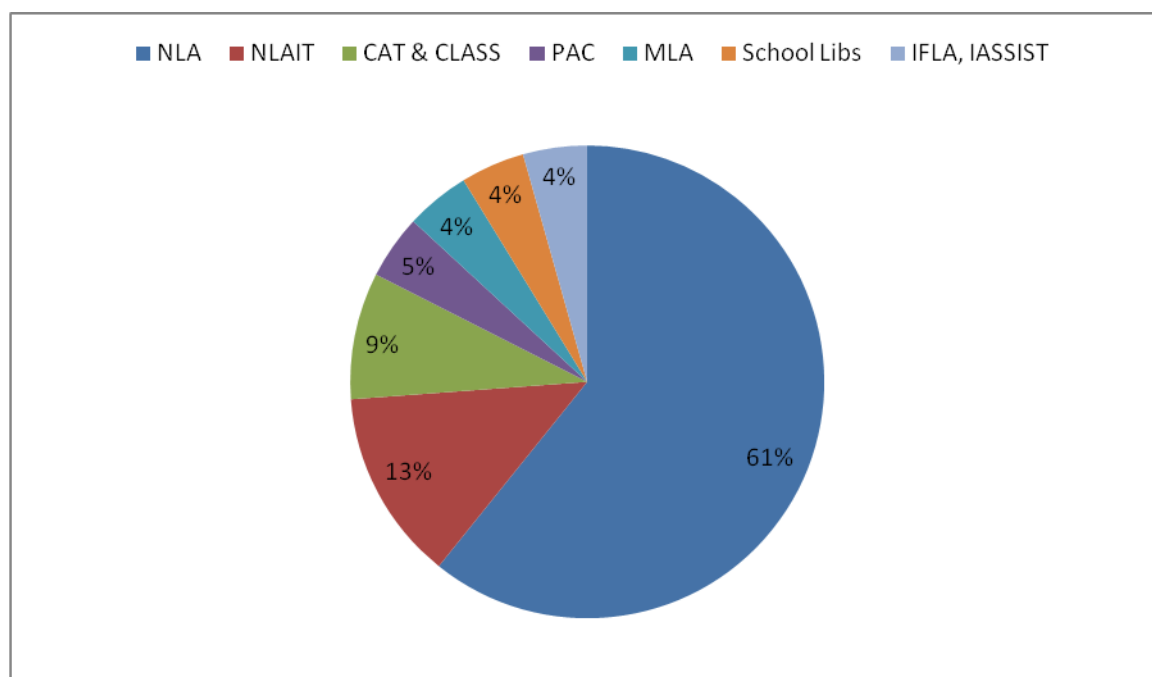

Figure 4: Library associations academic librarians belong to

Figure 5 presents the response from the respondents. NLA, IFLA, ALA and IASSIST had the highest (34.8%) membership. They are the library associations mentioned that provide mentoring relationship for librarians. This shows that the subject sections should do more in terms of mentoring relationship.
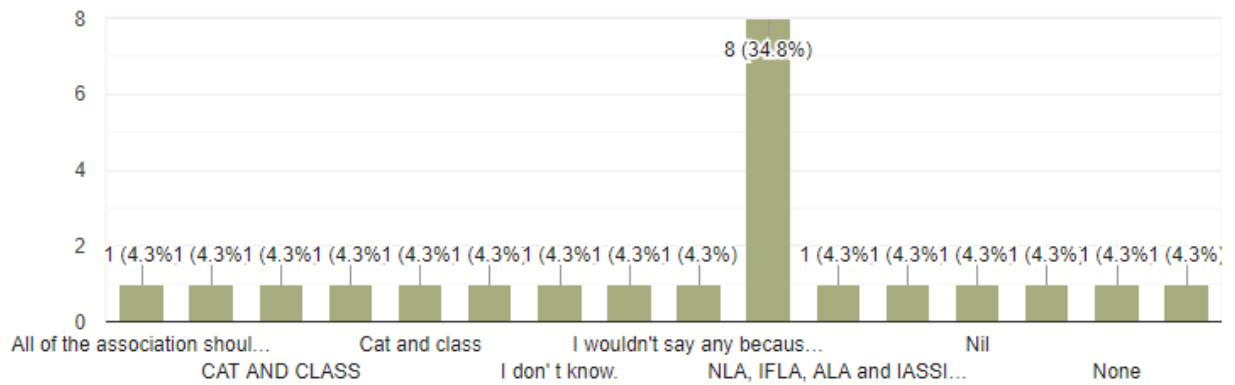
Figure 5: Library associations offer(s) mentoring relationship

