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KNOWLEDGE AND APPROACH TO CAREER MENTORING AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI METROPOLIS

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Abstract
Globally, mentoring is a means of career advancement and psychosocial support for the youths. This is a descriptive survey conducted on secondary school students who attended a technical workshop on Career, Mentorship, and Development Plan using a semi-structured questionnaire. Information on demographics, knowledge on mentorship, style of related practice, and career choice were collated and analyzed using SPSS version 21. Of 300 questionnaires received; 93(31.8%) were from males and 199(68.2%) from females. Most of them (90%) were aged 13-17 years. Some participants aspire to become Medical Doctors (26%), Lawyers (23%), Engineers (8.9%), Priests (2.4%), Teachers (5.1%), Journalists /Media Agents (4.7%), Bankers (4.8%) and Nurses (4.6%). About 210 (71.9%) have internet services while 82 (28.1%) do not. 8.1% of them have access to internet services, in school: (8.6%), home 88.6% and 8.2% from both school and at home. Majority (92.5%) have heard about a "MENTOR"; 134(49.6%) knew from their Teachers, Radio 48(17.8%), Church 25(9.5%), and online search 11(4.1%) respectively. Similarly, 193(66.1%) have been involved in one form of mentoring or another, of which 42.5% were involved in formal and 1.0% in informal mentorship. Secondary school students in Owerri metropolis have a low level of awareness of career mentorship. Other than traditional advice from a parent, teacher, and religious institutions, they have no formal structured mentorship program. There is a need to develop and implement structured mentorship that would ensure proper selection of career, career development, mentoring, and promote career goals and a brighter future for the youths.

Introduction

Mentoring has evolved over the years as a way of providing career advancement and psychosocial development through formal or informal relationships. In countries where mentoring is a norm, activities are set at different stages of life to support effective mentorship. Mentoring processes involve nurturing, advising, befriending, and instructing an individual which when properly done turns into a shared friendship, categorized by a peer bond, informal contact, and mutual support (Mullen *et al.*, 2012). Kram in 1983 defined mentoring as a relationship that pairs a senior and junior colleague in a support-based intense relationship that guides the mentee through career advancement and psychosocial development. This definition is supported by the description given by Wanberg *et al*. in 2003. It is a

form of educational or professional training aimed to develop employees in any profession (Al Hilali *et al*., 2020). When it becomes a trusting relationship between a young person and an older, more experienced non-parental individual who provides guidance, support, and encouragement to the mentee, it is classified as Youth Mentorship (DuBois & Karcher, 2005).

Effective mentoring when achieved has a positive impact on higher school education and performance, entrepreneurship, leadership as well as communication. Youth mentorship has been used to promote entrepreneurship and foster economic development and many academic and non-academic organizations have utilized high-impact mentorship to institute entrepreneurship in education, and exchange programmes. Experiences are being shared between experts in various professions and the younger generation aspiring to drive the future.
Mullen's model reviewed various definitions and proposed nine different types of mentoring (Mullens *et al*., 2019a). Among them, formal mentoring is primarily career-focused and ideal for youths and adolescents. In Nigeria, this seems to be lacking in our developmental support system. The majority of purported activities such as after-school lessons, address academic performance (Olu-Ajayi, 2016). As such many parents, teachers, and the students confuse such with the real traditional mentoring as defined by Kram (Kram, 1983). Moreover, the Nigerian system can be said to be fully engrossed in informal mentoring such as that seen through the provision of advice by parents, immediate and extended members, religious and social organizations. This type of informal mentorship tended to have a great element of psychological support than career development as most of the people providing advice to our future hope are not well educated, experienced, and lack the skills that can be transferred to promote career selection and development.

