

## **Mentor-Mentee Relationships in Higher Education: The Expectations of Early Career Female Academics**

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### **Abstract**

*This postgraduate research explores the effectiveness of mentor-mentee relationships (MMR) in higher education by examining the experiences and perceptions of early career female academics (ECFAs) in private universities in Ibadan, South-West, Nigeria. The study employed an interpretive-qualitative design of semi-structured interviews to gather insights from five ECFAs within the studied university, with a reflexive thematic analysis applied to coding exercises from transcripts. Results from the findings generated four broad themes: expectations of ECFAs, the reality of ECFAs, the nurturing effect, and holistic career progression which establishes that the ECFA are faced with several challenges that may affect their overall effectiveness as academic staff. The results revealed that Female early-career academics in particular address negative experiences regarding what they expect from academics as a career, and they revealed the burden they encounter in their mentoring relationship. This study's findings revealed that the mentor-mentee relationship's effectiveness is beneficial to nurture and support the professional development of ECFAs. The study provides practical recommendations to ECFAs on how they can invest in personal and professional development and not rely solely on a mentor to provide all the needed support for their career growth.*

**Keywords:** Early Career Female Academics, Nigerian Higher Education, Effective Mentor-Mentee Relationship,

**Wordcount:** 212

### **Introduction**

Over the past few years, mentoring relationships (MR) have gained the attention of several authors due to their perceived effectiveness in improving and enhancing Mentor-Mentee Relationships (MMR) in higher education. MMR in higher education has been viewed as a journey that involves an experienced professional shaping the career of a newly recruited academic staff while providing opportunities for growth and development (Sutherland, 2017). The benefits of this journey cannot be underrated as it has become increasingly dependent on early career academics (ECAs) professional

development (Kalpazidou & Faber, 2016). The representation of Early Career Female Academics (ECFAs) in private universities in Nigerian higher education (NHE) is an area of great importance and concern. According to Choi et al.'s (2019), mentorship is a pivotal factor in nurturing the future generation of academic faculty leaders and driving sustainability within academic medical centres.

Within the Nigerian context, female academics face unique challenges in universities. Managing multiple workloads, motherhood, family care, different mentoring expectations, research/article writing, and publications, all may limit their career progression (Idubor & Adekunle, 2021; Hassan et al., 2017; Hollywood et al., 2020; Okon et al., 2022). This may also have a ripple effect on their willingness to continue in the profession, if not properly managed. In the context of women pursuing careers in academia, fostering a supportive environment, and providing them with essential guidance can amplify their professional prospects and ensure job satisfaction (Beck et al., 2022; O'Connell & McKinnon, 2021). Specifically, regarding mentorship, findings suggest that providing support and guidance to ECAs can enhance their job satisfaction, career prospects, and staff retention (Idubor & Adekunle, 2021; Kanyumba & Lourens, 2021). However, given the significantly persistent low population of females in academia in comparison to their male counterparts, there is a need for further exploration of the specific impacts of these variables on female academics in Nigeria (LloydJones & JeanMarie, 2020). Gender disparities in education and employment, have been identified as factors affecting labour productivity in Nigeria (Abaneme et al., 2021) with this gender gap/disparity seen in admissions to tertiary institutions in Nigeria being well-documented (Oludayo et al., 2019). Addressing these disparities and promoting female education-friendly policies can contribute to closing the gender gap in academia.

