

**FROM EMPOWERMENT TO TRANSFORMATION: A CAPACITY
BUILDING MODEL FOR ACADEMICS IN DISTANCE HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA**

Prof. Dele Braimoh
University of South Africa
P.O. Box 392, UNISA 0003, Pretoria, South Africa.
Email: dbraimoh@yahoo.com & braimad@unisa.ac.za

Osiki, J.O. Ph.D,
Faculty of Humanities, National University of Lesotho, P.O. Roma180,
Lesotho, Southern Africa.
Email: jonathanosiki@yahoo.co.uk

&
Mpine Makoe, Ph.D,
University of South Africa
P.O. Box 392, UNISA 0003, Pretoria, South Africa.
Email: gakisme@unisa.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Applying the benefits of the multi-dimensionality of empowerment, using transformative paradigms to boost capacity building, within academics in Distance Higher Education (DHE), is a vital part of the re-focusing of research perspectives in African Tertiary Institutions (ATIs). How and when the transformative package is utilized for a sustainable research dividend, among the stakeholders in DHE, and within acceptable norms, calls for regular investigation. The study, therefore, using the transformative paradigms, examined how mentees and mentors' relationship, curtails possible academic frustration, indolence, career stagnation, spiral of academic victimization and other challenges, through a symbiotism of interconnectivity employed to facilitate adequate skills acquisition. The acquisition of relevant skills was therefore, instrumental to appropriate research breakthrough, personal development (i.e. increased self-awareness, openness, positive self-image, interdependence, etc) and overall community impact, national and or the African sub-regional advancement, growth and development.

KEYWORD: Empowerment; Transformation; Capacity Building Model; Academics; Distance Higher Education; Africa

Background

A very fundamental product of education, generally, and in particular, higher education, is the development, facilitation and acquisition of lifelong skills for useful living. Lifelong skills that are regularly developed and validated retain their marginal utility and strengths when they can be annexed and directly applied as solution-driven mechanism in bringing hope to global challenges, *viz*, socially, economically, politically and academically. Skills in lifelong Education (LE) are therefore reliable and positive-oriented weapon of change that is needed, especially, for the re-engineering of erstwhile oddity in learning. Such re-engineering, revalidation and re-appraisals are required in behavioural adaptability, instrumental for expected changes, both in academics and professional perspectives. Effectively pursuing these goals, as it were, presupposes that the major stakeholders in higher education (HE), as exemplified by programme facilitators (PF) and learners in distance higher education (LDHE) are directly goaded for programme re-validation, and the re-orientation, for the resurgence of new curricular design, professional behaviour, skills development and acquisition which are necessary for quality education as well as sustainable development. Being nurtured, prepared and goaded for sustainable results, especially in this twenty-first century, is functionally epitomized in institutional-employee collective empowerment.

The studies on empowerment generally, have had several imports in every segment of human life, including health, socio-economic, politics, and education. For instance, while Adetoun (2005) study implicated the importance of empowerment in “Gender and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, to curtail power-imbalances in discriminatory practices against the women folks, that of Osiki (2007a) was directed in the re-validation of preconceived African traditions for improving household economies (i.e. income-generating activities). Further implication includes Osiki (2007b) where various behavioural techniques were utilized in demystifying research difficulties and challenges of distance learners (DLs). In Osiki (2007b) for instance, when the Research Status Inventory (ReSI) was utilized in identifying the research difficulties of the Distance Learners (DLS), the findings, among others, indicated that over 95.64% of the DLS have not had previous research orientation, and would be happier if research methodology courses and, or dissertation were not made part of the University programme. Similarly, it further showed that while only 16.1% of the participants liked research activities, another 78.4% detested especially the applied form of academic research that implicates the use of statistical analyses. Using the benefits of the Multi-behaviour psychological techniques, both in correcting emotional

distortions of the DLS, with the concomitant upsurge in the participants' interest in research, Osiki (2007b), has therefore facilitated the concept of empowerment in HE.

Recent events at the National university of Lesotho (NUL), Southern Africa, where research training workshop was held (NUL Bulletin, 2008), had the title for the programme read as "Demystifying the Ph.D" posted for all her academic staff members and postgraduate students. The NUL, as one typical University in Southern Africa, among other few, has postgraduate students' enrolment of less than 15(although the emphasis here is on the Doctorate programmes) with the Faculty of Humanities having over 70% of the number. Among the sub-themes that attracted selected speakers from some African Countries are (a) 'choosing your topic and supervisor' (b) 'writing your thesis proposal'; (c) 'the architecture of a thesis'; (d) 'what examiners look for in a good thesis'; (e) proposal writing exercise'. What the NUL's experience portend in the aforementioned however, was to epitomise the dearth of scholarly work (i.e. researches) especially in higher education in the African sub-region, while, also implicating the open distance learning (ODL), in the twenty first century. The fallout of such events, also, without equivocation, points that: (i) embarking on research activity is not a child's play; (ii) emotions are involved in any reasonable and well conceived research; (iii) research and continue research endeavour as well as the regular validation of research outcomes is continuous; (iv) results-oriented research and or investigation involves one kind of training or another; (f) experience in research can only be gleaned by getting involved in research activities.

