Efficacy of Mentoring in Enhancing Academic Outcome of Business Students in KSA

M.M. Sulphey and Zafrul Allam
Department of Human Resource Management,
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz Univeristy, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia

Abstract: Mentoring is now accorded prime importance in most western worlds to develop youth and to make them employable. It is a sustained relationship between a young person the mentee/protegee and an adult, the mentor wherein the young person is provided with support, guidance and assistance. Mentoring programmes which have been successful in the developed counties will be of great utility for Saudi Arabian students. Mentoring will provide the college students with the required academic and other support services to help them become employable and enhance their chances for success in college and after graduation. Empirical works have proved that mentoring enhances academic performances, increased college retention rates and examination grades. As in the case of other countries, Saudi students also require emotional and psychological support to be successful in academics and their early stages of employment. Mentoring is capable of providing these supports. This research presents a model of mentoring that is capable of enhancing academic outcome of business students. The model is having practical implications and if implemented will enhance the overall employability of the business students of Saudi Arabia.

Key words: Mentoring, academic outcome, employability, prime, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is the relationship between a less experienced individual a mentee or protege and a more experienced individual the mentor. It is defined as "a sustained relationship between a young person and an adult in which the adult provides the young person with support, guidance and assistance". That mentoring is advantageous in various ways is a matter beyond doubt. The United States is a country that has done wonders with mentoring of youth. According to Freedom (1999) mentoring in the US developed in three stages. It started in the 19th century with a social reform movement. Later on, in the early 20th century the Big Brothers programme was developed in New York. This was followed by a number of other programmes to help various sections of the society including females, like the big sisters programme. The next stage occurred in 1970's in the corporate world when it helped women to break the glass ceiling in their respective careers. This was later expanded to include other sections like the minorities. The third stage was initiated in the 1980's. The focus of this stage was to address the deep rooted social problems.

Presently, there are innumerable agencies and programmes that are in the field of providing youth mentoring services. The mentoring initiatives are carried on by a large number of NGOs, corporate, educational institutions and state bodies. State funding is also provided for mentoring activities. These initiatives are worth replicating in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Statement of the problem: It is often found that many students who graduate are ill prepared for the professional world (Rohdes, 2008). They are often found to lack the required employability skills. These skills are essential for graduates to succeed in employment at the modern workplace. Further, employers now expect entry-level employees to possess the required employability skills. Now a days, employability skills are considered not just as the desired attributes for prospective employees but one of the basic conditions essential to be considered for employment.

To become employable and enhance their chances for success in college and after graduation, students would require academic and emotional support services. Evidences point towards a relationship between support

Corresponding Author: M.M. Sulphey, Department of Human Resource Management, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz Univeristy, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia

programmes like mentoring and student's performance (Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Ferrari, 2004). It can thus be considered that mentoring is one aspect that can provide the students with the required support (Rohdes, 2008). Mentoring can contribute to increasing the student's self-efficacy and positively assist in their setting and accomplishing of goals.

Substantial evidence exist to prove that mentoring programmes benefit the participants significantly in a host of domain like emotional/psychological, problem/high-risk behaviour, social competence, academic/educational and career/employment (Dubois *et al.*, 2002). Since, mentoring programmes have succeeded remarkably in increasing positive behaviours of proteges and reducing their negative behaviours, almost all mentoring programmes have been successful in receiving extensive public recognition (Bauldry and Hartmann, 2004; Delaney *et al.*, 2002). With respect to undergraduate students, studies show that mentoring has helped in developing research skills (Kardash, 2000), self efficacy, cognitive and social development (Rohdes, 2008), intellectual curiosity and logical thinking (Bauer and Bennett, 2003), academic performances (Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Waldeck *et al.*, 1997; Rohdes, 2008) and increased college retention rates (Gregerman *et al.*, 1998).