## **Literature Review**

Several studies have been conducted on MRs in the educational sector (Brown et al., 2020; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021; Ossorno & Doyle, 2021; Stoeger et al., 2021; Wilson & Huynh, 2020). Critically, these findings show that professional development depends heavily on MRs in a variety of professions and jobs. According to recent studies, MMRs are socially formed and developed, emphasising the importance of a safe environment

for the mentee's growth and enhancement (Hollywood et al., 2020; Rollnik-Sadowska et al., 2023). Additionally, the relationship between a mentor and mentee has been highlighted as a developmental step in the process of autonomously seeking out and forming partnerships that promote cooperation and collaboration (Kim, 2021). Based on this backdrop, ECFAs in the Nigerian higher educational sector are likely to benefit from the impact of a well-defined MMR where it is effectively practiced. However, the mentor-mentee relationship in higher education is saddled with so many expectations within the global context. For example, Sargent and Rjenties (2022) research demonstrates the substantial influence of mentorship on the effectiveness and achievements of early career academics (ECAs). Efforts to establish and execute mentorship programmes spanning various academic disciplines have been notable in developed nations like the United States. Fornari et al. (2014) reveal that these programmes have been developed with the primary aim of providing support for ECAs, helping them navigate the intricacies and challenges of the academic landscape.

Seeking more support in mentoring, Sargent and Rienties (2022) found that mentorship plays a vital role in enhancing the visibility and accessibility of ECAs while ensuring they get essential support and guidance. Within the context of African nations, mentorship can exert a meaningful impact on the landscape of higher education (Addy, 2023). Higher education systems in African countries grapple with specific challenges, such as a scarcity of resources, a dearth of diversity among faculty members, and the imperative to foster the professional development of ECAs (Idubor & Adekunle 2021). These challenges can be effectively confronted through the assistance of MRs, who have been shown to invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and avenues for networking and fostering professional growth (Okon et al., 2022; Zachary & Fain, 2022).

Developing a conceptual framework and self-assessment instrument that may direct institutional efforts to enhance research mentoring is critically important to guarantee the efficacy of MMR in African nations (Keyser et al., 2008). ECAs in African higher education institutions have unique requirements and problems that this framework should consider. The perspective of mentors and mentees has highlighted the importance of compatibility, time management, goal setting, and achieving aims (Barrett et al., 2017). The formation of mentoring relationships is impacted by various factors such as the setting in which they take place, and the expectations, demands,

and competencies of the individuals involved (Dajani, 2021). Pairing mentors and mentees together are also a key factor if EMMR is to be achieved. Such findings align with the main aim of this study to explore the benefits of effective MMR within Nigerian higher educational settings. A review of existing studies shows that one main aspect that has been neglected in recent studies is the perceived mismatched expectations from the mentees in mentoring relationships. Diggs-Andrews et al. (2021) argue that one of the key aspects to be considered is the mentee's expectations in a mentoring relationship. All the studies reviewed in this research were conducted with different approaches and in developed countries, acknowledging that mentoring is one of the methods of providing support for the ECAs in understanding their experiences and achieving sustainability in the profession (Hollywood et al., 2020).

Similarly, a study conducted on how mentoring is being adopted and practiced among academics within three universities in Nigeria revealed that effective teaching of the mentees through mentoring is important to better the performance of the ECRs (Idubor & Adekunle, 2021). Whilst recounting the challenges faced by the newly recruited academics in the university in terms of their career development, the study suggests the need for nurturing them through an effective and well-structured mentoring programme. From a critical review point, the study concluded that management should render support with policy formulation and implementation through mentoring programmes within the university. The study by Okon et al. (2022) revealed that nurturing practices may not influence research productivity while Idubor and Adekunle's (2021) results suggest that both mentors and mentees agreed that mentoring is about nurturing the younger academic staff into career development with a specific focus on research productivity. This could be key to measuring the career profession of newly recruited academics in higher institutions, with research knowledge being key. Despite several studies on MRs for the ECAs in higher education, research focusing on aligning the expectations of the mentee with the institutional mentoring structure seems scarce. While all these findings highlight the potential benefits of mentor-mentee relationships in improving the research output, career progression, and increased population of female academics within the higher education sector in Nigeria, they leave one pondering why these benefits have not been fully harnessed or achieved hence, the rationale for this study. The findings from this research may be used to close the knowledge gap from this perspective especially

when considering the overrated expectations brought into MRs by the ECAs within the higher educational settings and facilitate their professional development. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of MMR in higher education by examining the experiences and perceptions of ECFAs in private universities in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study further sets out two objectives; to explore the unique experiences of ECFAs in private universities in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria, and to find out the benefits of EMMR to ECFAs in private universities in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria. The following research questions guided the study.

