



ROLE OF MENTORSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE ETHICAL STANDARDS IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRESSION OF UNDERGRADUATES IN RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY



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Abstract

This research investigated the role of mentorship for effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University, with two (2) research questions and two (2) hypotheses. The descriptive design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of an estimated 1,870 academic and non-academic staff in Rivers State University. A Sample size was 329 academic and non-academic staff using Taro Yamane. A self-designed questionnaire titled “Role of Mentorship for Effective Ethical Standards in the Academic Progression of Undergraduates in Rivers State University (RMEESAPURSU)” was used to elicit responses from the sample. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that faculty mentorship programmes enhanced effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University with overall mean of 3.13. Formal mentorship programmes also enhanced effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University with overall mean of 3.29. There was no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff on the faculty mentorship programmes. The study concluded that faculty mentorship programmes and formal mentorship programmes serve as crucial mechanisms for fostering ethical standards and academic excellence among undergraduates at Rivers State University. Thus, the study recommended regular mentorship sessions, academic workshops, and ethical discussions.

Keywords: mentorship, formal mentorship, faculty mentorship, ethical standards, academic progression, undergraduates

Introduction

In higher education, mentorship plays a crucial role in shaping students’ academic and ethical development. Universities are not just centres for knowledge acquisition but also institutions where values, discipline, and integrity are instilled. Ethical standards are essential for maintaining academic excellence, as they guide students in making responsible decisions, avoiding misconduct, and upholding honesty in their studies. However, many undergraduates struggle with issues such as plagiarism, examination malpractice, and dishonesty due to lack of proper guidance. This raises the need for structured mentorship programmes that provide students with the necessary support to navigate academic challenges while maintaining strong ethical principles (Abodunde et al., 2018).

Mentorship, whether from faculty members, senior students, or external professionals, serves as a valuable tool in fostering ethical awareness and responsibility among undergraduates. A mentor provides guidance, encouragement, and advice on academic matters, personal growth, and career



aspirations. Through regular interactions, students gain insights into the importance of integrity, hard work, and accountability. In Rivers State University, where academic competition and pressures can be intense, mentorship can serve as a stabilizing factor, helping students develop the right mindset to achieve success without compromising ethical standards.

Furthermore, the presence of strong mentorship structures can reduce academic misconduct and enhance students' commitment to ethical behaviour. When students have role models who uphold integrity, they are more likely to adopt similar values. Effective mentorship programmes create an environment where students feel supported in making ethical choices, improving their overall academic performance. This not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the university's reputation as an institution that prioritizes both excellence and ethical conduct. By integrating mentorship into academic policies, universities can create a culture where ethical standards become a natural part of students' academic journeys. This study highlights different kinds of mentorship programmes that enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University: faculty mentorship and formal mentorship.

Faculty mentorship plays a significant role in fostering ethical standards and academic progression among undergraduates at Rivers State University. Professors, lecturers, and academic advisors serve as mentors by guiding students in their academic journey, providing insights into ethical decision-making, and setting clear expectations for academic integrity. Through one-on-one interactions, faculty mentors educate students on issues such as plagiarism, proper citation, research ethics, and responsible academic conduct. By serving as role models, faculty members demonstrate the importance of honesty, discipline, and professional ethics, inspiring students to uphold these values in their studies. Ndubuisi and Ndubuisi (2024) explored mentorship within the Nigerian university system, emphasizing its significance in ensuring smooth succession and professional growth. They observed that while mentorship exists, its quality and quantity are often insufficient, potentially impacting the ethical and academic development of undergraduates.

In addition, faculty mentorship helps students navigate academic challenges by offering personalized support and encouragement. When students face difficulties in coursework or ethical dilemmas, having a trusted mentor allows them to seek guidance rather than resorting to unethical practices. Faculty mentors also introduce students to academic resources, research opportunities, and professional networks, ensuring that they achieve academic success while maintaining high ethical standards. This structured mentorship enhances students' confidence in making ethical choices, contributing to the overall integrity and reputation of Rivers State University.

Formal mentorship is a structured and organized approach to guiding students in their academic and ethical development. In this type of mentorship, universities, faculties, or departments assign mentors—such as lecturers, academic advisors, or senior students to undergraduates, ensuring they receive consistent support throughout their academic journey (Okolie, et al., 2020). At Rivers State University, formal mentorship programmes are designed to provide students with clear guidelines on academic integrity, professional ethics, and personal development, while formal mentoring platforms are lacking, assigning research assistants to professors for guidance and thesis supervision will serve as an informal mentoring mechanism. Universities should establish formal mentoring policies and departmental committees to effectively implement mentoring programmes (Obasi and Ohia (2018). These programmes often include scheduled meetings, workshops, and training sessions where students learn about responsible research practices, avoiding academic misconduct, and making ethical decisions in their studies.

One of the key benefits of formal mentorship is its structured nature, which ensures that every student has access to ethical guidance and academic support. Unlike informal mentorship, where interactions happen on a casual basis, formal mentorship follows a well-defined process, making it easier to track progress and measure its impact. Mentors in formal programmes are usually experienced professionals who serve as role models, reinforcing the importance of honesty, discipline, and accountability. Through this approach, students not only improve academically but also develop a strong moral foundation that prepares them for ethical decision-making beyond the university.

