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Bridging the Gap: Structured and Sustainable Mentorship Models in Higher Learning Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship is widely recognised as a critical intervention for equipping young and early-career academic staff with the skills necessary to navigate the complex demands of higher learning institutions (HLIs). However, evaluating the effectiveness of mentorship programmes remains a big challenge. This article seeks to explore alternative mentorship models applicable in HLIs beyond structured programmes, identify key challenges facing structured mentorship initiatives, and outline best practices for developing effective and sustainable mentorship frameworks. Using the Google Scholar database, we conducted a systematic literature review of 25 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. Findings reveal that alternative models such as traditional dyadic, peer, group, distance, and constellation mentorship are viable in HLIs. Common challenges to structured mentorship include time constraints, scheduling conflicts, heavy workloads, limited mentorship skills, insufficient institutional support, mismatched pairings, and a shortage of qualified mentors. The article highlights best practices, including comprehensive mentor training, optimal matching, time dedication, institutional backing, voluntary participation, mentor compensation, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and clearly defined learning goals. This paper calls for the need for HLIs to have a strong mentorship culture that will help young and early-career academic staff navigate major academic responsibilities through mentors. Moreover, the management, mentors, and mentees should be responsible and accountable for each step of the mentorship programme for building effective and sustainable mentorship in HLIs.

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1.0 Introduction

Recently, Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) globally have undergone significant transformations driven by the pursuit of international reputations, institutional expansion, and the demand for quality education (Long, 2018; Kamugisha and Mateng'e, 2014). To remain relevant and competitive, HLIs require faculty members to continuously engage in lifelong learning, prioritise research, and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for academic excellence (Nuis, Segers, and Beausaert, 2023a). Faculty responsibilities encompass effective teaching, research, consultancy, and community outreach. However, young and early-career academics frequently face numerous challenges in executing these duties, such as managing classrooms, mastering pedagogical strategies, adapting to institutional cultures, balancing workloads, and building relationships with stakeholders (Mwilongo, 2024; Babarinde *et al.,* 2021; Hairon *et al.,* 2020; Van der Weijden *et al.,* 2016).

In response to these challenges, mentorship has emerged as a critical intervention to support early-career academics. It facilitates academic and professional growth by providing guidance, career advice, emotional support, and skill development (Diggs-Andrews *et al.,* 2021; Okolie *et al.,* 2020; Erbil, 2020; Mazerolle *et al.,* 2018). Mentorship also helps mentees stay in school longer, do better in school, and learn general skills (Joo & Cruz, 2024; Nuis *et al.,* 2023). Conceptually, mentorship involves a more experienced individual supporting a less experienced one to navigate their professional journey, creating a mutually beneficial relationship for the university's betterment (Demaria, 2020; Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Mentorship practices in higher learning institutions vary greatly across contexts. In developed countries, mentorship is often institutionalised, embedded within institutional policies and supported by adequate resources and clear guidelines that emphasise professional growth and research productivity among young and early academics (Joo & Cruz, 2024; Chavda *et al.,* 2021; Amri *et al.,* 2020). In developing countries, particularly African HLIs, mentorship often emerges from personal relationships rather than structured programmes, leading to inconsistencies in mentorship quality and accessibility that compromise the overall effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability of mentorship initiatives (Biljohn *et al.,* 2024; Kayombo, 2020).

Recent scholarly discourse underscores the urgent need for structured, institutionalised mentorship frameworks that are inclusive, adaptable, and capable of delivering long-term developmental outcomes (Deng *et al.,* 2022; Johnson, 2015). In order to shed light on this quandary, the article critically examines various mentorship models relevant to HLIs, identifies key gaps hindering the successful implementation of a structured mentorship system, and synthesises evidence-based best practices aimed at establishing effective and sustainable mentorship programmes that foster the professional growth and academic advancement of faculty members.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Mentorship

Mentorship has been defined in different ways depending on context and needs. For example, Nieuwstraten *et al.* (2011) defined mentorship as a formal or informal, mutually supportive, long-term relationship between at least two individuals, often in a professional setting. Also, Blackwell (1989), cited in Nuis *et al.* (2023), explicates mentorship as a process whereby a person of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instructs, counsels, guides, and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of a person identified as a protégé. However, globally, mentorship is recognised as a process in which an experienced, highly regarded, empathetic person (the mentor) guides another individual (usually younger) in the development and re-examination of their ideas, learning, and personal and professional development.