- What are the experiences of ECFAs with the MMR in a private university in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria?
- What are the perceived benefits of EMMR to ECFAs in private universities in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria?

## **Methodology**

The study employed an interpretive-qualitative design that utilized a series of semi-structured interviews as a research instrument to explore the unique experiences of the participants. A purposive homogeneous sampling technique was adopted to offer more insights into the participants' experience. The participants consisted of five early-career female academic staff from different departments of the selected University. Being case study research, the study focused majorly on ECFAs, who served as the research respondents, and three criteria for respondent selection were required to obtain reliable data. The first requirement was that each participant must be an academic staff of the selected private university. Secondly, the participant must be a member of staff within the Graduate Assistant and Lecturer II levels. Thirdly, participants of the study must be female mentees in different departments within the selected university.

Semi-structured interviews (virtually recorded on a Microsoft Team device) with open-ended questions were employed for data collection. In a bid to reduce network disruption, cost, time, and the barrier of distance, the interview sessions were conducted in a way that the participants' stories were virtually recorded and transcribed. Participants were interviewed online in their different offices within the selected university and each interview session lasted for about 20 to 30 minutes. This study employed a reflective thematic approach to analyse and transcribe the

qualitative data gathered through an open coding process (Braun & Clarke 2006). It is important to state that the process of presenting the reports from the findings of this study was completed with conscious reflective skills and innovativeness, giving clear explanations of the meanings intended by the interviewees while reporting and discussing the findings from the study. Ethical approval was obtained (2023\_16205) from the University of before data collection began (University of Lincoln, 2018; BERA, 2018)

### **Thematic Analysis**

The collected data underwent a rigorous and comprehensive manual coding process. First, the researcher was able to search for identified patterns with meanings by familiarising with them and linking them with the issues being discussed. This process helped the researcher to become more accustomed to the transcripts and create different codes. To achieve this, the researcher read the transcripts several times going back and front after which the coding process commenced (Saldana, 2021). While generating the initial code, the researcher revisited the research question to understand what the data set may be saying (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020). During this process, the researcher engaged in several practices of case description (narrative description) such as underlining and use of different colours for highlighting each code (Saldana, 2021). This allows the researcher to discover specific information that is necessary and allows for the sorting of similar recorded information in the same codes line by line (Busetto et al., 2020). Reflecting on the interviewers' perceptions and processes was done at the final stage of the analysis process while revealing direct interpretation. After the coding stage, twelve subthemes were generated which were later summed up to four prominent themes: Expectations of ECFA, Reality of ECFA, Nurturing effects, and Holistic Career Progression. These thematic patterns, extracted from the transcribed interview, were subjected to coding and comprehensive thematic analysis to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. *See Fig: 1*