In addition, web-based or e-mentoring, combines formal mentoring with technological advances to produce a twenty-first-century process. This mentorship style utilizes the pre-existing social or professional network to match mentor and mentee in a way that the mentor through structured and face to face secured activities can help and address the specific needs of the mentee (Mullen *et al*., 2019b, Stoeger *et al.* 2020). In youth, precisely adolescents, mentoring builds their self-esteem (Schwartz *et al*., 2012; Williams, 2020). In addition to that, knowledge is gained through this partnership program which in turn allows the teens and adults to discover and utilize different career possibilities that are often not available in a classroom setting. Similarly, the programme breaks down that gap and brings together human resources from certain professions and populations. Thus, promoting awareness on community's diversity in careers and professions. It is also known to build teamwork, whether the learning occurs in school, religious settings, or on the job (Claassen and Williams, 2020).

Looking at the latest approach to mentorship, the New York Academy of Science runs international youth focused e-mentoring programmes (NYAS, 2022) The organization identifies experienced mentors in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and matched them with mentees. The mentor is trained, and he or she assists the mentee to identify career goals, prepare them for college readiness, supervise their training activities on leadership, communication, critical thinking, and subsequently maintaining a progressive relationship. Good knowledge of mentorship is the best approach needed to select and develop a career path that would ensure development, skill acquisition and advancement. Thus, it is important to know if the students in secondary schools in Nigeria know about mentorship, types, benefits, and practices. Having this knowledge would help to identify needs, create and implement mentorship and matching programmes that would support career development and purposeful training of future generations of youths in eastern Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The study was conducted to assess the knowledge, and approach to career mentoring among secondary school students in Owerri metropolis, Imo state, Nigeria.

Methodology

This was a descriptive study conducted on secondary school students who attended a technical workshop on Career, Mentorship and Development Plan; the Missing Link in Empowering the Igbo Youth organized by Igboekulie under their annual Asusu Igbo Amaka programme held on 23rd of November at Owerri Girls Secondary School Owerri, Imo State 2019. A semi structured questionnaire was developed, and pilot tested. Written consents were obtained, after informing them about the topic of the questionnaire and expectations from them in both Igbo and English Languages. Sample size was determined randomly. The secondary school students studied were those in senior secondary years,

most of whom are at the point of university/polytechnic readiness and are preparing for the West African School Leaving and Joint Admission and Matriculation Examinations. Questionnaires were administered to all students from 12 public and private secondary schools randomly selected based on proximity to study site, who attended the annual Igboekulie Association, Asusu Igbo Amaka, and gave their consent or assent through their school guardians.

The study was conducted in Owerri, Imo state which is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. The state is in the south-east part of Nigeria. Imo state has a population of about 4,927,563 million of 2017 (National Population Commission, 2017) with a growth rate of 3.2%. The state is bordered by Abia State on the East, River Niger and Delta State to the West, Anambra State on the North, and Rivers State to the South. It lies within latitudes 4°45'N and 7°15'N, and longitude 6°50'E and 7°25'E with an area of around 5,100 sq km. Education is of paramount importance in Imo State. The area of the study is in Owerri its capital and one of the largest zones, the other zones being in Orlu and Okigwe. The six educational zones in this state are Okigwe Zone 1 and Zone 2, Orlu Zone 1 and Zone 2 and Owerri Zone 1 and Zone 2 respectively. The respective population of secondary school students is stated to be Okigwe Zone I (14,517), Okigwe Zone II (16,830), Orlu Zone I (41,198), Orlu Zone II (25,679), Owerri Zone I (73,377) and Owerri Zone II (35,159) respectively (Achonu *et al*., 2019). A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to the students from the various secondary schools and information on demographics, knowledge on mentorship, style of related practice, and career choice were obtained. The answers to the "YES" or "NO" and other predefined answer questions were used to calculate the score of participants.