From the definition, the mentee is described as inexperienced and less knowledgeable, eager and ready to learn from the mentor (Deng, Gulseren and Turner, 2022). He/she is an actively knowledge-seeking person who is responsible for his or her learning, including initiating relationships with the mentor of his/her interest and formulating learning goals (Arnesson and Albinsson, 2017). Unlike the mentee, the mentor

is broadly considered a teacher, counsellor, and role model who guides the mentees (Demaria, 2020; Law *et al.,* 2014). The mentor role is to provide challenging work, social support, and constructive feedback to relationships through knowledge and skills sharing (Ally & Mabagala, 2022). Moreover, Etzkorn & Braddock (2020) describe a mentor as a sponsor, collaborator, evaluator, encourager, and friend to the mentee. They actively contribute to effective mentorship programmes following the fulfilment of all these roles.

In the context of HLIs, mentorship is set up in different forms; it includes senior faculty with junior faculty for direction, networking, and professional development; faculty with students for advisory; and senior students with junior students for peer mentoring (Bung, 2024). Despite the fact that mentorship is built for professional development, it extends beyond academic supervision to include psychological support, career guidance, and role modelling (Tenorio-Lopes, 2023; Kram, 1983). The relationship between the two parties can be ineffective if either of the parties does not assume his/her role robustly.

2.2 Structured Mentorship in HLIs

Structured mentorship and formal mentorship are used interchangeably. They both explain a kind of mentorship in which an organisation assigns a formal mentor to a junior employee (Chavda, Mehta and Patel, 2021). The matching between mentor and mentees is done by adhering to both process and individual characteristics (Deng *et al.,* 2022; Soklaridis *et al.,* 2015). It is characterised by a systemic approach to learning, focused on clear objectives, specific content coverage, and explicit philosophy (Birtch & Chiang, 2023; Hairon *et al.,* 2020; Hezlett, 2005). Structured mentorship is different from informal mentorship in that it is planned for a set amount of time, usually a short amount of time, and is focused on completing specific tasks. It also has clear feedback frameworks (Jackevicius *et al.,* 2014).

Further, structured mentorship is designed based on the overall goal of the business with a clear programme vision, structure, and action plan (Treasure *et al.,* 2022; Nieuwstraten *et al*., 2011). It has a clear monitoring and evaluation framework, while the roles, responsibilities, and dos and don'ts of mentors and mentees are clearly defined and stipulated in the implementation framework (Nuis, Segers, and Beausaert, 2023a; Nieuwstraten *et al.,* 2011).

Like any other form of mentorship, structured mentorship has gained significant value in HLIs for all mentors, mentees, and the institution at large (Fornari *et al.,* 2014). It serves as a model of professional behaviour and success, empowerment, support, and identity for development (Babarinde *et al.,* 2021; Long, 2018). It increases job knowledge and satisfaction, promotion, and retention of faculty members while helping protégés with the confidence, skills, and knowledge to excel in major activities in their careers (Tenorio-Lopes, 2023). For example, Hamilton *et al.* (2019), in their study, revealed that a 12-month structured mentorship helped the professional growth of mentees, reduced burnout, and made a difference between mentors and mentees. Therefore, a well-organised mentorship program is very important for the development of both individuals and institutions.

2.3 Understanding the GROW Model for Structured Mentorship

This model was grounded in the Inner Game Theory developed by Timothy Gallwey in the 1980s (Lesley *et al.,* 2015). He studied players' faults and revealed that most of their faults are rooted in the conventional coaching methods, meaning that they lacked clear directions from their coaches. Thus, players are likely to improve their performance once instructions and guidance are provided by their coaches and internalised in their minds over time (Kunos, 2017). In 2002, John Whitmore and his colleagues Graham Alexander and Alan Fine developed the GROW coaching model (Rahman, 2023; Whitmore, 2009). It is one of the most popular coaching and mentoring tools that helps individuals and teams break down their aspirations into manageable steps. They provided four steps for effective coaching to take place, abbreviated as GROW, which means:

i) **G**-Goal
ii) **R**-Reality
iii) **O**-Options

iv) **W**-Way forward (Kamarudin *et al.*, 2020).