Ethical standards in academic progression refer to the principles and guidelines that govern students' conduct throughout their educational journey. These standards emphasize honesty, integrity, responsibility, and fairness in all academic activities, including coursework, research, and examinations. Upholding ethical standards ensures that students develop a strong sense of accountability, avoiding dishonest practices such as plagiarism, cheating, and fabrication of data. By adhering to these principles, students not only earn their academic achievements legitimately but also build a foundation for ethical decision-making in their future careers (Isibor & Unobe 2016).

Maintaining ethical standards is crucial for academic progression because it fosters a culture of trust, respect, and excellence within an educational institution. Universities that emphasize ethical conduct create an environment where students are encouraged to think critically, engage in original research, and contribute meaningfully to their fields of study. Ethical academic progression also enhances the credibility of degrees awarded by institutions, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for professional and societal responsibilities. At Rivers State University, promoting ethical standards among undergraduates helps shape responsible individuals who can positively impact their communities and professional environments.

In many universities, including Rivers State University, a growing concern exists over declining ethical standards among undergraduates, which negatively affects their academic progression. Issues such as plagiarism, exam malpractice, dishonesty, and lack of discipline have become common, often hindering students from achieving their full academic potential. While mentorship has been identified as a powerful tool for shaping students' behavior and guiding them toward academic excellence, its role in promoting ethical standards remains underexplored. Many students lack proper mentorship, leaving them without the necessary guidance to make ethical decisions in their academic journey. This study seeks to examine how mentorship can instill strong ethical values, reduce academic misconduct, and enhance the overall academic growth of undergraduates at Rivers State University.

Research Questions

How does faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university?

How does formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university?

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university.

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The population of the study consists of 1870 academic and non-academic staff in Rivers State University. A Sample size of 329 academic and non-academic staff in Rivers State University using Taro Yamen formular was used for this study.

Taro Yamane's formula is given as;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where N = Population of study (1870)

n = Sample size (?)

e = Level of significance at 5% (0.05)

1 = Constant

$$n = \frac{1870}{1 + 1870(0.05)^2}$$



$$n = \frac{1870 + 4.68}{1870 + 5.68} = \frac{1874.68}{1875.68} = 329.23$$

$$n = 329$$

A self-designed questionnaire titled “Role of Mentorship for Effective Ethical Standards in the Academic Progression of Undergraduates in Rivers State University (RMEESAPURSU)” was used to elicit responses from the sample. The instrument was based on the 4-point modified Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1) respectively. The reliability of the instrument for data collection was tested at 0.76 reliability coefficient. Three hundred and fifteen copies of the questionnaire retrieved were used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: How does faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the ways faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University

S/N	Items	Academic Staff (n=172)		Non-Academic Staff (n=143)		Mean Set (n=315)	Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	Faculty mentorship helps provide guidance on ethical decision making	3.28	0.86	3.22	0.82	3.25	Agreed
2	Faculty mentorship promotes academic integrity	2.98	0.89	3.06	0.94	3.02	Agreed
3	Faculty mentorship encourages responsible research practices among undergraduate students	3.11	0.84	3.01	0.81	3.06	Agreed
4	Faculty mentorship helps undergraduates to understand the importance of creating a welcoming and equitable academic environment	3.11	0.77	3.12	0.87	3.12	Agreed
5	Faculty mentorship models professional ethics and transparency in academic pursuit.	3.23	0.79	3.17	0.93	3.19	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.14	0.83	3.12	0.87	3.13	Agreed

Source: IBM SPSS, Version 26



The data in table 1 showed that the mean and standard deviation of respondents on the ways faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University. The table highlighted the key roles faculty mentorship plays in academic progression which are: provision of guidance on ethical decision making (Mean=3.25), promoting academic integrity (Mean=3.02), encourages responsible research practices among undergraduate students (Mean=3.06), helping undergraduates to understand the importance of creating a welcoming and equitable academic environment (Mean=3.12), models professional ethics and transparency in academic pursuit (Mean=3.19).

Research Question Two: How does formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University?

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation of respondents on the ways formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University

S/N	Items	Academic Staff (n=172)		Non-Academic Staff (n=143)		Mean Set (n=315)	Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	Formal mentorship programmes create a clear communication of ethical expectations and standards to undergraduates	3.44	0.80	3.53	0.74	3.48	Agreed
2	Formal mentorship programmes provide structured guidance for students helping them develop critical thinking skills	3.18	0.79	3.27	0.74	3.22	Agreed
3	Formal mentorship programmes provide a system of accountability and support to students	3.23	0.84	3.13	0.87	3.19	Agreed
4	Formal mentorship programmes provide undergraduates with role models who demonstrate good ethical behavior.	3.11	0.76	3.23	0.80	3.16	Agreed
5	Formal mentorship programmes provide a systematic evaluation and feedback on undergraduates.	3.33	0.73	3.47	0.67	3.39	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.26	0.78	3.33	0.76	3.29	Agreed

Source: IBM SPSS Version 26

The data in table 2 highlighted the Mean and Standard deviation of respondents on the ways formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of

undergraduates in Rivers State University. The table showed that formal mentorship programmes provide the following: clear communication of ethical expectations and standards to undergraduates (Mean=3.48), structured guidance for students helping them develop critical thinking skills (Mean=3.22), system of accountability and support to students (Mean=3.19), role models who demonstrate good ethical behavior (Mean=3.16), systematic evaluation and feedback on undergraduates (Mean=3.39).

