AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (1), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF PEER MENTORING ON DOCTORAL STUDENTS' SUCCESS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN EASTERN NIGERIA

Ndidi Loretta Okeke
Department of Educational Management and Policy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Email: on.loretta@unizik.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1424-157X

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of peer mentoring on the success of doctoral students in universities within Eastern Nigeria. With the rising interest in doctoral education despite significant challenges such as isolation, financial constraints, and academic setbacks, peer mentoring emerges as a valuable support system. A descriptive survey design was utilized to investigate the perceptions of 76 doctoral students from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent sample t-test. Findings indicated a generally positive perception of peer mentoring's impact on academic success, however, no statistically significant difference was found between the two institutions t (74) = -1.268, p = 0.209. The study emphasizes that peer mentoring promotes academic resilience, emotional support, and professional identity development. It concludes that organized peer mentoring programs are crucial in improving the experiences of doctoral students and recommends institutional adoption of formal peer mentoring frameworks to decrease dropout rates and enhance academic outcomes.

Keywords: Peer Mentoring, Doctoral Student, Higher Institutions, Academic Success, Early Career, Impact

Introduction

Doctoral program is structured to give individuals the highest level of educational attainment. Primarily, it is designed to equip students with skills to conduct research and also to prepare them for various career options. The program involves coursework, seminars, conferences, extensive research, and ultimately, thesis writing. The journey through a doctoral program is demanding, designed to cultivate the professional identity of graduate students. A high-quality doctoral program encompasses more than just coursework; it includes experiences linked to future job obligations, retention, and integration into the profession (Noonan et al, 2007). Becoming a competent researcher requires significant investment of time,

financial resources, hard work, dedication, and several years of challenging effort (Garcia, 2020).

Recently, there's been a surge in interest in doctoral education among higher education institutions in Nigeria. The reasons often cited include career opportunities, social benefits, and personal fulfilment (Sarrico, 2022). Many scholars feel dissatisfied with only holding a master's degree, while others seek academic advancement that necessitates a Doctorate. Davis (2009) remarked that earning a PhD enhances one's career prospects and contributes to academic growth. Unfortunately, pursuing a PhD involves more than mere aspiration. It presents numerous challenges that require determination, confidence, hard work, and networking. During the initial stages of the program, students frequently encounter unforeseen difficulties which may result in their failure to complete the program successfully (Hockey, 2004).

However, recent findings suggest that isolation and imposter syndrome are widespread among doctoral candidates and significantly contribute to their dropout rates and mental health issues (Lovitts, 2000). In Nigeria, it has been observed that students often withdraw from the program, especially after completing coursework, while others remain in the program longer than required. Factors contributing to dropout and delays include insufficient funding, limited access to research resources, departmental and faculty holdups, issues with supervisors, inadequate writing skills, and competing obligations (Mbagwu, 2020; Gardner, 2009; Steven and Caskey, 2023). Despite these obstacles, there remains a strong interest in doctoral programs among graduate students (Schmidt and Hansson, 2018).

Additionally, statistics from OECD countries indicate an increase in demand for doctoral education driven by substantial incentives and funding from governments and organizations aimed at boosting the number of doctoral graduates (Sarrico, 2022). The situation in West African nations, particularly Nigeria, contrasts sharply, as doctoral students face challenges in financing their studies. This financial burden is a key factor in attrition.

Doctoral students are categorized into PhD students and PhD candidates. A PhD candidate is someone whose understanding of the research process has progressed, distinguishing them as more experienced within the doctoral community (Callary, 2012), whereas a PhD student is typically in the early stages of the program. This latter group encounters numerous constraints that have heightened their dropout rates. The postgraduate faculty recognizes that transitioning from being a course participant to an independent researcher is challenging (Lovitts, 2001).