Empowerment in Higher Education (HE)

Fundamental in this multi-etiological concept, is the notion of the very difficult circumstance of adequate definition. Empowerment is a process that challenges the assumptions about the way things are and can be (Page and Czuba, 1999). The central contention in this definition is 'power' and the product of power which is held in relation to the people and or other things. In their postulations, Page and Czuba contended that empowerment depends on; (a) the notion that power can change; and where it does not happen, then there is no empowerment. (b) Secondly, that empowerment also depends on the idea that power can expand (i.e. power got at the expense of others-'the zero-sum theory'). In the first contention, and which underpins Max Weber twentieth century maxims, '*power is related to our ability to make others do what we want, regardless of their wishes or interest*'. It means by inference, that power does not exist in isolation nor is it inherent in individuals; and since it is created in relationships, power and power relationships can change. The zero-sum conception of power according to Page and Czuba

(1999) and which depicts their second notion was based on the premise that *'power will remain in the hands of the powerful unless they give it up'*.

Although Page and Czuba's (1999) conception of empowerment merely focused on the socio-political dimension, other studies (Commonwealth of Nations, 2007; Chamberlin, 2008) provide additional dimension. Strictly discussing on 'Commonwealth Youth Programme' (CYP), the Commonwealth of Nations in their signed plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (2007-2015), conceptualise the term when it said *'Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions'*. Critical feature in the definition epitomizes the central theme of 'accountability' and that, until the individual accepts responsibility and can be accountable; the notion of their empowerment may be a nullity. In consequence therefore, until such a time and age, the individual can only be regarded as a mere 'child'. Thus, youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youth and adults (Vavrus and Fletcher, 2006). Providing the necessary experiences to empower the youth is often addressed as the gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building with multifarious activities directly focused on youth-led media, youth rights, youth council, youth activism and youth involvement in community decision-making (Fletcher, 2005; Sazama and Young, 2006) as well as other methods, geared towards their mainstreaming.

In Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC) (2008) and as readily as the case may be, with most Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), but with particular reference to some institutions in Africa, students are assisted through professionals and peer tutors, in deficient and weak areas of their academic responsibilities including reading, writing, mathematics, chemistry and biology. Professionals and peer tutors, using the MVCC as a referent point, provide supplemental instruction to ameliorate learners' challenges as well as the emotional conditions predicating poor academic performance. As a rider to what the MVCC might have been known for, Osiki (2006), examining how the girl-child could be empowered economically, conceived empowerment to include the *'varied strategies employed in the different form of skills acquisition, awareness creation/generation, knowledge-generation and creatively-tested ideas designed to instigate independent, meaningful and useful living both of individual and the family*

which he said, was the basis for adequate home management and family happiness'. Conceiving empowerment as osiki (2006) has provided, though with emphasis on family economics, the term 'empowerment' is, without doubt, amorphous, ranging through every segment of academic disciplines and human endeavours. Every human being needs to be empowered to maximize their potentials, socio-politically, economically, mentally and healthful living, emotionally and psychologically; while, mitigating human sufferings and frustration. Fundamental among its benefits is that, it promotes personal independence, creates individual and collective awareness with a symbiotism of shared opportunity for knowledge germane, for personal and institutional growth and development.

According to the World Bank (2008), empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes and desires. But then, the outcomes and desires being envisioned, should however, be capable of transforming our individual and collective poverty and, or squalor (i.e. economic and, or knowledge) inclination to actual innovations by every standards. When individuals are empowered, particularly positively, they are able to initiate and propel the opportunity to exercise personal discretion and or choice that contributes to individual's growth and personal wellbeing in the workplace. Empowerment as summarised in Page and Czuba (1999) leads the individual with the following options: (a) decision-making power on their own; (b) access to information and resources for making proper decision; (c) a range of options from which to make informed choices; (d) ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision-making; (e) positive thinking on the ability to make changes; (f) ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power; (g) ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means; (h) involving the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated; and (i) increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma

An important dimension, and as inferred from Page and Czuba's (1999) study, is that learning is an unending, abstract and invisible process that permeates everyone's life, whether young or old, rich or poor, educated or illiterate where the individuals are influenced and within the cyclic order, also influences others meaningfully. Some times, employees (i.e. whether in the civil service or academics, especially HE) and, or learners often engage in learning encounter, sometimes deliberately or inadvertently (i.e. direct consequence of creativity), in order to learn new things or to unlearn old and unprofitable ideas (i.e. consequence of empowerment) with the implication on how we live and should be living. Real and apparent learning is an embodiment

of education that transcends the four-walls of the classroom, and can be categorized as a lifelong phenomenon that is results-oriented and overall academic breakthrough and professional maturity. This is the essence of learning, being the consequence of empowerment, which functions as a process, adds to or updates the reservoir of individual's knowledge and or group existing knowledge base, which of course, is expected to lead to some form of behavioural modification on the part of the educatee as well as collective commitments that simultaneously, instigates performance efficiency and the orientation of world-view which, consequently, improve positively.