First, the goal means what you want to achieve. It is the target or objective that the coach and coachee are working towards in their learning process. The goals must not only be clear but also SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) to channel the direction and commitment between parties (Western, 2012). These goals must align with the mentee's academic or professional aspirations. Failure to do so, the mentorship arrangement might either fail or become informal. In literature, goal incompatibility has weakened the effectiveness of mentorship efforts in HLIs, which mostly lack a clear sense of direction and motivation (Soklaridis *et al.,* 2015). Effective and structured mentorship, along with SMART and challenging goals, requires the mentor and mentee to work together, which is not negotiable (Bedinghaus *et al.,* 2024). It may involve aspects such as teaching goals, publishing research, responding to grant calls, designing and teaching short courses, or advancing to the next academic rank. For example, rather than setting a vague goal like "I want to be successful academically", a SMART goal would be *"I aim to publish one peer-reviewed journal article in an indexed journal within the next six months, with my mentor's guidance on structure, referencing, and methodology."* This type of goal defines what is to be done, when, and how progress will be tracked.

Significantly, goals must align with the mentee's academic or professional aspirations. For instance, a junior lecturer might set various goals. From teaching, the goal may be *"To improve student engagement in my undergraduate class by redesigning course materials and incorporating more interactive methods by the end of the semester."* From research*, "To submit a co-authored research proposal in response to a national research fund call by the next quarter."* From career advancement, *"meet promotion requirements and apply for Senior Lecturer status within the next academic year."* From capacity building*, "To design and deliver a short course on digital research tools for graduate students before the next university break."* In line with that, when goals are misaligned with the mentee's interests, mentorships often lose structure and purpose, turning ineffective. Research has shown that goal incompatibility is a common reason for failed mentorship programmes, especially in HLIs, where mentorship is sometimes introduced without a strategic framework (Soklaridis *et al.,* 2015).

The second part of the GROW model is called "Reality," and it talks about where we are right now. It allows both mentor and mentee to assess the current situation, identifying strengths and weaknesses that hinder the effectiveness of the mentorship relationship, including time constraints and scheduling challenges (Lucey & White, 2017; Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007). Lack of institutional support and financial rewards (Nuis, Segers and Beausaert, 2023b). The lack of mentors (Binkley & Brod, 2014), management challenges such as overregulation and inconsistencies (Schulze, 2010), and matching challenges (Soklaridis *et al.,* 2015) are among the issues that need to be addressed. This reflective analysis grounds the mentoring process in the actual experiences and contexts of the mentee, ensuring that strategies are realistic and personalised. For instance, in a workplace setting, a manager coaching a junior employee who wants to take on leadership roles might explore their current performance metrics, communication skills, and feedback from peers. This reality check helps determine what development is needed before progressing. By analysing this real-world starting point, the coach and coachee can align expectations, focus on achievable steps, and work with a grounded understanding of what must change to reach the desired outcome (Rahman, 2023).

Thirdly, the Option stage of the GROW model focuses on identifying and evaluating potential strategies and resources that a mentee can use to achieve their goals. This stage is guided by a shared understanding between mentors and mentees, supported by best practices such as setting SMART goals (Schulze, 2010), providing mentor training (Fornari *et al.,* 2014), ensuring systematic matching (Joe *et al.,* 2023), and establishing institutional support and monitoring frameworks (Trejo *et al.,* 2021). Embedding these elements in mentorship structures enables higher education institutions to formalise mentoring relationships, promote self-directed learning, and build a culture of developmental support.

For example, in mentoring a junior employee aiming to become a team leader within a year, the mentor may ask reflective questions about building leadership skills and accessing available institutional resources. Together, they might explore options such as enrolling in a leadership course, leading a departmental project, shadowing a current leader, attending external workshops, or holding regular feedback sessions. Each option is assessed for practicality and potential impact. While formal training may be valuable, time constraints may favour shadowing or project leadership as more immediate, actionable alternatives. This strategic approach enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of mentorship programmes.