The association between different socio-demographic variables, mentorship knowledge, approach, and availability of electronic gadgets for e-mentoring, were investigated using bivariate and multivariate analysis. Both parametric and non-parametric procedures were used to assess the data. Data were collated and analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 (IBM, Chicago, IL). Frequency and percentage tables were drawn to show the distribution of data for both demographic variables and research questions. Mean and standard Deviation as summary measures were used for quantitative variables like age at last birthday. Frequencies and percentages for different schools were also analyzed to have an overall view of each school's responses to some research questions.

Result

Socio-Demographic Information of Participants

Of the 300 questionnaires administered, 292 (97.3%) were received of which 93 (31.8%) were from males and 199 (68.2%) from female respondents. Most of the participants are within the age range of 13-17 (90%), followed by those 18-22 (6.5) and the least being those aged 9-12 (2.7%) as shown on Table 1.

Table 1
Information on demographics, career professions and status of mentorship among selected Senior Secondary Schools students in Owerri, Metropolis

Gender	Frequency (N=292)	Percentage (%)
Male	93	31.8
Female	199	68.2
Total	292	100
Age Range		
9-12	8	2.7
13-17	265	90.8
18-22	19	6.5
Total	292	100

Within the population studied we analyzed their state of origin and found out that there were from Imo 228 (78.1%), Anambra 47 (16.1%), Abia 6 (2.1%), Enugu 8 (2.7 %), Ebonyi State 2 (0.7%). Interestingly one participant (0.03) hails from Rivers State (Figure 1). Greater percentage of the students were from Owerri Girls Secondary School, Owerri 54 (18.5%), Owerri City College School 35 (12.0) Ikenegbu Girls Secondary and School 29 (9.9), Comprehensive Development Secondary School, Owerri 27 (9.2%) and Holy Ghost College, Owerri 27 (9.2%). The result of other schools is as shown on table 2.

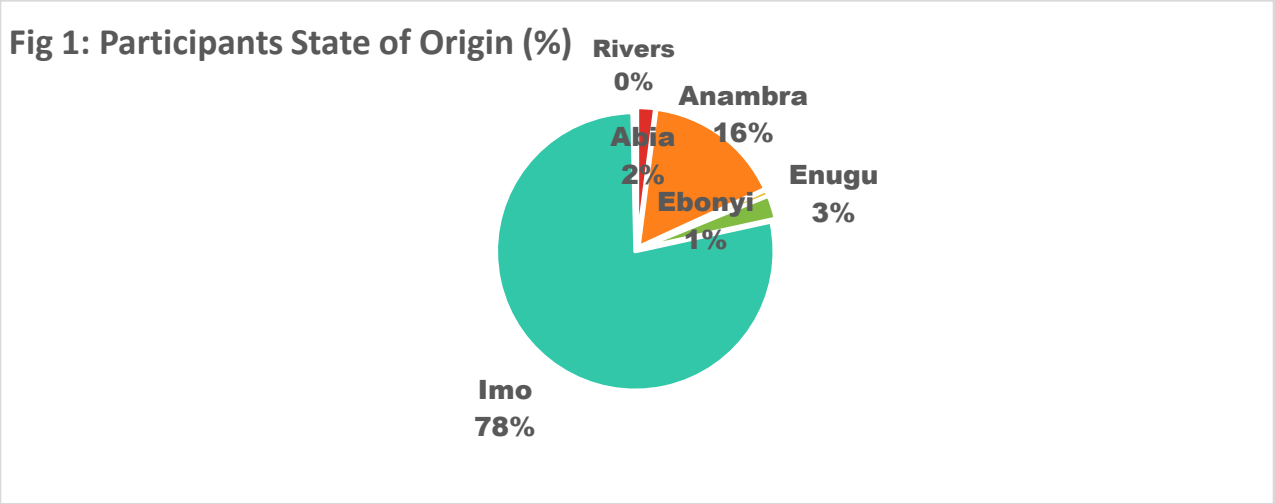

Table 2:
Information on Study population and distribution within selected schools