Challenges in Twenty-First Century Higher Education (HE)

Prominent and common workplace practice, and which equally epitomises that of the Higher Education, World-wide, is the exercise of 'pseudo-empowerment'. Pseudo-empowerment summarises the inclination of management activities geared toward a direct attempt to change the attitudes of workers, colleagues and, or learners to enable them to work harder through conformity rather than providing enabling environment for independent, creative and democratic and well reasoned ideas which is the function of *real and ultimate 'power'*. In Wilkinson (2004), the term 'attitudinal shaping' was used to characterise some of the antecedent weaknesses inherent in institutional pseudo-empowerment. In some of the African HE for instance, learners and, or younger colleagues are supposed to be conditioned (otherwise, mentored) in a most productive and elegant manner, particularly typifying academic culture of excellence in research, teaching and community services. Paradoxically however, the rapidly changing landscape of higher education in Africa has led to the unimaginable apathy, so to say, on the part of many senior academics and the management staff of several African Universities, to embark on the process of meaningful professional initiation of the new entrants into the culture of teaching, research, scholarship and publishing. Adjudged from this perspective, the psycho-social stability and or emotional preparedness often desired in the quality of performance of the junior and the inexperienced newly recruited lecturers (and sometimes, the learners), who inevitably engage in the process of trial and error, in order to find their feet in academia, with regard to what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and the extent to which what is expected, get marred and unfortunately confused from the onset.

Mentoring, typified as part of any institutional responsibilities, is the informal educational and or organisational process which promotes personal and intellectual (otherwise, management) growth, including professional development through empowerment and confidence building for

the achievement of academic, professional, workplace and other organisational competence. In applying the general concept of personnel mentoring, which among others, includes coaching, training, discussion, counselling and or supervision of the less experienced scholars in academia and, or personnels (and students inclusive), it is the basis for the development of a virile, nurtured and well groomed academic of all time, for all day. Traditionally therefore, mentoring is described as the activities conducted by a person (the mentor) for another person (the mentee) in order to help that other person to do a job more effectively and/or to progress in his/her career. Mentoring, with defined specific goal, does not promote gullibility in the mentee; rather, it equips the mentee with independent skills needed for sustainable growth and personal development. The mentor, in HE and or any organisation, would probably, therefore, be someone who had "been there, done that" before (<http://www.managementhelp.org/guiding/mentrng/mentrng.htm>) and knows 'what' 'when' and 'how', the expected competences that are arranged to facilitate skill acquisition, but without exploitation.

In higher education however, though the mentor-mentee relationship was expected to exemplify that of symbiotism, especially when empowered, however, the scenario, today, is the flouting of known ethical and, or workplace standards (academic and or professional). Foremost in this direction, is the outcome of the regularly and over-debated challenge of plagiarism. Plagiarism in the twenty-first century HE, though an aged-long phenomenon, is a constant threat in the operationalisation of either employee (with emphasis to the academics) and learners' empowerment (otherwise mentorship), that has continued to erode the fundamentals in education. Plagiarizing the works of other people (colleagues and students' theses/dissertation/projects), and, or the re-editing and scanning of related materials of others, for personal advantage, without due acknowledgement, especially in the virtual learning programme as well as in the conventional system, has a lot of ethical implications (Bramoh and Osiki, 2008). It can lead to summary dismissal from work or studies or it could even attract demotion, a failure in course grade for a paper, and sometimes, expulsion from the programme. It erodes known academic confidence, and equally, potentially affects institutional image negatively. Using the information from Academics (Distance Education Student Handbook, 2008), different perspectives on plagiarism were summarized and they include, among others, the following:

- (a) copying and pasting text from on-line media, such as encyclopaedias;
- (b) copying and pasting text from any web site;
- (c) transcribing text from any printed material, such as books, magazines, encyclopaedias or newspapers;

- (d) simply modifying text from any of the above sources or replacing a few selected words using a Thesaurus;
- (e) using photographs, video or audio without permission or acknowledgment;
- (f) using another student's work and claiming it as your own, even with permission (known as collusion);
- (g) the acquisition of work from commercial sources;
- (h) translation from one language to another is not using your own words which fall under the guidelines for quotations, summaries and paraphrasing.

Although plagiarism is almost an intractable embarrassment the world over, its continued menace is a regular concern in HE and educational institutions generally, but, with a lot of worries in open and distance learning (ODL) globally. While academic cheating cannot be limited to time, space and, or environment (otherwise, type of programme), the sustenance of the ODL programmes via the machinery of especially technology, almost often, smears the purpose of education, academic credibility and professional excellence; while acknowledged academic shrewdness of programme facilitators (PFs) vis-à-vis those in tutelage, have gotten rather, asymptotic since the gap between theory and practice, is not merely sluggish, but wider; with very obvious and concomitant increase in school dropout and antecedent unemployment.