Furthermore, while there has been considerable research on faculty mentoring

(Wellington, 2010; Hilliard, 2013), there is a lack of studies on peer mentoring and its effects on doctoral student success, particularly in universities located in Eastern Nigeria. This research aims to provide new insights into the effectiveness of doctoral programs by examining how peers can mentor one another and contribute to the success of their academic journey. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the influence of peer mentoring on doctoral student success in Eastern Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research question:

1. To what extent does peer mentoring influence the academic success of doctoral students?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the opinions of doctoral students at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (Igbarim) University and those at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) regarding the impact of peer mentoring on their academic success?

Review of Related Literature

The primary goal of every doctoral student is to achieve success in their program, which involves persisting in their studies and completing their degree on time (Bagaka et al., 2015). Success can also be seen as the institution's capacity to produce competent scholars across various research areas (Bagaka et al., 2015). Indicators of doctoral student success can include coursework performance, completion rates, dropout rates, graduation rates, program retention rates, and the duration taken to finish the degree (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001). Scholars generally agree that graduate students frequently withdraw from their programs after completing coursework due to factors related to the program's nature, the characteristics of the supervisor, and the goals established by the student (Cosgrove, 2022). Essentially, if a graduate student lacks self-efficacy or self-direction, there is an increased risk of dropping out of the program. Gardner (2009) described self-direction as a key measure of success and suggested that pairing incoming graduate students with advanced students displaying self-directedness can facilitate the newcomers' success. The role of mentoring in contributing to doctoral students' success is also crucial. Mentors can enhance students' self-confidence, offer support and guidance during the socialization process, improve academic performance, foster professional advancement, and provide unique opportunities for both personal and professional development (White, 2007). A study conducted by Gardner (2007) on acclimating to graduate school revealed that students often sought advice from more advanced peers regarding the program and their past educational experiences. They also looked for help in determining which research groups to join and identifying approachable professors (Gardner, 2007).

The findings indicated that mentoring from PhD candidates for new doctoral students could significantly enhance their success by alleviating some of the challenges associated with the program (Gardner, 2010).

Mentoring is defined as a relationship in which a more experienced individual pairs with someone who has less experience to enhance awareness, skills, and productivity in various pursuits (Dohm & Cummings, 2002). This study focuses on peer mentoring, where newly admitted students are paired with more seasoned doctoral candidates to offer both academic and emotional support (Gardner, 2008). Peer mentoring fosters a sense of community, inclusivity, and assistance while counteracting feelings of isolation that may hinder the completion of doctoral programs (Gardner, 2008). Research indicates that students in postgraduate programs often face challenges due to feelings of inadequacy; financial difficulties, dissatisfaction with their program, research incompetence, lack of motivation, and poor networking are all contributing factors (Lovitts, 2001; Gardner, 2009; Kiersma et al., 2012).

Another study aimed at evaluating the effects of mentoring programs on graduate students' interest in research found that such mentoring significantly boosts graduate students' enthusiasm for research writing (Kiersma et al., 2012). Additionally, Rawl (2008) explored how doctoral students' self-efficacy and their experiences with research mentoring influence their commitment to their careers. The results showed a strong correlation between high levels of research self-efficacy and emotional occupational commitment. Mentors play a crucial role in providing mentees with opportunities to co-present at conferences, thereby enhancing research productivity. They offer support, respect, and admiration, which all contribute to the mentee's self-confidence (Rawls, 2008).

A qualitative study conducted by Lorentti et al. (2020) looked into how peer mentoring contributes to graduate students' resilience, knowledge acquisition, and academic competence development. The findings indicated that peer mentoring promotes knowledge sharing, skill acquisition, professional networking, and academic success. It also allows doctoral students to better integrate into professional circles by taking on roles as instructors and researchers (Vicki, 2011). Mentors are instrumental in helping mentees cultivate a sense of community and belonging by linking them to professional networks that aid in developing a professional identity. A sense of belonging addresses the psychological aspects of social integration and connection to the institution (Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005). Peers tend to be more approachable than faculty and supervisors, allowing them to assist new students in navigating unfamiliar communities and institutional settings, thereby helping them acquire the necessary

skills for success (Wisdom and Balleisen, 2023).