Demographic Information (Name of School)	Frequency (N=292)	Percentage (%)
Boys Model Secondary	9	3.1
Comprehensive Development Secondary School	27	9.2
Dora Chinyere Nwankiti Juniourate, Inyishi	20	6.8
Girls Secondary School Ikenegbu	29	9.9
Holy Ghost College,	27	9.2
Marist Comprehensive College	21	7.2
Okwudor Secodary Technical School	25	8.6
Owerri City College School	35	12.0
Owerri Girls Secondary School	54	18.5
Secondary Technical School, Obodoukwu	13	4.5
St. Paul Secondary School	20	6.8
St .Paul Seminary	2	0.7
Urban Development Secondary School	10	3.4
Total	292	100

Research Question 1: What is the Career or Profession preferred by the students

Table 3 shows the outcome of the survey on career/professional choice. Some participants aspired to be Medical Doctors (26%), Lawyer (23%), Engineer (8.9%), Priests (2.4%), Teacher (5.1%), Journalist /Media (4.7%), Banker (4.8%) and Nurse (4.6%). Others are Accountants (3.8%), Pharmacist (3.4%), and Fashion Designer (2.7%) respectively. Only a few would want to be in Business Admin (1.7%). a Farmer (1.0%), or Biotechnologist (0.3%). Most of the participants 143 (81.3%) spend their free time reading.

Table 3

Career or Profession preferred by the students

Preferred Career/Profession	F (N=292)	%
Teacher	15	5.1
Lawyer	67	23
Medical Doctor	77	26.4
Academic Doctor	2	0.7
Engineer	26	8.9
Banker	14	4.8
Computer Scientist	4	1.4
Farmer	3	1.0
Fashion Designer	8	2.7
Accountant	3	1.0
Acting	2	0.3
Actor/ Actress	6	2.7
Banking And Finance	1	0.3
Biochemist	1	0.3
Biotechnologist	1	0.3
Business Admin	5	1.7
Computer Scientist	1	0.3
Diplomat	1	0.3
Music	1	0.3
Economist	1	0.3
Footballer	2	0.7
Laboratory Scientist	2	0.7
Lecturer	2	0.7

Journalist /Media	12	4.1
Nurse	13	4.6
Pharmacist	10	3.4
Police	1	0.3
Priest	7	2.4
Radiographer	1	0.3
Theater Art	1	0.3
Undecided	2	0.7
Total	292	100%

Note: On the contrary, another group of 116 (39.7%) respondents agreed to spend their free time playing games, while 176 (60.3%) do not. We also observed that 91 (78.4%) of participants that affirmed playing games during their free time were involved in Manual Games while 24 (20.7%) play electronic games. When asked if they were internet compliant and can easily assess online hardware facilities or gadgets to complement, 210 (71.9%) agreed they have while 82 (28.1%) do not. On the nature of electronic online gadget, most of the participants (77.0%) have mobile phones while the least 1.0% has Laptop and access to data. Although, 186 (88.6%) have their gadgets at home, only 21.4% of them have access to online and hardware facilities at schools.

Research Question 2: What population of students knows about mentorship, types, practice, and its benefits to their career

Table 4
Knowledge of Mentorship, Types, and Practice among the Secondary Schools in Owerri, Metropolis.

Practice among the Secondary Schools	Frequency (N=292)	Percentage (%)
A. How do you spend your free time?		
Playing Game? Yes	116	39.7
No	176	60.3
If yes, what type of game? (N=116)		
Manual	91	78.4
Electronic	24	20.7
Manual and Electronic	1	0.9
If no what other activity (N=176)		
Acting	1	0.6
Acting, Singing, Dancing and Hide and Seek	1	0.6