Learning, Empowerment and Morality

One very uncommon research irritation, is the question bothering on the ‘morality of learning’ and, or simply put, does empowerment have its limitations? Or when academics are empowered, does its after-effects also lead to morality question in the workplace and or HE? Learning however, occurs in most of people’s lives because it is fundamentally situated in activity, context and culture (Packer & Goicoechea 2000). Because learning includes goals, purposes, intentions, choice and decision-making (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), it is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived world. It involves enculturation that is - picking up the behaviour, values and norms of a social group, and adopting its belief systems to become a member of a culture (Lave, 1996). Jarvis (1995:20) defines learning as “any process of receiving and assessing any aspect, or aspects of culture. It transforms experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, etc.” In learning, a person is an acting being engaged in an activity in the world (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Formal education have exercised considerable influence over people's understanding of learning, however, several studies have shown that most learning occurs informally (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Learning, wherever it occurs, is an aspect of changing participation in changing practices (Lave, 1996). Social interaction is a critical component of situated learning – learners become involved in an activity which is situated in particular context and culture (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They refer to this social interaction as people involved in communities of practice which embodies certain beliefs and behaviours to be acquired. In developing the situated learning theory, Lave and Wenger (1991) observed how professional tailors, for instance, facilitate learning to their apprentices. They therefore, concluded that the work practice, rather than the master-apprentice relationship, is the one that provide the most important learning opportunities which, of course, typified skills provision in fashion and design.

In Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory, learning is not seen as the acquisition of knowledge; they viewed it as a process of social participation. "The meaning of learning is configured through the process of an individual becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 29). Mezirow transformation theory argues that learning should be understood as the process of changing our frames of reference or mind sets to generate a new or revised interpretation of our beliefs and experience as a guide to future action (Mezirow, 2000). "The justification of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context of biographical, historical and cultural frames, in which they are embedded" (Mezirow, 2000, 3).

This process involves a constant interaction between an individual and his or her experiences and environment (Kolb, 1984). For learning to occur, according to Kolb's experiential theory, there must be a direct relationship and connection between the person who learns and the person who teaches (i.e. the mentor-mentee relationship). Such connection happens through the link between prior experiences and new knowledge leading to higher level of learning (Ndoye, 2003). Adults adapt to their professional and social environment by reflecting and acting upon a rich body of experiences. The transformation that happens when learning occurs, emanates from a support system of family, friends and support groups; but more importantly, within ODL in particular, the set goals and or objectives directing empowerment.

Empowering the academics and or learners, in especially the ODL, has the single advantage for boosting academic confidence, standards and professional behaviour. Empowerment, through mentor-mentee relationship, can be symbiotic, as both learn and enrich the other with crucial

skills for personal and collective growth with the potential to take on independent tasks and stand by their decision. But, the aspect of academics' re-editing of others' publications, plagiarism, academic indolence, pilferage, and mutilation of library collections and or books/journal articles, however raises the morality question. Although, learning can be contagious and effectively productive for its impact in inducing positive and meaningful changes, the issue of morality and professional standards have been discussed (Fieser, 2007, Braimoh and Osiki, 2008) in especially the sub-themes of '*normative ethics*'. The normative ethics buttresses the dimension of moral standards that regulate 'right and wrong conduct'.

According to Braimoh and Osiki (2008), in academia, for instance, learners are prompted through effective participatory learner-teacher activities (otherwise, that of the teacher-teacher), to initiate and develop the capacity for independent and collaborative efforts to academic success rather than engaging in cheating to pass examination, and, or submit articles for publication as the case may be, which is punishable. The normative ethics usually operates, therefore, within the "Golden Rule" which establishes the single and, or set of principle (principles) against which, all human actions are evaluated and judged. The assumption bothering the normative ethics gets empowered by its sub-theories of (i) virtue theories (ii) duty theories and or deontological or the non-consequentialist theories (i.e. right theory, categorical imperative and prima facie versus actual duty); and (iii) the consequentialist theories summarized in ethical egoism, ethical altruism and utilitarianism. In ethical egoism, actions are considered to be morally right if the consequences of the actions are more favourable than unfavourable only to the agent performing the action. In ethical altruism, actions are considered to be morally right if the consequences of the actions are more favourable than unfavourable to everyone except the agent. Actions are however morally right if the consequences of the actions are more favourable than unfavourable to everyone (utilitarianism). Following the aforementioned analogy, is the additional emphasis that epitomized Fieser (2007) categorization of '*ethical theory*' in his **applied ethics** which consists of the analysis of specific and controversial moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, pilfering, examination malpractices, sexual abuse, and results falsification. Understanding the interconnectivity of the relatedness of the sub-themes and their respective underpinnings in education has potential for mitigating abuses in workplace professional behaviour as well as academic fraud. It harnesses the opportunity for improved and sustainable individual and collective tasks commitments (Braimoh and Osiki, 2008) with enhanced propensity for self-confidence, professional growth and academic credibility.

Research Breakthrough and Transformation in Higher education

In the tripod related responsibility of the average academic, designing and conducting research as well as the related activities, which includes the validation of research measures are of prime importance in HE and especially in ODL. Attitudinal and behavioural changes in terms of human life styles, technological recouping for growth, development and advancement, are part of the transformational import of higher education. Human survival, socio-economically, technologically and generally are directly linked to research endeavours, even though, conducting applied research, can be tasking and very demanding (i.e. whether among academics and, or the learners).

In Osiki (2007b), it was opined that learners in the Distance Learning Programmes (DLP) and, or selected programmes in higher education, as part of their Degree Certification, are often expected to compile and write a field report in the form of either a project and, or dissertation/thesis before graduation. This, the ODL beneficiaries often dread. But in other sphere, the slang '*publish or perish*' is a too familiar appendages within academia. In consequence therefore, while research requirement constitutes a threat to the learners either in ODL and, or HE generally, it is an issue of general concern, that is constantly worrisome among academics. In so far as general application of knowledge is concern, and should be the vogue, the transformational value of research benefits (otherwise, breakthrough) is the product of continuity whether in politics, trade and industries, socio-religiosity, mental health and or general medicine as well as administration.