Figure 6 presents the type of mentoring the library associations' offer. The majority (52.2%) mentioned training as the type of mentoring the associations offer while 21.7% of the respondents mentioned group mentoring. 18.1% mentioned One-on-One while 4% mentioned online mentoring and the remaining 4% mentioned training and one-on-one.
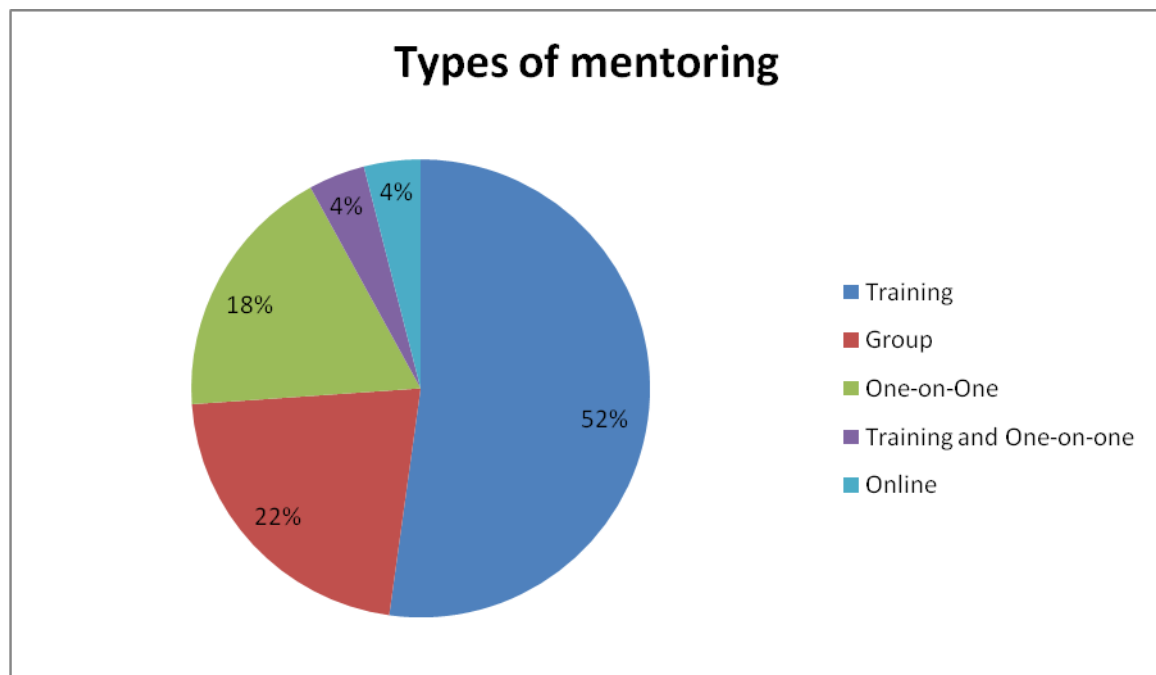