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University.

Table 3: Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Academic Staff	172	3.14	0.83	313	0.509	0.638	NS
Non-Academic Staff	143	3.12	0.87				

NS= NOT SIGNIFICANT

Source: IBM SPSS Version 26

The table above showed the difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university. The mean responses of academic staff is 3.14 and the standard deviation is 0.83 while the mean of non-academic staff is 3.12 and standard deviation is 0.87. The t-test calculated value is 0.509, the corresponded significance value is 0.638 showing > 0.05 at 313 degrees of freedom. Hence, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University. Therefore, the null hypothesis one is retained at 0.05.

H02: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University.

Table 4: Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Academic Staff	172	3.26	0.78	313	0.410	0.548	NS
Non-Academic Staff	143	3.33	0.76				

NS= NOT SIGNIFICANT

Source: IBM SPSS, Version 26

The table above showed the difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university. The mean responses of academic staff is 3.26 and the standard deviation is 0.78 while the mean of non-academic staff is 3.33 and standard deviation is 0.76. The t-test calculated value is 0.410, the corresponded significance value is 0.548 showing > 0.05 at 313 degrees of freedom. Hence, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University. Therefore, the null hypothesis one is retained at 0.05.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of the study sought to identify the ways faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university. The study highlighted that provision of guidance on ethical decision making, promoting academic integrity, encourages responsible research practices among undergraduate students, helping undergraduates to understand the importance of creating a welcoming and equitable academic environment, models' professional ethics and transparency in academic pursuit are the ways faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university. Also, the study revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how faculty mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University. The finding of the study is in agreement with that of Ndubuisi and Ndubuisi (2024); they explored mentorship within the Nigerian university system, emphasizing its significance in ensuring smooth succession and professional growth. They observed that while faculty mentorship exists, its quality and quantity are often insufficient, potentially impacting the ethical and academic development of undergraduates.

The second objective of the study sought to examine the ways formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in rivers state university. The study showed that formal mentorship programmes provide the following: clear communication of ethical expectations and standards to undergraduates, structured guidance for students helping them develop critical thinking skills, system of accountability and support to students, role models who demonstrate good ethical behavior, systematic evaluation and feedback on undergraduates. Also, the study revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic and non-academic staff of Rivers State University on how formal mentorship programmes enhance effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University. The finding of the study is in agreement with that of Obasi and Ohia (2018); they



investigated mentoring for professional development in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, and found that while formal mentoring platforms were lacking, assigning research assistants to professors for guidance and thesis supervision served as an informal mentoring mechanism. They recommended that universities establish formal mentoring policies and departmental committees to effectively implement mentoring programmes

Conclusion

The study examined the role of mentorship for effective ethical standards in the academic progression of undergraduates in Rivers State University. Faculty mentorship programmes and formal mentorship programmes serve as crucial mechanisms for fostering ethical standards and academic excellence among undergraduates at Rivers State University. Faculty mentorship programmes provide direct guidance from experienced educators, helping students navigate academic challenges while instilling integrity, professionalism, and accountability. By engaging in close interactions with faculty mentors, students develop a strong ethical foundation, ensuring they uphold honesty in research, coursework, and interpersonal relationships within the university community. On the other hand, formal mentorship programmes offer a structured approach that extends beyond faculty-student relationships. These programmes incorporate peer mentoring, career counseling, and institutional ethics training to reinforce moral values and responsible academic conduct. Through workshops, seminars, and professional mentorship opportunities, students gain exposure to real-world ethical dilemmas, equipping them with the skills needed to maintain ethical standards in both academic and professional settings. Together, faculty and formal mentorship programmes provide a well-rounded support system that enhances students' ethical awareness and overall academic progression.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

Rivers State University should establish structured faculty mentorship programmes where lecturers actively guide students on academic integrity, ethical conduct, and professional responsibilities. This can be achieved through regular mentorship sessions, academic workshops, and ethical discussions.

The university should incorporate ethical training modules into its formal mentorship programmes. This could include case studies, real-world ethical scenarios, and seminars led by professionals to help students understand the importance of maintaining ethical standards in their academic and future careers.

Faculty mentors should be given designated time and resources to engage with students effectively. Creating mentorship schedules, feedback mechanisms, and tracking students' ethical development will enhance the impact of mentorship programmes.

The university should collaborate with industries, alumni, and professional organizations to enhance formal mentorship programmes.

Regular assessments and feedback mechanisms should be put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of both faculty and formal mentorship programmes. This will help identify gaps, improve program implementation, and ensure that ethical standards are consistently upheld among undergraduates.

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