Research has so many parts, and that, must be appreciated. Additionally, academics whether among the PFs and or those in tutelage (i.e. students), once we are in academic, every participants and or stake holders should be perceived as learners for life. We keep learning new things every day just as curricular re-appraisal and or review is a regular feature; and that is, if programmes in HE and or ODL in particular, would have a sustainable relevance, with the capacity to translate individual and or national dreams, to a concretized reality. Highlands does not exist in academic circle as continuous dividend (i.e. whether in HE or ODL) is the function of collective commitments of all and sundry. In this paradigm, skills acquisition for eventful research is followed through the cyclical order where, research perspectives and the modus-operandi and, or modus-vivendi are essentially derived from the community, along functional inter-personal symbiotism. In the transformation, mentee-mentorship is a direct consequence of empowerment, which in itself, is multi-dimensional. In its multi-dimensionality, premium is

placed on the socio-psychological indices, personal-emotional variables, eco-religiosity while simultaneously, using the structures of the mentee-mentor and community benefits. The essence of this paradigm has been summed up in the ultimate and transformation academic capacity model in figures I and II below (appendix).

Capacity building model for Academics in Distance Higher Education Institutions

Particularly hinged on the multi-dimensionality of the transformative theme, the empowerment of the stakeholders in institutions of higher education (IHE) in general and ODL in particular, recognises the tripod interconnectivity of the mentee, mentor and community paradigm. Within a more dynamic symbiotic cyclical order, individual (i.e. mentee and mentor) change constitutes the basis for community and or national growth, advancement and development (i.e. socio-economically, technologically, politically, mental wellness and, or health, etc); and without equivocation, the relevance of HE in Africa. While the paradigm necessarily goad the more experienced academic to a purposefully research-driven activities along with the less experienced and, or the learners (mentees), individual change (i.e. personal growth) instigated via continuous and eventful research breakthrough, then becomes the bridge to community and, or national (or continental) connectedness and politico-social and economic changes. According to Wilson (1996) putting it succinctly, reasoned that, to create change, *'we must be ready to change individually to enable us to become partners in solving the complex issues facing us'*. It was this conceptualisation perhaps, and the synthesis of the recognition of mentee-mentor/mentor-mentor mutual trust and respect, within a diverse perspective and a concomitant developing vision, with individuals striving to collaborate toward facilitating creative and realistic solutions to the myriad of African challenges (otherwise, global challenges) that typifies empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1995; Wilson, 1996) and, of course, the epitome of capacity building in ODL and DHE. As encapsulated in the paradigm (figures I and II, Appendix) therefore, skills enhancement and acquisition flow symbiotically between the mentee and mentor (i.e. irrespective of gender, age, academic status, experience, personality variables, which are all held constant), to impact positively on personal development and growth as well as overall implication for community survival and national or African sub-regional advancement.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have dealt with myriad of issues which should serve as signposts for us in our distance education marathon journey to the 'promised land' of efficient capacity building,

through the mentoring process. It must be borne in mind however, that mentoring does not only benefit the mentee but in the process of mentoring, even the quality and performance level of the mentor in all ramifications, are also being constantly improved. We must also not see mentoring paradigm as a new phenomenon in our society, as it has a long historical root even with the operation of the apprenticeship training process at the traditional functional education premise.

Suffice it to say that before the advent of modern education system in Africa, there used to be a form of educational encounter, no matter how rudimentary it was, through which character formation, skills training and even traditional literacy used to be imparted to the learners. Such training was holistic and all-embracing but sometimes it might be referred to as dogmatic, repressive, authoritarian and chauvinistic. The problem is that not many people believe or consider mentoring as anything of importance in education, let alone in distance education, through which permanent and flexible learning process could be undertaken for the purpose of attitudinal and behavioural modification as well as in coping with our daily professional challenges. Braimoh (2008) indicated that the modus operandi of mentoring may only become more discernible now in the 21st century, nonetheless, mentoring is a useful informal and lifelong educational process which is not only cost effective, but can also stimulate personal development, increase productivity and improve performance of its trainees.

We must not be oblivious of the reality that as we progress with our mentoring process, not only is mentee at the greater receiving end to improve professionally, the by-product of his personal development will also dove-tail to benefit the society in which he/she lives. The major challenge however, which the operators of mentoring paradigm in either the conventional and/or virtual higher institutions of learning should be more curious about, is the unconscious or the deliberate abuses of mentoring which may render impotent the usefulness of the process. Abuses of such are not limited to the mentor alone, but the mentee may also not be totally absolved from committing such abuses, whether knowingly or inadvertently. Mentoring is no doubt, a very useful strategy of capacity building in academia. We must however, critically assess first, the socio-cultural milieu and geo-political settings in which we are operating before it can be adopted, especially on a blanket basis, because, culturally, it may be a taboo, an offence, a violation of human right or an aberration of custom and tradition of some group of people, who may be working in such a heterogeneous and complex distance higher education environment.