Mentoring describes a relationship where an experienced doctoral student is paired with a novice doctoral student to offer support, encouragement, advice, and direction, making the doctoral experience smoother and more success. Mentors facilitate the introduction of new graduate students to faculty members and connect them with appropriate university resources. Peer mentors serve as guides who assist freshmen in managing academic, social, and personal challenges, helping them transition from dependent to independent graduate students (Bonin, 2013). Mentoring has a positive effect on students' perceptions of research and provides greater networking opportunities along with a wealth of research-related information (Kiersma et al., 2012). Faculty members also play an important role in fostering student engagement and enhancing the likelihood of program completion through their attentiveness and responsiveness to student needs (Wellingtone, 2010). When faculty members are dedicated to their relationships with doctoral students, those students' chances for success improve (Wellingtone, 2010).

Supporting this discussion, Noonan et al. (2007) examined the characteristics and outcomes of mentoring through three focus groups of mentors. They found that students involved in peer mentoring relationships tend to be more open and genuine about their feelings compared to those who are not. The findings indicate that mentoring creates a secure and supportive environment that helps students excel in their programs, facilitating their transition from dependent learners to independent researchers.

In Nigerian universities, doctoral students often encounter financial and academic obstacles, making peer mentoring an essential support mechanism. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research on its effectiveness in Nigeria. This study seeks to fill this void by investigating how peer mentoring influences the academic success of doctoral students.

Methods

This research utilizes a descriptive survey designed to gauge the perspectives of PhD students regarding the influence of peer mentoring on their success in the doctoral program. The study population comprises all doctoral students within the Faculty of Education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Odomegwu Ojukwu University. A purposive sampling method was employed to select 76 doctoral students from both institutions between 2020 and 2023 academic sessions. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire aimed at assessing students' views on the effectiveness of peer mentoring on academic success. The data was analyzed utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistical method. Validity and reliability of the instrument were conducted and both were found to be reliable and valid. Finally, a mean

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (1), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

threshold of 2.5 and above was view as "agreed" by respondents. While below 2.5 was seen as "Disagreed."

Presentation and Data Analysis

Table 1: mean rating on the impact of mentorship on doctoral students' academic success

s/n	My mentor:	UNIZIK			Igbarim		
		M	**SD**	**Decision**	**M**	**SD**	**Decision**
1.	Engages me through effective communication to help me achieve success in the program	3.35	0.55	Agreed	3.47	0.59	Agreed
2.	Creates opportunities to stretch my abilities to become successful in research writing	3.06	0.72	Agreed	3.32	0.79	Agreed
3.	Introduced me to faculty members that can help to demystify graduate programs	2.22	1.09	Disagreed	3. 30	0.79	Agreed
4.	Regularly check up on me to know if I am making progress with my class work	2.64	0.98	Agreed	2.72	1.03	Agreed
5.	Shares their personal stories to help me build confidence	3.16	0.77	Agreed	3.07	0.88	Agreed
6.	Help me develop self-confidence through praising my small achievements	3.03	0.65	Agreed	2.85	0.98	Agreed
7.	Tailors his mentoring approach to suit my academic needs	2.93	0.81	Agreed	2.97	0.89	Agreed
8.	Understands my expectations from the program	3.10	0.68	Agreed	3.05	0.74	Agreed
9.	Recommends resources that help me to achieve success in the program	3.29	0.73	Agreed	3.32	0.79	Agreed
10.	Helps me overcome challenges through sharing relevant resources	2.77	0.71	Agreed	2.90	0.95	Agreed
11.	Helps me to learn the act of collaborating with peers	2.96	0.87	Agreed	3.15	0.73	Agreed
12.	Helps me gain perspective on how the program operates	2.96	1.11	Agreed	2.85	0.911	Agreed
13.	Introduces me to professional networks that will help propel my career	3.22	0.66	Agreed	3.20	0.66	Agreed
14.	Helps with research links that provides vital information for success in my program	2.61	1.05	Agreed	2.75	0.89	Agreed
15.	Provide constructive feedback to guide me as I progress in the program	3.22	0.66	Agreed	3.20	0.68	Agreed
16.	Provides opportunities to co-present to help sharpen my presentation skills	2.61	1.05	Agreed	2.75	0.89	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**2.94**		**Agreed**	**3.05**		**Agreed**