Figure 6: Types of mentoring done by the library associations

Figure 7 presents findings on where else academic librarians get mentoring from. The highest, which is 82.6%, responded that they get mentorship from superiors at work; 52.2% are mentored by colleagues, another 52.2% are mentored by library and information science lecturers.
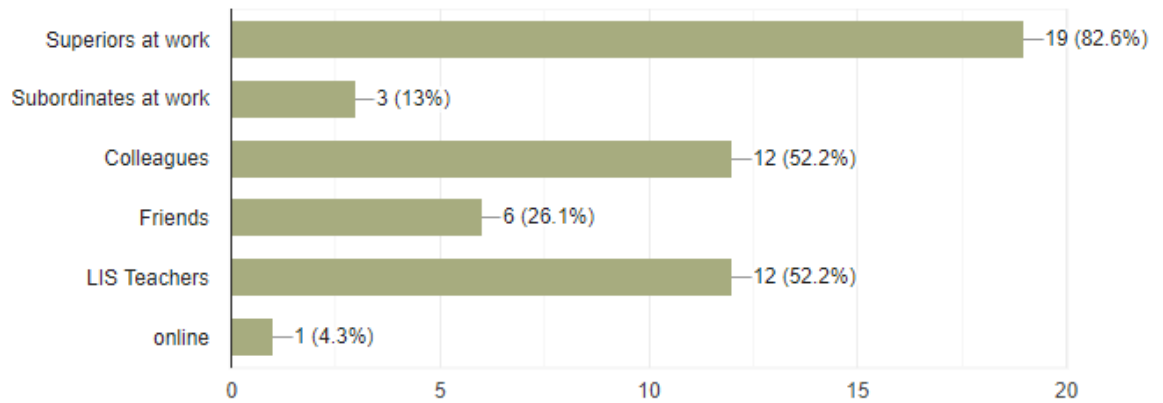
Figure 7: Other mentoring avenues used by academic librarians

Table 2 presents the responses of the respondents. It was collated and summarised as indicated below.

Table 2: Ways of maintaining mentoring relationships among academic librarians

Having a good relationship
Having mutual respect and loyalty
Focusing on the purpose
Having good communication
Willingness to learn and ready to take to corrections
Communicating regularly on social media and through emails

Figure 8 presents the type of librarianship professional mentoring they have experienced. The majority (68.2%) have experienced workplace mentoring; 63.6% have experienced one-on-one mentoring; 40.9% have experienced lecturer mentoring; 31.8% experienced group mentoring; and another 31.8% experienced library association mentoring.
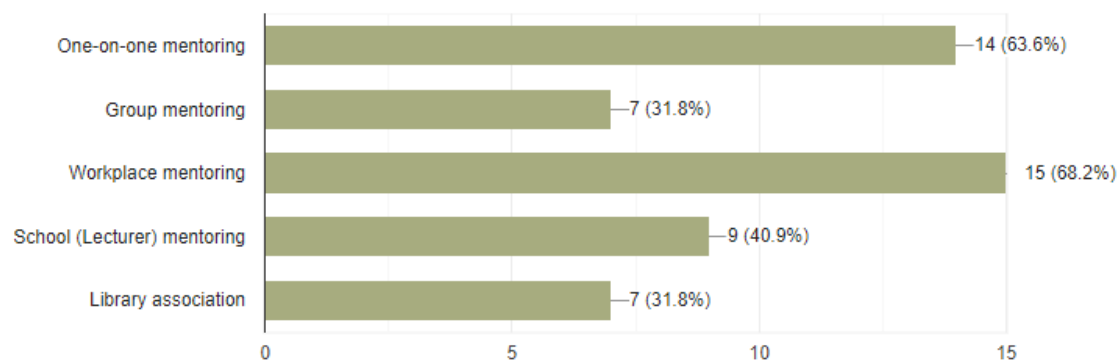