Lastly, a way forward for the GROW stage model involves choosing the best option from the identified alternatives that will define the programme. It includes making a clear plan and deciding when and how to take action (Kunos, 2017). For example, suppose a mentee has explored several ways to build leadership skills. The mentor and mentee agree that the most effective option is to lead an upcoming departmental project while also enrolling in a part-time leadership course. Together, they create a plan based on the following aspects: the mentee will begin leading the project starting next month, they will register for the leadership course that begins in two weeks, weekly check-ins will be scheduled with the mentor to discuss progress and challenges, and a midterm review will be conducted after two months to assess growth. This structured plan not only clarifies what needs to be done but also instills accountability and ensures that action is taken in a timely and organised manner. The Way Forward stage ultimately transforms discussion into measurable progress, aligning individual development with organisational goals.

3.0 Materials and Methods

Tinoco-Giraldo (2020) described Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the methodological system that permits the mining of the most relevant information from existing literature in a given field that complements pre-specified eligibility criteria, answers research questions, and is conducted in phases. This research used SLR to collect scientific evidence on models, challenges, and best practices for effective structured mentorship in HLIs. In navigating this, we adopted the methodology for conducting SLR provided by Petticrew (2006). This method provides five steps: First, formulate research question(s). Second, search terms were defined, and a suitable database was selected. Third, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. Fourth, critical appraisal is conducted to evaluate the scientific quality of the obtained studies and exclude low-quality studies, and the fifth sample of studies is drawn. Therefore, we first defined the research questions and inclusion and exclusion criteria; second, we proceeded to search for and select the relevant studies; and lastly, we analysed and interpreted the results from the selected literature qualitatively.

3.1 Research Questions

We began by examining the evolution of research on mentorship and structured mentorship within Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) from a global perspective. This involved a comprehensive review of relevant literature, focusing on studies that directly addressed our research problem. We systematically extracted information from the main content and bibliographies of these works to help us come up with our research questions. For consistency and relevance, only literature published since 2015 was included in our analysis. The year 2015 was selected as the base year, as it marks a significant turning point in global and regional efforts to strengthen higher education systems and academic capacity. Specifically, 2015 coincides with the adoption of the United Nations.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasises inclusive and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. During this period, there were increased efforts from scholars to explore mentorship as a tool for academic leadership and prosperity. This year captures contemporary trends, policy shifts, and emerging models of mentorship that align with current educational reforms and global development practices. Based on this review, we formulated the following research questions to guide our in-depth analysis:

RQ1. What are the existing mentorship models applicable to higher learning institutions other than the structured mentorship model?

RQ2. What are the key challenges affecting the implementation of structured mentorship programmes in HLIs?

RQ3. What are the best practices for institutionalising effective and sustainable mentorship programmes in HLIs?

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Based on the research questions, we established criteria for the article selection process. We established a set of four (4) inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify research that is relevant to answering the research questions.

Table 1
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria
IC1. It is related to formal or structured mentoring applied in higher education.
IC2. It is related to models and challenges of mentorship in HLIs.
IC3. Include concrete empirical research.
IC4. Research papers published from 2015 were taken into consideration.
Exclusion Criteria
EC1. Not related to formal or structured mentoring applied in higher education.
EC2. Not related to models and challenges of mentorship in HLIs.
EC3. Do not include concrete empirical research.
Ec4. Research papers published before 2015 were not considered.