Like in any part of the world, the students of Saudi Arabia also require emotional and psychological support to be successful in academics and early stages of employment. These supports can be effectively provided through the process of mentoring. Certain areas in which mentoring services can be provided in graduate courses include advice and guidance with respect to academic, professional and associated matters and providing the required supports. The mentee/protegee can be assisted by the mentor in identifying various learning resources and project funding opportunities. In KSA, due to its size and spread, it would be ideal to adopt mentoring in a decentralized manner and later scaled across the length and breadth of the country. Since, the economic and social context in KSA is undergoing vast changes, mentoring that provides for strong inter-generational relationships will have immense potential in transforming the capacity and capability of young graduates. Serious work in this area is lacking in the kingdom. The present work intends to present a model that would provide mentoring the required importance in making the undergraduates of KSA more confident and employable. It also attempts to enrich the literature in this area. It is earnestly expected that this work will trigger further research, both empirical and otherwise in the area.

Literature review: Mentoring relationship in academics involves professors acting as close, trusted and experienced colleagues and guides (Cusanovich and Gilliland, 1991). This, according to them is necessitated since part of what is learned at graduate schools is not cognitive. It is mostly limited to socialization to 'the values, practices and attitude's of a particular discipline and to the university in which he/she studies. In business courses, the mentor should nurture and provide the required support to the students during their period of transition. The mentor has to assume the position of a role model and serve as a resource who will answer the questions and doubts of the mentees/proteges.

Rohdes (2008) is a social scientist who has done considerable work in the area of mentoring. He was the first to propose a formal model for mentoring process which can have a lasting impact on developmental outcomes in proteges. According to him the impact of mentoring occurs through the flowing three inter-related processes improving the emotional and social well-being of youth; improving their cognitive skills through instruction and intellectual challenge and role-modelling and identity formation. The quality and length of mentoring relationship is decided by the extent of the mentor's impact on these three factors. Taking a similar view, Gupta and Gowda (2012) have opined that mentoring can lead to emotional and social well being, cognitive development and identity development.

Mentoring has been found to bring in positive attitudes towards the educational institution, create a greater expectation towards success and bring about improved institution and family connectedness. It also reduce absences and better grades (Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Rohdes, 2008; Waldeck *et al.*, 1997), aid in cognitive and social development (Rohdes, 2008) and the resultant higher levels of educational attainment and occupational prestige (Furstenberg and Kmec, 2000). Other areas that are found to be positively associated with mentoring are career advice, educational institution to work transition, finding of opportunities for employment, economic and social participation and overall youth development.

One of the major reasons for failure of mentoring programmes is because the faculty who are assigned the position of mentors usually lack the required basic understanding of the mentoring process. Most of them misunderstand and consider it to be mere counselling or advisement. It has to be borne in mind by the mentors that mentoring is something which is far above and superior to counselling and advisement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Enhancement of academic outcome through mentoring: There is no second opinion about the definite need to meet high standards of training for business graduates. However, a consensus about the appropriate curriculum that can prepare business student for transition from training to work is still elusive.

Many studies have shown that present students graduating out of universities seldom meet the demands of most employers (Johnson, 1991; Ananda *et al.*, 1995). Though there are many reasons of prime importance is irrelevant curriculum structure and teaching practices (Porter and McKibbin, 1988). Substantiating this Bennis and O'Toole (2005), Mintzberg (2004) identified considerable gap between business theories taught to business students and the actual workplace practice. Gap was also identified between knowledge and skills and the needs of the practitioner's (Mintzberg, 2004). Another aspect that requires consideration is the reduced focus of faculties on including basic employability skills in the curricula (Bok, 2006). All these points to the pressing need of continuously updating the curriculum and scientifically bridging the gap between theory and practice. Towards this the professors should continuously update and use the latest and innovative teaching methodologies for delivery of the curricula. The evaluation and grading criteria should scientific and in tune with the latest trends in the industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Once the curriculum is arrived at a due and appropriate mentoring process should be designed. Mentoring helps in passing on the experience, wisdom and ethics of the senior mentor to the protege/mentee. Mentoring has now acquired strategic importance and has found wide usage for the enhancement of a protege's career prospects (Schwiebert, 2000). It is an effective tool that is capable of developing a host of skills, enhancing socialization, facilitating career development (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005) and relationship development (Noe *et al.*, 2002). There is considerable evidence to suggest the significant relationship between the need for guidance during youth development (Magnusson and Stattin, 2006; Scales *et al.*, 2006) and its association with mentoring. This if mentoring is done in the right earnest and with the required seriousness, it will lead to inculcating in the mentees the right kind of knowledge, skills and attitudes. This in turn will lead to a host of positive outcomes.