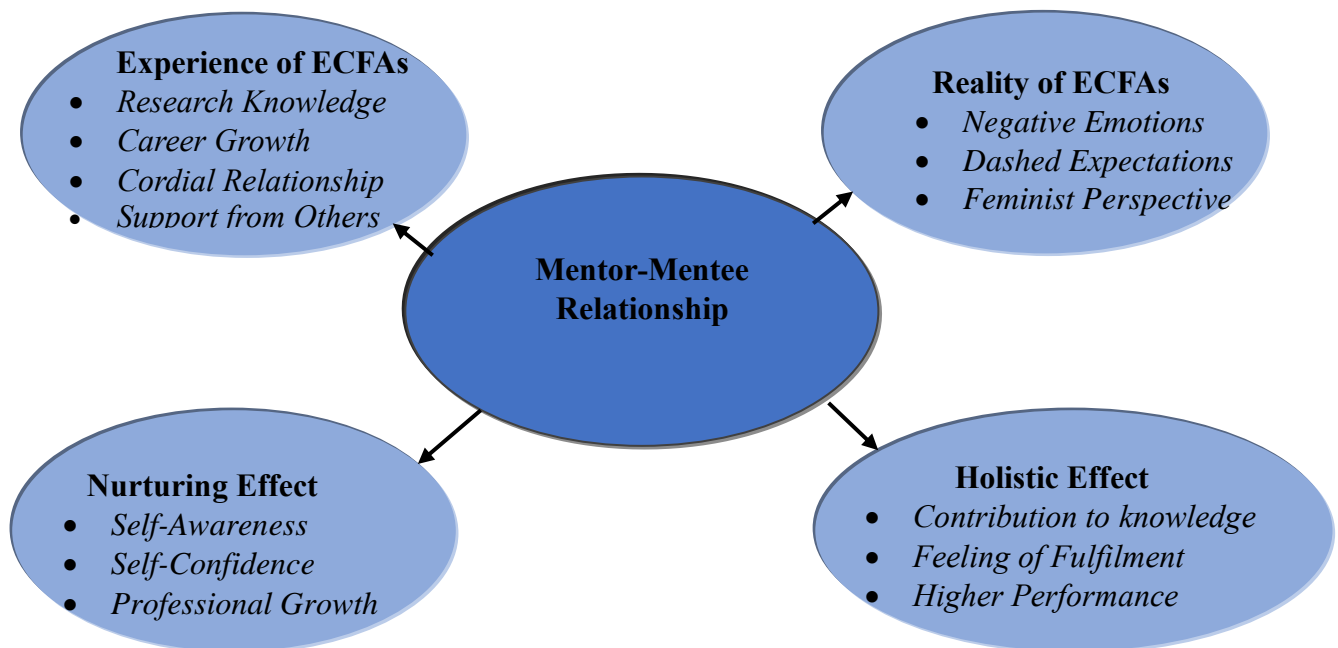


Figure 1: Thematic Map for Mentor-Mentee Relationship in Higher Education  
Researcher's Compilation, 2024

## Results

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of effective mentor-mentee relationships for early-career female academics in private universities in Ibadan Southwest Nigeria. Four distinct themes emerged from the data: *Expectations of the ECFA*, *the Reality of the ECFA*, *the Nurturing Effect*, and *Holistic Career Progression*. These themes offer a multidimensional view of ECFA's perceptions, aspirations, and apprehension as they navigate the terrain of MMR in the university.

### Expectations of the Early Career Female Academics

The first research question formulated in this study was to explore the unique experiences of the ECFAs about their MR in the NHE. The theme "Expectations of ECFA," reveals a range of aspirations and expectations of ECFA as they progress toward academia and MMR in the profession. Such expectations center on research knowledge, career growth, cordial relationships, and support from others. Participants voiced their expectations with academic activities prominently in research knowledge. P1 stated that "there was a need to publish articles, author a book and all the academic

activities which I did not think of at all” but when they realized that research knowledge and journal/article/book publications are important and compulsory aspects of academic activities, they “expected to be guided by a mentor on how to go about this” (P2). Extracts from the coded data reveal that most participants in this study expected academic activities to revolve around teaching/lecturing students and the final code reflected research knowledge and they expected to “ride seamlessly on a mentor’s wing” (P1) to achieve these. One of the participants referred to research as “very deep” (P5). However, their expectations fell short with P2 describing that “the guidance was not seen at all” indicating an unmet expectation.

Another sub-theme is the career growth expectations which revealed that ECFAs with high degree qualifications and lower degrees alike expected and relied on mentors to grow professionally. P1 recounted that there was “a feeling of expectations” to be mentored on what is unknown”. They described how they had the feeling of being mentored towards their career growth such as “being trained by a mentor or a senior colleague” (P4). In addition, participants hoped to “get secured, in the field” (P5) by having “senior colleagues with who one can climbed the career ladder and achieve significant success career-wise” and to be “put through professionally” (P4).