3.3 Search Approach

Based on the requirements, we selected Google Scholar to search for relevant literature. We used Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" to connect different descriptors for searching strings. Example: "mentorship" AND "higher learning institutions", "structured mentorship" OR "formal mentorship" AND "university". Also, words like "mentorship" or "mentoring" and "structured mentorship" or "formal mentorship" were used to get literature related to mentorship, while synonyms like "university" and "colleges" were used on behalf of higher learning institutions. A total of 47 articles were initially downloaded and scanned. Only 25 articles published between 2015 and 2025 met the inclusion criteria and were used for review. The list of authors of reviewed articles is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
List of Authors of Reviewed Articles

S/N	Author	Publication Type	Subject
1	Bung, P. (2024)	Article	Collaborative Mentoring Models in Higher Educational Institutions: A Win-win Strategy for Mentor, Mentee, and the Institution
2	Nowell, L.S. (2022)	Article	Beyond Tradition: Innovative Mentorship Models for Higher Education
3	Nowell, L. (2018)	Article	Mentorship in Nursing Academia: A qualitative Study and Call to Action
4	Minshew *et al.* (2021)	Article	Qualitative Evaluation of a Junior Faculty Team Mentoring Program
5	Mazerolle *et al. (*2018)	Article	Faculty Mentorship in Higher Education: The Value of Institutional and Professional Mentors
6	Kayombo, J.J. (2020)	Article	Mentoring Experiences in Higher Education: Voices of Early Career Academics (ECAs) at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
7	Joo, M. & Cruz, K. (2024)	Article	Formal Mentoring and Protégés' Leadership Development: The Roles of Protégés' Informal Mentoring Networks, Political Skill, and Gender
8	Treasures *et al.* (2022)	Article	Virtual Mentorship Program for The Youth in The Promotion and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Uganda Program for the Youth in the Promotion and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Uganda
9	Etzkorn, K. & Braddock, A. (2020)	Article	Are you my Mentor? A Study of Faculty Mentoring Relationships in US Higher Education and the Implications for Tenure
10	Deng *et al.* (2022)	Article	How to Match Mentors and Protégés for Successful Mentorship Programs: A Review of the Evidence and Recommendations for Practitioners
11	Wimberly *et al.* (2023)	Article	A Model of Mentorship for Students from Historically Underrepresented Groups in STEM
12	Odogwu *et al.* (2023)	Article	Mentoring Young Academics for Optimal Performance in Teaching and Research: Evidence from the University of Lagos
13	Tinoco-Giraldo, H. (2020)	Article	E-Mentoring in Higher Education: A Structured Literature

S/N	Author	Publication Type	Subject
			Review and Implications for Future Research
14	Nuis *et al.* (2023)	Article	Conceptualizing Mentoring in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review
15	Joe *et al.* (2023)	Article	Mentorship Programs in Residency: A Scoping Review
16	Salinas *et al.* (2020)	Article	Mentoring Experiences and Perceptions of Latino Male Faculty in Higher Education
17	Soklaridis *et al.* (2015)	Article	Developing a Mentorship Program for Psychiatry Residents
18	Drury *et al.* (2022)	Article	Examining the Effects of a Structured Mentorship Program on the Nurse Mentor: A Pilot Study Engaging Oncology Nurses
19	White *et al.* (2017)	Article	Factors that Impact Implementation of Mentorship Programs in Nursing Academia: A Sequential-Explanatory Mixed Methods Study
20	Diggs-Andrews *et al.* (2021)	Article	Introduction to Effective Mentorship for Early-Career Research Scientists
21	Balandya *et al.* (2021)	Article	Building Sustainable Research Capacity at Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania through Mentoring of the Young Research Peers
22	Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024)	Article	Implementation and Evaluation of a Structured Mentorship Program
23	Grocutt *et al.* (2020)	Article	Can Mentoring Programs Develop Leadership?
24	Trejo *et al.* (2021)	Article	A System-Wide Health Sciences Faculty Mentor Training Program is Associated with Improved Effective Mentoring and Institutional Climate.
25	Hairon *et al.* (2020)	Article	Structured Mentoring: Principles for Effective Mentoring

4.0 Findings and Discussion

This section summarises major findings that were obtained as a result of a systematic literature review of selected articles. They are presented according to the research questions.