Some of the outcomes include higher educational aspirations (Herrera *et al.*, 2007); good grades/academic outcomes (Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Meca *et al.*, 2003; Rohdes, 2008; Waldeck *et al.*, 1997), emotional well being (Dubois *et al.*, 2002), positive behaviours including future orientation (Karcher, 2008). The relationship with employability has also been observed by Dubois *et al.* (2002) and Sulphey (2015). Based on these discussions, a model about enhancement of academic outcome (Fig. 1) is developed.
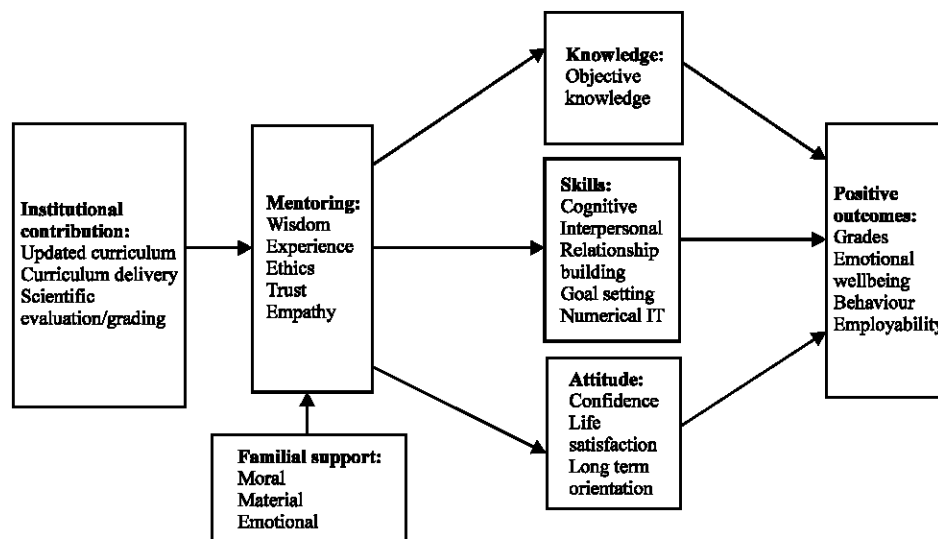

Fig. 1: Model for enhancement of academic outcome through mentoring

CONCLUSION

Based on the extensive review conducted, it is suggested that formal mentoring programmes should be initiated in business schools of KSA. Most universities of KSA are having updated curricula. Many of them are accredited institutions. As such, there are no doubts regarding the quality of the curriculum. What now required is to implement a comprehensive mentoring programme. Such programmes have the capacity to positively influence academic outcomes (Meca *et al.*, 2003; Rhodes, 2002) and employability of business students. It would be advisable to nominate senior members of the faculty as mentor's mentor from whom the junior members would be receiving advices regarding mentoring. These mentors, in turn would be mentoring the students. Since, familial support is capable of acting as a moderating force (Dubois *et al.*, 2002; Rhodes, 2002, 2008), it should invariably be made use of. Familial support is capable of enhancing the emotional well being of the students and at this age they are in the stage of development. Dubois *et al.* (2002) is of the opinion that the effect of this programme will lead to several patterns of outcome measures.

It is thus presupposed that mentoring will this lead to a host of positive outcomes in the knowledge, skills and attitude domains of the students. This coupled with emotional maturity will lead to a host of positive outcomes like better grades, emotional well being, positive behaviours and employability of the graduates. As youth in general and graduate students in particular is capable of leading the country to greater heights, no stones should be left unturned in making then good citizens. If the graduate students of KSA are brought under a comprehensive and scientific mentoring programme, it will work as an effective catalyst in making them employable and good citizens of the country, thereby propelling KSA to greater heights. This will act as a driving force in achieving the noble objectives of vision 2030.

The present research is theoretic in nature. However, it has immense potential to be put into practice. It is earnestly expected that the present research will act as a trigger in inducing social scientists to conduct empirical and action oriented research work in the area.

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