### **The Reality of ECFA in a Private University**

The reality of ECFA is a theme for the current situation of ECFA. While many ECFAs had their expectations from MMR to improve results reveal that almost all their expectations were not met. This theme is showcased in the apprehension, frustration, and disappointments ECFAs encountered in their mentoring relationships. P5 expressed that their “expectations are not met yet value may have been wasted”.

Virtually almost all the preconceived expectations of ECFA for their MR with their mentors were not met according to their interview data. Participants negatively responded to questions about whether their expectations are being met with expectations on academic activities (research knowledge), paper writing, cordial relationships, and support from colleagues and others were not as they expected. While reemphasizing this, P2 narrated how their “earlier expectations were not there at all”. Participants further recounted their ordeals and negative narratives of the current situation specifically P1 stated “honestly, my expectations were dashed”. Only P3 consented expectations in MMR “has been partially met”. Which further shows that



their most of them came with more expectations which are not met at the time of gathering data and this could be assumed as not “been really encouraging” (P1) to them.

Another subtheme found there is a feminist perspective to their stories which reveals the challenges females in academia may face. They all explained the challenges they face as women in academia who are in mentor-mentee relationships. As described by P1, who narrated an expectation from some mentors for a married female academic mentee “to shift all attention on the job when newly recruited”. From their perspective, they expect their mentors to consider their gender and provide support in this regard as they have more task being a married woman who will have to “raise their kids, take care of the home and still face the job” which is seen as quite challenging” (P3). Anecdotally, this is usually a position occupied by women in this context as they recounted that this when coupled with “meeting up with deadlines” (P5) as a married female academic “is a big issue” (P5). An expression on the difficulty experienced in the journey has that “this has taken a toll on me, and it has not been easy at all” (P4). In summary, the second theme showcased the current hurdle faced by some of the ECFAs in their mentoring experiences within a private university.

Within this subtheme, it was also revealed that the earlier conceived expectations on career were not fully explored for the early career female academics in the studied private university. One of the participants (P2) narrated a rare case in which expectations were met but this was when another mentor was intentionally picked by her recounted how they struggled to understand academic activities that could foster their career growth. While highlighting some of the challenges they face with getting a female mentor, P2 narrated how she “previously had a female mentor not detailed” and was later assigned to “a male who will follow up with” her and “guide her on how to achieve” (P2) the set goal. Sometimes they “ask how things are been done here” (P1) and wonder “how to go about all the hurdles” (P3). These narratives show how they view their academic journey as “nothing but an unpleasant experience” (P5).

All this depicts the struggles faced by ECFAs to get to this point and this may further suggest that harnessing some of these expectations from mentees could give a

positive narrative to the experience of these ECFAs. In general, it is perceived that women in academics may experience academic struggles in diverse ways. This theme highlighted the current hurdles faced by ECFAs in their mentoring experiences within a private university.

### **Nurturing Effect**

The "nurturing effect" theme delves into the perceived benefits of MMR with subthemes of "self-awareness," "self-confidence," and "professional growth" highlighting the benefits EMMR can deliver to the mentees. The sub-theme of 'self-awareness' emerges as a cornerstone because all five respondents emphasized the pivotal benefit of EMMR to help mentees identify personal variables needed to thrive academically. P3 mentioned that one of the benefits of MMR is that "there will be increased self-awareness and strong communication skills when there is effective mentoring and female mentees will learn how to mentor others". Also, it reveals how they have "more confidence after some years especially in research knowledge due to training received" (P4). It further shows how mentee can benefit by "achieving the personal goals or development" (P1). This subtheme calls for self-consciousness and determination to progress in the career as described by P2 who mentioned that "a lazy mentee cannot enjoy a mentoring relationship". Mentor-mentee relationships in this regard may help the mentee "gain more knowledge career-wise" (P5)