Table 1 indicates that both institutions (Igbarim and UNIZIK) recorded grand mean scores above the threshold of 2.50 (UNIZIK=2.94; Igbarim=3.05) indicating overall agreement that mentorship positively impacts academic success. Both institutions provided strong evaluations for items 9, 13, and 15 (resource recommendations,

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (1), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

professional networks, and constructive feedback), indicating that these are critical for effective mentorship. At UNIZIK, Item 3 had the lowest mean score (2.22). Conversely, all items at Igbarim were rated "agreed." In addition, the low standard deviations suggest a reasonable level of consistency in responses among respondents.

Table 2: t-test analysis on the impact of peer mentorship on doctoral students' academic success

		Levene's of variance	*Test*	*equality*	*t-test*	*Equality*	*of*	*Means*
		F	***Sig***	***T***	***Df***	***Sig.(2-tailed)***	***Mean diff.***	***Std. Error Diff.***
Mentorship	Equal variances assumed	0.374	0.543	-1.268	74	0.209	-0.12648	0.09977
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.254	67.71	0.214	-0.12648	0.10084

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test results show that Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant (F= 0.374, p=0.543), this is >0.05 indicating that the assumption of equal variance was not met. This suggests there is no significant difference in the views of doctoral students from both universities regarding the influence of peer mentoring on their academic achievement, t (74) = -1.268, p = 0.209.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in Table 1 indicates that doctoral students view mentorship as predominantly advantageous, particularly in aspects such as communication, confidence enhancement, and academic support. This finding is in tandem with the submission of Lorentti et al (2020) and Gardner (2008) who noted that peer mentoring fosters a sense of community, inclusivity, and assistance while counteracting feelings of isolation that may hinder the completion of doctoral programs. However, some mentoring aspect, including networking, exposure to collaborative research, and introductions to faculty, reveal disparities between the two institutions. These discrepancies may arise from variations in mentor training, the cultural context of the institutions, or the ratio of mentors to mentees. The significantly lower evaluation from UNIZIK regarding faculty introductions highlights a lost opportunity for improving doctoral socialization.

Table 2 indicates a largely positive attitude towards peer mentoring among doctoral students at both universities. Although UNIZIK recorded a marginally higher mean, the t-test demonstrates that this variation is not statistically significant. This implies a

shared recognition of the advantages of peer mentoring, regardless of the institution.

These results align with existing literature that highlights how peer mentoring can enhance academic support, provide emotional backing, and aid in the development of professional identity for doctoral students (Gardner, 2007; Rawls, 2008; Lorentti et al., 2020). Students may view peer mentoring as an essential asset for navigating their doctoral experiences, even in the context of inconsistent institutional and supervisory support.

Implications of the Study

Peer mentoring promotes academic resilience which alleviates feelings of isolation, boosts research self-confidence, and fosters retention. Therefore, the need for institutions to establish formalized peer mentoring structured programs to assist students, particularly in the initial stages of their studies. This will enhance doctoral results thereby improving retention rates in programs and a decrease in dropouts. This study faces limitations regarding its sample size and scope. It examined only two universities in Eastern Nigeria, which restricts the applicability of the findings. Furthermore, it relies on students' perceptions, which could be influenced by bias or exaggeration.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significance of peer mentoring as a supportive resource for doctoral students in Eastern Nigeria. Despite the lack of statistically significant differences in perceptions among the universities, the results indicate a common belief in the advantages of peer mentoring for academic achievement and retention in programs. Peer mentoring is an essential addition to faculty support and plays an important role in strengthening the institutional framework.