Dancing	1	0.6
Football	2	1.2
Meditating	1	0.6
Movies	1	0.6
Playing Musical Instrument	2	1.2
Reading	143	81.3
Reading And Playing Football	1	0.6
Reading And singing	2	1.2
Reading, Washing and Cooking	1	0.6
Reading, Singing and Hanging Out with Friends	1	0.6
Self-Development	2	1.2
Singing, Dancing or Sleeping	1	1.2
Sleeping And Gisting	7	3.9
Studying	3	1.7
Teaching	1	0.6
Thinking	2	1.2
Watching Tv	2	1.2
Drawing Designs	1	0.6
B. Source of Advice on career part		
Do you have anyone advising you on your career path?		
No	46	15.8
Not sure	4	1.4
Yes	242	82.9
If no, would you like to have someone to advise you on how to (n=46)		
Yes	44	95.7
No	2	4.3

Do you have anyone helping you to achieve your career (n=292)		
Yes	229	78.4
No	50	17.1
Maybe	13	4.5
If yes, who is the person? (N-229)		
Father	53	23.1
Father and mother	12	5.2
Father, mother, and sister	1	0.4
Father, mother, and teacher	1	0.3
Mother	85	37.1
Mother and sister	1	0.4
Mother and teacher	1	0.4
Sister	11	4.8
Teacher	32	14.0
All the above	6	2.6
Aunty	4	1.7
Brother	1	0.4
Cousin	1	0.4
Family	2	0.8
Father and teacher	1	0.4
Friends and guardians	1	0.4
Guardian	3	1.2
My parish priest	1	0.4
Parent and elder siblings	1	0.4
Parent and mentors	1	0.4

Both Parents	18	7.9
Spiritual director	1	0.4
Uncle	1	0.4
If not, would you like to have someone? (n=50)		
Yes	46	92.0
No	3	6.0
Maybe	1	2.0

C. Knowledge on Mentorship

Have you heard about the word mentor before?		
Yes	270	92.5
No	22	7.5
If yes from where? (n=270)		
Radio	48	17.8
Teacher	134	49.6
Google search	11	4.1
Church	25	9.3
Igboekulie	27	10
Home	1	0.3
Classmate	1	0.3
During a seminar	2	0.7
Father	1	0.3
In school	1	0.3
Mother	2	0.7
Movies	1	0.3

My father	1	0.3
My parent	2	0.7
Parent	7	2.4
School	3	1.0
Sister	1	0.3
Television shows	1	0.3
A mentor is someone who; (n=270)		
Pays your school fees	2	0.7
Provide your food	3	1.1
Godparents in church	8	3.0
Your friend	28	10.4
Someone who assists you to identify and achieve your career goals	217	80.4
Confidant	6	4.4
D. Style of Mentorship		
Have you been involved in any form of mentoring before (n=270)		
Yes	193	66.1
No	77	26.4
If yes, what type (n=193)		
Formal (lesson teacher, career talk)	82	42.5
Informal (home and religious)	111	57.2
Availability of online mentorship tools (N=292)		
Do You Have Electronic Gadgets?		
No	82	28.1
Yes	210	71.9

If Yes, Which (N=210)		
Mobile Phone and Laptop	2	1.0
Mobile Phone and Access To internet	4	1.9
Laptop and Access To internet	2	1.0
Access to internet for Browsing	17	8.1
All of the Above	2	1.0
Laptop alone	21	10.0
Mobile Phone alone	162	77.0
If Yes, Location (N=210)		
School	18	8.6
Home	186	88.6
Both	6	2.8

A greater percentage of the students (82.9%) have someone advising them on how to choose a career in life. On the other hand, an average of 15.8% of participants claim they have no one advising them. Interestingly, 1.4% were not sure if they have ever received a piece of advice on what their career could be like. Of those who admitted to having received one form of advice or another 78.4% have someone to help them achieve their career, mostly their mother (37.1%), father (23.1), and teacher (14%). On a contrary, 17.1% do not and wish to be advised (92%). While 4.5 % were not sure of receiving any advice 6.0% preferred not to be advised by anyone. A good number of these participants (95.7%) would like to have someone advise them on which career to choose in life.