### **Holistic Effect**

The second research question to find out the perceived benefits of EMMR to the ECFAs illuminates the numerous benefits that an MR promises for the mentee, mentor, and the institution at large. Holistic development defies the notion that only mentees benefit from MRs, instead unveiling a landscape of unlimited benefits for all involved in MMR and institutions that serve as a context for the relationship. A voice echoed within this theme is the unparalleled and universal advantages that EMMR offers the mentor opportunity "to also training him or herself" (P1) and "mentors would be very happy to be proud of their successful mentee" (P2). When these are achieved, "the two parties will want to do more" (P3). Revealing how "mentors in such relationship, are learning as well" (P4). It becomes evident through the data that an EMMR will help foster mentees and mentors having a sense of fulfilment and actualization. P5

described this by stating that “when some you mentor is striving in the academia. Intriguingly, a perceived connection emerges between EMMR and overall performance in private universities as affirmed by P1 that “*the system will gain this back ohh yes*”. Through EMMR, mentees may sharpen their academic skills, and mentors will also advance professionally and when this happens, the performance of such university will take an upward trend towards sustainability.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The rationale for this study was to explore the experiences of the ECFAs in private universities in Ibadan Southwest Nigeria: the effectiveness of MMR in higher education. The findings have yielded information on four distinct themes (Expectations of ECFA, Reality of ECFA, Nurturing Effects, and holistic Career Progression) which offer a multidimensional view of ECFA's perceptions, aspirations, and apprehension as they navigate the terrain of MMR in the university. The theme "Expectations of ECFA," reveals a range of aspirations and expectations of ECFA as they leap toward academics and MMR in the profession. Previous studies in support of this finding are being carried out in different countries highlighting the importance of research skill development for the ECRs (Merga & Mason, 2021; Okon et al., 2021). Etzkorn & Braddock (2020) reported that mentors and mentees are significantly different concerning perception, belief, and participation in MMR. These emanate from preconceived expectations of the parties in the MMR.

O'Connell and Mckinnon (2021) assert that women face unique challenges in their careers as they have different expectations in mentoring relationships. As reviewed by Okon et al. (2020), mentorship practices for the ECAs significantly impact the quality of research produced by the ECAs. In support of this, Merga and Mason (2021) established the need to equip ECRs through mentorship to become more skillful and competent in research knowledge in a fast-growing yet challenging environment. In contrast, Lin (2021) argued that understanding the mentoring experience should not only be considered from the mentee's perspective but also from the mentor's experience perspective. Sibener et al.'s (2022) study noted that when females in academics have the opportunity of early mentoring; this can promote a transformative experience and inspire them to remain in academia with the study, Idubor and Adekunle (2021) acknowledged that MMR can be used to better the career

development of the mentees. One of the participants recounted how she was not promoted due to a lack of published articles. These expectations are what they thought, when met, would facilitate, and accelerate their career growth. The implication of this is that the future of conducting quality studies may be viewed as such that lies in the hands of the ECAs.

The reality of ECFA emerges as a theme marked by the current situation of ECFA. While ECFAs have robust and elevated expectations from MMR to develop, the current exploration reveals that all their expectations were not met. This theme highlights the apprehension, frustration, and disappointments ECFAs meet in their MR. The "nurturing effect" theme delves into the perceived benefits of MMR with subthemes of "self-awareness," "self-confidence," and "professional growth" highlighting the perceived advantages EMMR can deliver to the mentees. Oberholzer and Boyle (2023) suggest that because recently qualified teachers may be enthusiastic about their developing careers, it is important to recognize, develop, and nurture these career goals. In contrast to this, Okon et al's (2022) found that the nurturing effect negligibly influences the ECR's research productivity. They further suggest enhanced institutionalized mentoring practices in higher educational settings.