In order to stimulate further academic discourse, based on our varied individual experiences, perceptions and belief systems with regard to the how, why, when and to what extent we can adopt mentoring for empowerment and thus lead to the transformation of human resource base in the process of capacity building in our various higher institutions of learning, we have given below some few challenging recommendations. These are not meant to castigate but to strengthen the management structure of our higher institutions in order for them to produce positive and enviable results in their process of maintaining quality of both the academic staff and the institutional programmes they offer to the teeming populations who are daily yearning for the acquisition of higher education qualifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ladder and Stardom Philosophy

Majority of senior academics in our different African Tertiary Institutions (ATIs), who by virtue of their positions are expected to mentor others, selfishly withdraw from performing that role or are resistant to share knowledge or experience with the junior and/or inexperienced academic staff, simply because they see them as mere threats to their positions. They have the belief that the junior and inexperienced staff members should also struggle on their own in “climbing the academic ladder” like they did without any available mentor to show them the way. That is a wilful thinking because, it should be a thing of pride for us that we have been able to replicate ourselves through effective mentoring process before we leave the ‘academic stage’ rather than being parochial to hoard information to ourselves, while we watch our junior colleagues travailing the rough academic road like a lost sheep without a shepherd.

2. Apathy due to incompetence

Many atimes, unexpressed incompetence on the part of the senior colleagues to whom many junior and inexperienced academics look unto, can be a factor of unwillingness to groom others. Many senior colleagues got to their present exalted positions not through merit and not because of high quality and consistent academic output but simply as a result of many years of sojourning in a particular university campus, ostensibly without anything worth-the-while to show for it. Sometimes, it is through mere political gymnastics or administrative favouritism, to say the least. This group of people can be referred to as pseudo-academics, who parade themselves as politicians in academic robes. To maintain quality in academia therefore, the promotion goal-

post in particular, should not for any reason be moved haphazardly at the whims and caprices of any “military general VCs” or be doctored by influential university principal officers, as “king makers” on campus, simply for the advantage of their professional and political associates.

3. Performance Based Assessment (PBA)

Annual increment, promotion or any financial reward that may be accruing to any staff member from the rank of senior lecturer upward as an academic career entry point, should be weighted highly on the basis of the following:

- At least, one publication annually should be produced in any internationally reputable journal;
- Regularity and successful supervision of either the masters and/or the Ph.D. students should be mandatory in order to remain a productive and respected Professor;
- Mentoring of at least one junior colleague to a higher academic and administrative competence level, within a given period of time, continuously and with discernible results, should be encouraged;
- Regular attendance at university sponsored international conferences where he/she will be expected to present solid academic paper, to boost the image of institutional affiliation, should be the practice in all our higher institutions of learning.

4. Leadership of University Administrative Positions

In order to lead by example, and to supervise the junior colleagues, headship of departments/schools/faculties/colleges should not only be competed for and the most competent and suitable candidate be appointed, there must also be consideration for seniority in terms of academic ranks. It is indisputable that “experience is the best teacher”, but it will be a mockery of administrative process to appoint someone who is just “fresh from the University” either with a Masters or a Ph.D. degree and without any previous administrative exposure in running a department/school/faculty/college, to lead, when there are some more senior and more qualified colleagues at the Associate and full Professorial levels available, whose services could still be utilized. There is no doubt that this may raise some serious debatable philosophical questions from some people in different schools of thought, who may argue on the basis of where will the

new graduate acquire the expected working experience if he/she is not given the chance now to lead? We are not against giving chances to anyone, all we are saying is that if and when more qualified and experienced colleagues are still available and ready to accept such positions, they should allow the new comers to therefore, be mentored for a while by watching how the system is being operated in order for him/her to attain maturity level, rather than rushing in and messing up the whole administrative structure and process as a result of his/her own ineptitude.

5. Standardize Promotion Criteria

It may be impossible to have uniform promotion criteria across all the disciplines within a university, nonetheless, for quality assurance maintenance purpose; there must be a realistic benchmarking with other similar regional and international institutions for us not to be encouraging the promotion of mediocrity at the expense of academic excellence.

6. Retirement Age

A paradox of reality is with the current brain drain syndrome, which of course, is a brain gain to other institutions within the continent or outside of African continent, which have the economic capability to pay for the services of those who decide to emigrate. We must note this exodus, and therefore, not be too rigid about mandating the willing, active and productive Professors who have attained the age of 65 years, to compulsorily retire, while yet, there are no qualified skilled human resources available on the ground to replace them. Without any sentiment, this may be subjecting the quality of the programme in whichever departments or faculties they are retiring from to be in jeopardy. It is of note however, to commend few Universities in Southern African sub-region, who practice the retention of their good Professors even up to the age of 70. Some Professors may although decide to retire officially in order to collect their retirement benefits by choice, they could nonetheless, be encouraged by the university management to stay further and be given contract appointments. This will however, depend on if they are still physically strong and mentally alert to cope with the challenges of academia. This group of people should be given less of teaching work-load at the undergraduate level but be engaged more on institutional research activities, postgraduate students' supervision including essentially, the mentoring assignment of the new generation academics.