Most of the participants 270/292 (92.5%) have heard about the word 'MENTOR' while only a few (7.5%) have not. Among those who have heard, 134 (49.6%) obtained the information from their teachers, 48 (17.8%) from Radio, 25 (9.5%) from Church, and 11 (4.1%) came across it through online search (table 1C).

We observed that 80.4% of the participants are aware that a Mentor is someone who assists an individual to identify and achieve their career goals in life while 0.7% think a mentor is someone who pays school fees. We also observed that 193 (66.1%) of the participants have been involved in one form of mentoring or another, of which a number below average (42.5%) were involved in formal mentorship precisely through their teachers and career talks. In contrast to that a substantial number above average (57.2%) receive informal mentoring from homes and religious centers.

The study also investigated the availability of basic online mentoring tools. While 71.9% of the respondents have electronic gadgets, 28.1% do not. For those that have, 77% have mobile handset/telephone alone and 1.9 with access to the internet. We also identified the 10% that have laptops with 1% of them having access to the internet. A very low number (1%) have both mobile handset telephone and laptops. Overall, 8.1% of the students have access to internet services. Of which 8.6% can access the internet from school, 88.6% from home, and 8.2% from both school and at home.

Discussion

Mentoring is a means of career development and knowledge creation among youths. It is important that these youths should have a good knowledge of how to achieve their career goals in life and on time. The study assessed the gender of secondary school students who participated in the study. We observed more females than male respondents. This is in line with that report from Nigeria Digest of Education Statistics which showed more females are enrolled in secondary schools in Imo state than males (http://education.gov.ng/nigeria-digest-of-education-statistics) Moreover, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, the ratio of female to male secondary enrollment (%) in Nigeria was put at 0.90317 % in 2016. (Trade Economics, 2020). These statistics are in line with our findings.

Having more women in secondary schools in Owerri reflect the pre-existing clamour for the education of the girl child in Eastern Nigeria. Furthermore, most mentoring programmes target mentees of the same age bracket, gender, career goals, or skills. The population investigated falls within the age range of 13-17 years. In addition, interstate distribution was also reflected as the population cuts across children from six states in the eastern part of Nigeria.

The choice of career in the eastern part of Nigeria has always skewed towards high-priority professions particularly Medical Doctor, Lawyer, Engineer, and Teacher (Forsyth, 1969). This was shown in this study as these same professions were observed as the four most preferred professions. The lower number of students aspiring to go into Business Administration, Farming, and Biotechnologist calls for concern. In the present-day Nigerian economy, research and development have expanded the need for professionals in this field. In addition, food and food products generate a substantial global income when compared to some other industries (FAO, 2017). In addition, the biotechnology industry has revolutionized science. Most drugs, food, diagnostic and industrial reagents are products of bioengineering. On the other hand, any career in bioremediation would be lucrative, especially in states in eastern Nigeria and neighboring states known for oil exploration and associated environmental pollution.

Although we did not stratify the different types of engineering, the low level of interest shows that soon the need for experts in the areas of big data, artificial intelligence, robotics, and telemedicine may be challenged. Hence the need to encourage the youths to build their carrier paths in these directions. In addition, the eastern part of Nigeria is rich with natural deposits of clay, solid minerals, and precious stones. The gap in having trained personnel with related expertise is obvious soon.

Business management and administration is the bedrock of trade, negotiation, technology transfer, patenting, product development, retainer-ship, and royalty, especially when complemented with the law profession. Although indigenes from eastern Nigeria are graciously involved in commerce and Imo State has the highest number of Professors in Eastern Nigeria, it is important to reflect this rich expertise in research and development. Selection of career, career development, and mentoring to achieve career goals need to be revisited thus the need to have a younger generation that is aware and would aspire to utilize the value of business management and administration to identify, innovate, produce, manage, and optimize resources to the benefit of Nigerians. This can be achieved through structured mentorship. Expert and experienced mentors in different fields should be identified and matched with mentees to assist them to identify career goals and subsequently advance to the future progressively.