Figure 8: Types of librarianship professional mentoring experienced

Figure 9 shows the type of mentoring the respondents would have loved to experience. The majority (13%) prefer library association mentoring; 8.7% of the respondents prefer workplace mentoring while 8.7% prefer one-on-one mentoring.
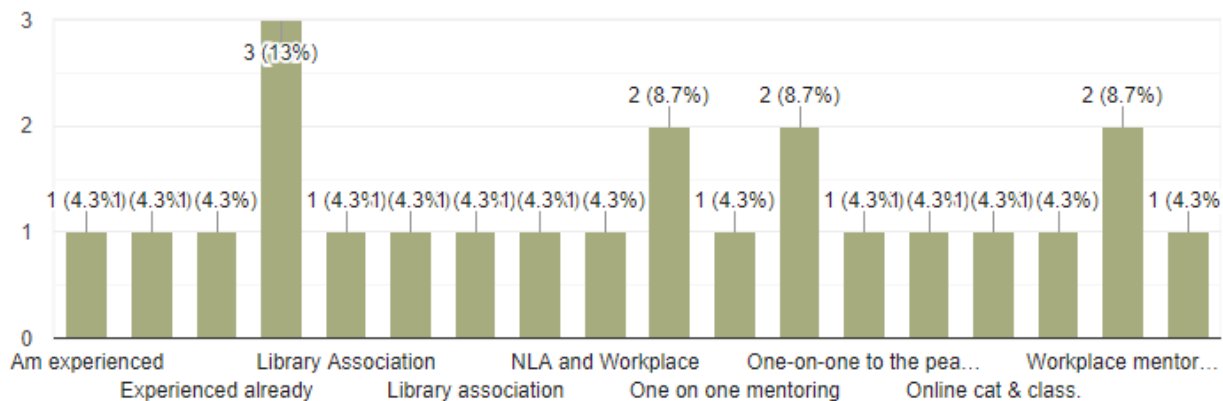

Figure 9: The type of mentorship wished for

Table 3 shows the responses elicited from the respondents on what mentoring mean to them. The results show that the respondents really know what they want from mentoring.

Table 3: Meaning of mentoring mean

A good guide to the peak of my career
Guiding someone through to perform better
Learning from those who have achieved success in the profession
Guidance provided by an experienced person in the profession
Guiding of subordinate professionally by a superior colleague
Learning from the experience of professionals who know their onions
Training others so as to get better
Providing guidance, training and motivation to junior colleagues so that they can grow better in the profession

Table 4 presents the responses from the respondents on an ideal mentor. An ideal mentor is available, transparent and willing to support when there is need.

Table 4: An ideal mentor

Available, transparent and willing to support
Has an open mind to teach step by step for growth and success
Interested in the progress of a subordinate
Successful in the career and is ready to teach others to succeed
Ready to share his professional skills, knowledge and experience
Competent, trustworthy, disciplined and committed.
Open minded in showing or teaching junior colleagues the tricks of the profession
Diligent, selfless and up to date in the profession
A good role model that is highly committed to knowledge sharing

5 Discussion

The discussion will follow the objectives of the study. 8.7% of the respondents are from academic libraries. 82.6% answered in affirmative that they have a mentor in the profession while 17.4% of the respondents did not have mentors. 91.3% stated that the objective of mentoring is for professional development, 87% of the respondents said it is to become an expert on the job, 73.9% stated that it is to do a better research, 39.1% stated that it is to get grant and fellowship while 4.3% mentioned that it is to avoid pitfalls in the profession. There are benefits of mentoring to the mentees such as increasing one's knowledge base, empowerment and getting to the peak of one's career. 56.5% of the respondents belong to Nigerian Library Association without any subject section. NLA, IFLA, ALA and IASSIST were mentioned as the library associations that provide mentoring relationship for librarians, the subject sections of the association should do more in terms of mentoring relationship.

The ways of maintaining mentoring relationships were mentioned such as having a good relationship, giving regular assignment, having mutual respect, focusing on the purpose of mentoring, good communication skills, willingness to learn and take to correction and also collaboration.

6 Recommendations

The library associations should ensure that the ethics of the profession are strictly adhered to; NLA subject sections should incorporate specialised training and mentoring programmes as part of their programmes; develop new models to train new librarians; provide an enabling environment for members to grow in the chosen profession and there should be regular opportunity designed for professional development. Academic librarians should endeavour to have mentors to guide them in their career path. Library associations should actively develop junior colleagues for the future of the profession by developing mentoring relationships as part of the association's culture, this will help potential mentors who have not been in a mentoring relationship and also the mentees. Library associations can promote the development of mentoring programs by including performance appraisals and career development programs to sustain professionalism.

7 Conclusions

Mentoring is a tool for building future librarians. It is an important developmental process for the mentor, the mentee and the profession. A well-conducted and well-timed mentoring can reap enormous benefits for mentees and be useful to mentors and librarianship as a profession. Mentoring is necessary to sustain professionalism for librarians to enable them take the profession to a greater height. The paper concludes that mentoring is a tool needed for building future librarians and required for taking the profession to its expected destination.

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