Another subtheme that is central within the research found that there is a feminist perspective to their stories which reveals the unique challenges females in academia may face. This, Hollywood et al (2020) found that ECR's job satisfaction decreased within their early years of experience in the job but they looked forward to working in a friendly environment. All these highlight the importance of this research to align the expectations of the ECFAs with the reality on the job as they agitate for support in their early MR to foster professional development.

The second research question to find out the perceived benefits of EMMR to the ECFAs illuminates the numerous benefits that an MR promises for the mentee, mentor, and the institution at large. Holistic development defies the notion that only mentees benefit from MRs, instead unveiling a landscape of unlimited benefits for all involved in MMR with institutions serving as a context for the relationship. Okolie et al. (2020), identified that mentorship is like a career development relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Their study suggests career training with mentoring programmes for all parties involved. Respondents envisioned a situation in which the MMR is effective,

which will promote contribution to knowledge, the feeling of fulfillment, and high performance for the mentee, mentor, and the institution. In consonance, the study's findings reveal that ECFA relies on mentoring by mentors to help them in career growth and professional development with their MRs failing to fulfill this purpose. This is in convergence with Musakuro & De Klerk (2021), who reported that newly recruited academics got trained later than expected and are exposed to struggles that come from individual professional development. Interestingly, a connection emerges between EMMR and overall performance in private universities affirmed by the benefit to the institution at large. Where EMMR, mentees may sharpen their academic skills, mentors will also advance professionally, and the institution may in turn be sustained.

## **A Theoretical Explanation**

### ***Black Feminist Theory (BFT)***

One of the prominent theories that can help explain the current findings is the Black Feminist Theory (BFT) popularized by female scholars such as Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Bell Hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1990s. The theory is centered on the experiences of black women and the unique intersectionality of race, gender, culture and other identities. From the BFT lens, the history of oppression and suppression continues to shape the dealings and careers of Black Women (TAS, 2021; Joseph, 2020), based on this, black women have always been discriminated against. The findings of the current study revealed that the discrimination is not just from the white but also from black men and elite black women as well. BFT postulates that black women are exposed to special kind of oppression and sufferings which cannot be understood by viewing race and gender as a different entity, this is known as intersectionality. Black women are exposed to special kinds of oppression and suffering due largely to their gender identity and social configuration (Collins, 2022).

BFT proposed that women strive for development and empowerment in their own terms, albeit a large number of them were repressed due to inequality and injustice in most social and cultural configuration (Collins, 2022). From this perspective, academics is a field that is considered to be cognitively tasking and a career that require highly intellectual individuals to venture into. Given this, due to social and cultural configuration of African settings, men are expected to venture and thrive in

academics as women are considered to be nurtured for domestic responsibilities. In spite of the stereotyped configuration, many women have been entering into academics for decades and trying to change the narratives. However, the inequality in the academic system, oppression from some elite groups (mentors) and gender-based discriminations with its peculiarities keeps undermining influence of ECFA and the pace at which they attain professional development.

In consonance, BFT posited on centering black women's experiences, and opined that black women have been historically marginalized within feminist movement and the society at large which impact on them negatively (Taylor,1998). System of power in higher institution of learning and especially the locale of the present study is configured in a way that maintained socially constructed categories that places women at the receiving end. Often women strive for liberations from socially constructed discrimination but are often become isolated from both black male and elite female who could be regarded as mentor. There are stereotypes against women, majority of women are caught between the dilemma of kitchens responsibilities and economic realities (Joseph, 2020). Women in academics that depends on mentors for growth experience multiple layers of oppression and discrimination which retards them from optimally utilizing their potentials.

In relevance to BFT, the unique challenges of ECFA's being investigated by a Black researcher, ECFA as Black Women are not only viewed as being oppressed as women, but also based on race, class, and career as well. These regular oppressions serve as hindrances that not only hamper the development and career growth of black women to a level but also add to black women experiencing worries in their professional relationships even with themselves (Sanford, 2018; Porter et al., 2020). Women are particularly discriminated against, marginalized, and labelled even within the informed community (Collins, 2000; Joseph, 2020).