Recommendations

1. Nigerian universities should develop organized peer mentoring initiatives of pairing experienced doctoral candidates with less experienced students.
2. University management should provide training for mentors on how to effectively assist their mentees both academically and emotionally.
3. Include peer mentoring in the orientation programs designed for new doctoral students.

REFERENCES

Bandura, A, (1977). Self-efficacy: towards a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychology rev; 191-215. Doi; 10.1037/0033-295x.8884.2.191

Blass, F. R & Ferris, G. R. (2007). Leader reputation: The role of mentoring, political skill, contextual learning, and adaptataion. Human resource management, 46, 5-19

Bonin, E. (2013), Effect of peer mentors on academic performance; Rivier academic journal, 9(2)

Bagaka, G. J; Badillo, N; Bransteter, I; Rispinto, S. (2015). Exploring student success in doctoral program: The power of mentorship and engagement. International journal of doctoral studies, 10, 323-342. http;//ijds.org/volume/10/IJDsv10p

Callary, B; Werthner, P; & Trudel, P. (2012). The lived experience of a doctoral student: The process of learning and becoming; The qualitative report, 17(43);1-20; http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/

Cosgrove, P. B. (2022). The nature of success in doctoral education: the roles of the student, the advisor, and goals in research anthology on doctoral student professional development. Doi 10.4018/978-1-6684-5602-6.chool

Gardener, S.K (2009). Student and faculty attributes of attrition in high and low completing doctoral programs in the united states. Higher education 58 (1); 97-112

Gardener, S.K (2010).Contrasting the socialization experiences of doctoral students in high and low completing departments: Aqualitative analysis of disciplinary contexts at one institution. The journal o higher education, 18 (1); 61-81

Gardener, S. K. (2008). Fitting the mould of graduate school; a qualitative study of socialization in doctoral education. Innovation higher education, 33(2), 125-138

Garcia, R. (2020). There is a reason for doing something so difficult: What to expect from a PhD. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com

Lorenzetti, D. L; Nowell, L; Jaacobsen, M; Lorenzetti, L; Clancy, T; Freeman, G; Paolucci, E. O. (2020). The role of peer mentors in promoting knowledge and skills development in graduate education. Education research international; http://doi.org/10.1155/2020/8822289

Mbagwu, F. C. (2020). Challenges faced by students in the pursuance of doctoral degree in Nigeria University. A journal of library and information science; 18(1)

Wellington, J. (2010). More than a matter of cognition: An exploration of affective writing problems of post-graduate students and their possible solutions. Teaching in higher education; 15(2), 135-150; https://doi.org/10.1080/13562511003619961

Hilliard, A.T. (2013). Advising doctoral candidates and candidates' views during dissertation process; Journal of college teaching and learning; 10(1), 7-112; https://doi.org/10.19030/tic.y10i1.7525

Schmidt, M& Hansson, E. (2018). Doctoral students' well-being: a literature review; 13, 1508171; https://doi.org/10.080/17482631

Henschen, B. M. (1993). Easing the transition from doctoral student to academic professional; Political science and politics, 26(2); 80-82; https://doi.org/10.2307/419512 cambridge.org

Hurtado, S& Ponjuan, L. (2005). Latino educational outcomes and the camps climate journal of Hispanic. Higher education, 4, 235-251

Kierma, M.E; Hagemerer, N; Melton, B; Noureldin, M; Plake, K. S. (2012). Agraduate student mentoring program to develop interest in research. Am J pharm education; 76(6);104, doi: 10.5688/ajpe66104; www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

Noonan, M, J; Ballinger, R; Black, R. (2007). Peer and faculty mentoring in doctoral education: Definitions, experiences, and expectations International journal of teaching and learning in higher education; 19(3),251-262.

Sarrico, C. S. (2022). The expansion of doctoral education and the changing nature and purpose of the doctorate; High education, 84; 1299-1315; https: //doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00946-1

Wisdom, M; Balleisen, E. C.(2020) Peer to peer mentoring programs for PhD students, Duke university