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Authors' Biographies:

DELE BRAIMOH

Dele BRAIMOH is a Professor and UNESCO Chair of Open and Distance Learning at the University of South Africa (UNISA) where he heads a new Institute for Open & Distance Learning. He was for fifteen years, a Professor of Adult and Distance Education at the National University of Lesotho, where he was the founding Coordinator of the part-time B.Ed. and the M.Ed. Degree programme in adult and distance education.. A well travelled scholar, Prof. Braimoh holds a Ph.D. in Adult Education and he belongs to many reputable professional associations, world-wide.

He could be contacted at the following address: Institute for Open & Distance Learning (IODL), University of South Africa, P.O. Box 392, UNISA 0003, Pretoria, South Africa. Phone Nos. (Mobile) (+27) 72 72 317 06; (Work) (+27) 12 429 6763. Email: dbraimoh@yahoo.com & braimad@unisa.ac.za

OSIKI JONATHAN OHIORENUAN

Osiki Jonathan Ohiorenuan holds the B.Ed, M.Ed and the Doctorate Degrees in Education and Education Guidance and Counselling (i.e. Educational/Counselling/Clinical Psychology), University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He is presently employed at the National University of Lesotho, Southern Africa where he facilitates the Clinical Pastoral Care and Counselling Programme.

He could be contacted at the following address: National University of Lesotho, P.O. Roma 180, Lesotho, Southern Africa. Phone Nos. (Mobile) (+266)-584-30404; (Work) (+266)-522-13931 Email: jonathanosiki@yahoo.co.uk

MPINE MAKOE

Mpine Makoe is a senior lecturer at the Institute for Open and Distance Learning of the University of South Africa (UNISA). She was also communication lecturer at the same university for 8 years. Mpine holds a PhD in Educational Technology and M.Sc in Research Methodology in Educational Technology from the Open University, UK. She also has an MA in journalism from the University of Michigan, U.S.A. She has published several journal articles on e-learning, learner support, distance education and media messages on HIV/AIDS. She has also developed courses and training programs for both academic and government institutions on media, gender and health promotion.

She could be contacted at the following address: Institute for Open & Distance Learning (IODL), University of South Africa, P.O. Box 392, UNISA 0003, Pretoria, South Africa. Phone Nos. (Mobile) (+27) 82 957 4858; (Work) (+27) 12 429 6603. Email: Qakisme@unisa.ac.za