The present study listens to the story of ECFA, given their narratives of ordeals they encounter from those who are saddled with the responsibilities of seeing to their professional growth and development and a major theme of personal empowerment emerged. this can be explained from the BFT perspectives on women's empowerment. Most dialogue around difficult issues surrounding marginalization of ECFA and their experience in the academic systems will not be resolved until women begins to invest

in personal and professional development. According to Collins (2022), Black Women have a distinctive viewpoint on their experiences, and there will be certain experiences among them. As more women continues to strive, the attempt is to arrive at equality and develop institutions to protect what the culture have devalued and disrespect, that is huge potentials in black women.

## **Conclusion**

The first objective of this study was to explore the unique experiences of ECFAs as they relate to the MMR in a private university in Ibadan, Southwest, Nigeria. The study found that ECFAs have negative experiences in their mentoring relationships as demonstrated by all participants. This result was attributed to a few reasons. First, all participants shared their stories around their expectations to learn and understand research and be able to publish academic writings which according to them has not been pleasant. Evidence of these challenges is found in their inability to cope with academic stress, family care, walking a lonely journey, and lack of adequate knowledge for career progression. Also, their expectations brought into their MRs or lack of mentors to properly guide them through the process were adequately expressed within the study. This could be a concern for the management of the university if it wishes to accomplish considerable progress and sustainability.

The second objective was to understand the perceived benefits of effective MMR as it relates to the ECFAs in the case study. Results revealed that EMMR is beneficial to nurturing and supporting the professional development of ECFAs. By extension, results found that some of these benefits are of great importance to the ECFAs, mentors, and the institution at large. The study concludes that the current situation of ECFA's mentoring relationships in private universities is under practiced and that if made EMMR can deliver advantages to the mentee, mentor, and the institution in general.

## **Recommendations**

The findings revealed that ECFAs are faced with several challenges which may affect their overall effectiveness as academic staff. There are three recommendations:

- 1) The recommendations for MMR within the studied institution are that current practice should be formalized and monitored for effective outcomes by the institution. The possible impact of following this recommendation may include a positive organisational culture, enhanced research productivity, staff well-being, reduced workload/stress on staff, and academic/professional growth.
- 2) EMMR is beneficial to mentors, mentees as well as the university at large. This further calls for a considerable effort from the university to consider the personality traits of parties in MR before pairing mentees with mentors which may lead to improved performance, increased in several quality academics, higher job satisfaction and productivity, and work-life.
- 3) ECFAs should invest in personal and professional development and not rely solely on mentors to provide all the needed support for career growth.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

The present study explores the experience of ECFA in a private university with a focus on MMR. Revealing that women in academia may have negative experiences of what they expect from academics as a career and the oppression they encounter in their MR. The most striking part of this research is the findings from interpretive qualitative approaches with consideration of the transformative framework by the feminist theory perspective as the paradigm and methodology designed to provide an answer to the research question. The study sheds light on the status quo of MMR of ECFA in private universities, mentors, mentees, higher institutions, and policymakers with indications of the challenges being faced by the ECFAs in the studied university.

This study makes a significant addition to the literature philosophically, conceptually, and theoretically with final themes emerging that can be used as metrics for future studies to promote EMMR in NHE. The thematic map developed from this research highlights other emerging areas that this study added to the body of knowledge conceptually due to its originality.

### **Research Limitation**



The study is limited in terms of its sample size, and future studies should sample ECFAs from both private and public higher institutions. This would provide a broader view of the current experience from different stakeholders and allow opportunities for the generalization of its findings. Data was collected from only the mentees and future researchers may consider collecting data from mentors for comparison. This comparative study could reveal the expectations from the mentor's side to harness this for a more productive mentoring outcome. Only ECFA participated in the study, future researchers should consider their counterparts to see if there is a difference in their experiences.

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