This study shows that a high number of participants spend their free time reading. Close to average consent to playing one type of game or another. If a small proportion of such time is apportioned to awareness creation, structured mentoring, visits to industries and organizations, well-informed youths when enrolled in a mentorship programme would have the capacity to develop career goals, identify heroes, acquire leadership skills, at a younger age and grow with such progressive legacy.

The post COVID-19 new normal will drive school and mentoring activities online. It is encouraging to observe that a greater percentage of the students have someone advising them on how to choose a career in life. The study showed mothers, fathers, and teachers doing alike, however, better results may be achieved if such informal are fortified by formal mentorship. T some countries, it has been a developmental norm included as part of growth plans both in urban and rural areas.

The word Mentor is not new to the students in Owerri as they are well informed and understand the meaning. The study observed the general practice of the informal methods of mentorship both in schools, churches, and homes. Our investigation shows that irrespective of the environment, mentorship activities were primarily geared more on how to promote academic performance. There was a low level of knowledge on formal career mentorship. Neither did we find planned interactions and networking between students and experts in different professions. Formal mentorship is a structured and pre-planned practice and involves a process where experienced individuals direct an inexperienced person to achieve the desired goal. Structured mentorship progammes vary. In educational system, studies have shown that the main thrust is to spend at least a minimum time of one hour in a week or two to direct the mentee to achieve specific mentorship needs other than improvement in academic performance. For example, in the 1000Girls and 1000Futures Mentorship programme the mentee is assisted on how to set career goals, learning modalities for college (university) readiness, leadership skills, conflict resolution, and networking with peers and experts in the preferred career (NYAS, 2022).

A good number of the participants showed a willingness to be mentored in the right way indicating how promising this programme might be when introduced to them eventually. Efforts should be made to roll out mentorship schemes, identify mentors from industries, academics, and other relevant fields and draft a structure for subsequent matching, training, and implementation of a robust career mentorship programme. A mentorship programme for youth is conducted through online training using public social media like Skype, Google chat and secured platform that requires the use of a good internet network (Stoeger *et al.* 2020). The mentorship style requires quality interaction between mentors and mentees distributed across diverse regions, countries, and continents. Overall, a good number of the participants have access to Internet network from home. This should be considered when designing any or introducing a mentorship programme. Having home-based mentorship will not only enhance accessibility but will also promote parental monitoring. From this survey, it will not be out of place to say that the knowledge of the best approach needed to mentor and develop a career plan may be a strong missing link in empowering the Igbo Youth. This tends to justify a need to create awareness of career mentorship so as to implement promising interventions, support career development, and ensure purposeful training of future generations.

Conclusion

The study shows that secondary school students in Owerri, metropolis have a low-level of awareness of career mentorship and how to achieve their career goals. There is no formal structured mentorship program for senior secondary schools other than traditional advice from parents, teacher, and religious institutions. A good number of students in Owerri have access to handset/mobile telephone at home. In this twenty-first century, an era of new normal in education and training, a very high number of students in Owerri do not have laptops and internet access. Having access to internet services will promote the need to establish one on one mentoring programme between students (mentees) and experienced professionals (mentors). This would be a key factor to mentor, impact, and ensure proper selection of marketable professional careers, and appropriate direction on how to acquire foundation and skills before tertiary education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. The is a need to promote proper selection of career, career development, and mentoring to achieve career goals
2. Expert and experienced mentors in different fields should be identified and matched with mentees to assist them to identify career goals and subsequently advance to a progressive future.
3. There is a need to develop structured mentorship for secondary school pupils.
4. Having access to internet services will promote the need to establish one on one mentoring programme between students (mentees) and experienced professionals (mentors). This would be a key factor to mentor, impact, and ensure proper selection of marketable professional careers, and appropriate direction on how to acquire foundation and skills before tertiary education in Nigeria.

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