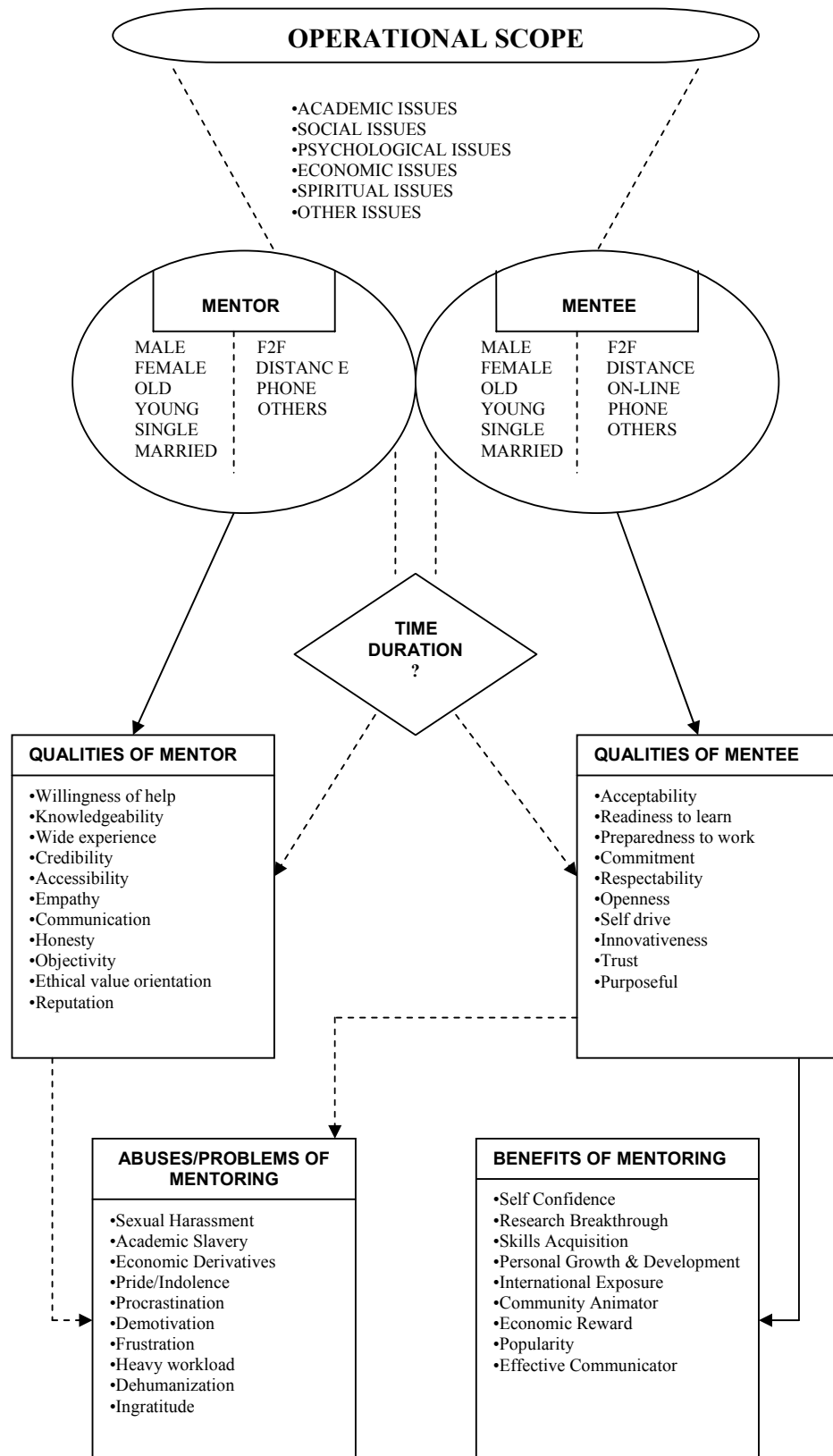


FIG. 1: **Transformative Mentoring Model for Capacity Building in Distance Higher Education** 20

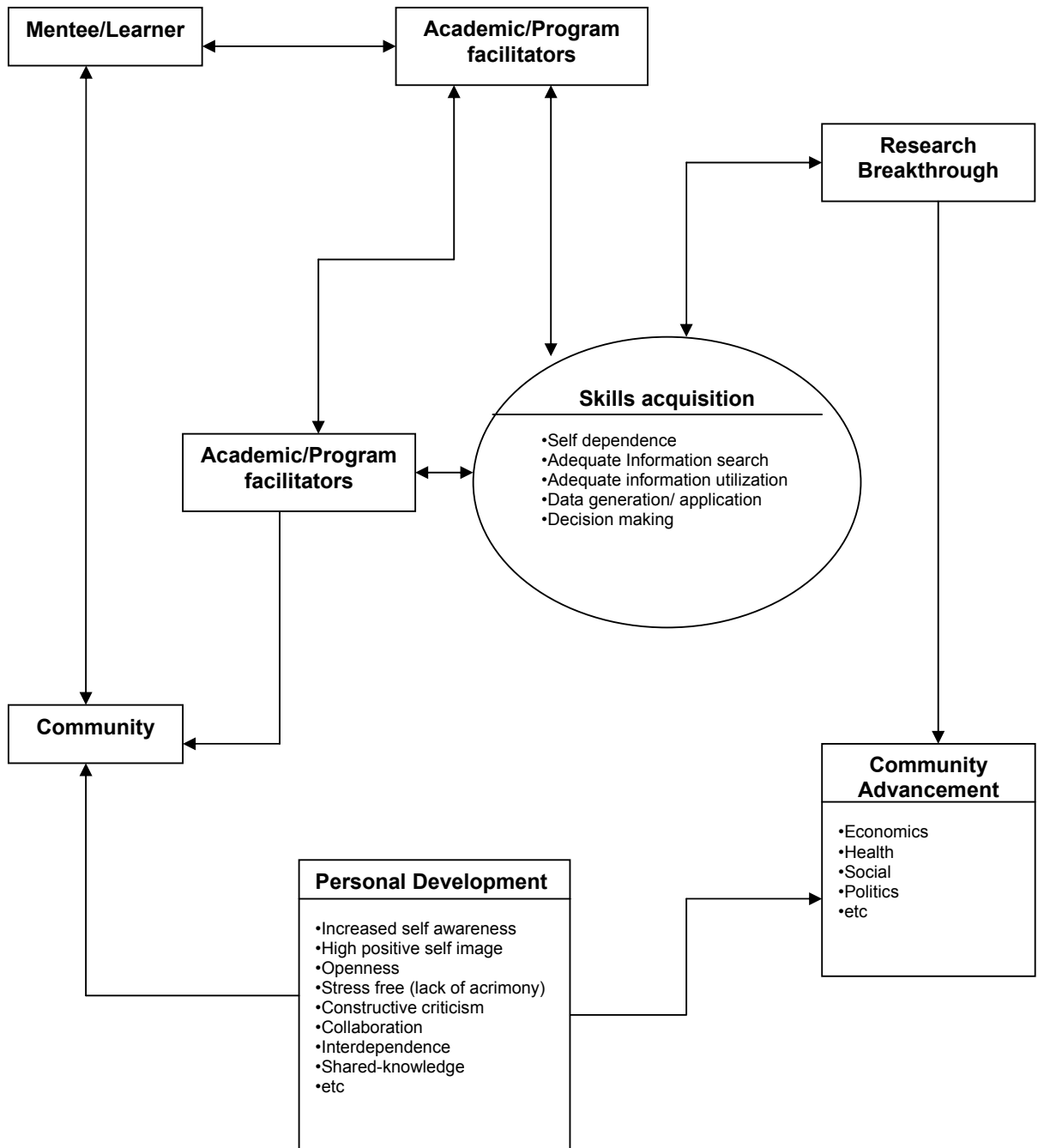


FIG. 2: Ultimate Cyclical Transformative Capacity Building Model for Academics in Distance