4.1 Mentorship Models applicable in HLIs other than Structured Mentorship (RQ1)

Table 3
Mentorship Models Used in HLIs

S/N	Key findings	Authors
1	Traditional dyadic mentorship model	Bung (2024); Wimberly *et al.* (2023); Deng *et al.* (2022); Minshew *et al.* (2021); Nowell (2022); Nowell (2018)
2	Peer mentorship model	Bung (2024); Wimberly *et al.* (2023); Treasure *et al.* (2022); Nowell (2022); Kayombo (2020)
3	Group mentorship model	Bung (2024); Wimberly *et al.* (2023); Nowell (2022)
4	Distance mentorship model	Bung (2024); Wimberly *et al.* (2023); Treasure *et al.* (2022); Nowell (2022); Etzkorn & Braddock (2020); Tinoco-giraldo (2020)
5	Constellation mentorship model	Wimberly *et al.* (2023); Nowell (2022)

4.1.1 Traditional Dyadic Mentorship Model

This is also called the One-to-One Mentorship Model (Wimberly *et al.,* 2023). It is the most common form of mentorship that is used in many higher learning institutions (Minshew *et al.,* 2021; Nowell, 2018). In this model, a senior mentor is paired with a less experienced mentee to foster a personalised and often long-term relationship. Studies by Bung (2024) and Deng *et al.* (2022) indicate that traditional dyadic mentorship is informal, where senior faculty guide graduate students or junior academics to enhance intellectual growth and career development. The model aims to inspire early-career academics toward professional and scholarly excellence. Nowell (2018) further notes that such mentorships are usually time-bound and commonly applied in graduate and postdoctoral settings to address academic challenges and promote professional learning. Effective implementation, however, depends on active engagement and a balanced sharing of responsibilities between mentors and mentees (Nowell, 2022).

4.1.2 Peer Mentorship Model

Peer mentorship transpires among individuals possessing comparable levels of training, rank, or experience who interact consistently to share knowledge and offer emotional support (Bung, 2024; Nowell, 2022). In higher learning institutions (HLIs), this model can be applied across disciplines and career stages to promote

mutual professional and personal growth. For example, an assistant lecturer from one department might join a consulting group in another department, where members work together to solve problems related to school and work. According to Wimberly *et al.* (2023), peer mentorship is most effective within well-defined communities where participants are familiar with one another, and mentorship roles may be distributed among various actors such as research advisors, programme directors, or committee members. University alumni may also contribute as peer mentors by volunteering to support junior academics through workshops, meetings, and conferences. Kayombo (2020) further notes that the growing reliance on peer mentorship among junior academic staff stems from limited support from senior faculty, prompting early-career academics to collaborate with peers in managing teaching responsibilities, learning instructional techniques, and handling examinations.

4.1.3 Group Mentorship Model

This happens when one or more mentors support a group of mentees who hold themselves individually or collectively to a common purpose of learning and development (Nowell, 2022). In this model, junior staff (mentees) collectively join together and are placed under the mentorship of a senior lecturer, whereby discussions, opportunities, socialisation, and engagements are given by mentors and mentees who vary in rank and experience. Wimberly *et al.* (2023) provided that this model would be effective when there are more mentees than mentors. In HLIs, group mentorship is commonly visible in research labs and consultancy teams, where students and junior academic staff are given rooms to learn together from their mentor(s). This arrangement furnishes the platform for mentees to learn theoretically and practically. They are given real experience with how to navigate different academic challenges and responsibilities.

4.1.4 Distance Mentorship Model

The increasing integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in academia has minimised physical interactions, making the adoption of distance mentorship programmes essential for higher learning institutions. This model, also referred to as *e-mentorship*, *virtual mentorship*, *network mentorship*, *online mentoring*, *electronic mentoring*, *cyber mentoring*, or *virtual tutoring*, facilitates mentoring relationships between individuals located in different faculties or institutions (Bung, 2024; Nowell, 2022; Etzkorn & Braddock, 2020; Tinoco-Giraldo, 2020). In this approach, mentors provide continuous guidance and support remotely, without face-to-face contact (Nowell, 2022). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social distancing measures were enforced, many academic activities, including mentoring, were shifted to online or blended formats. According to Tinoco-Giraldo (2020), e-mentorship serves three main purposes: (1) promoting learning and development by enhancing mentee–mentor interaction, (2) supporting institutional adaptation to technological and educational trends, and (3) improving educational methodologies through continuous innovation. As this model relies heavily on ICT infrastructure and digital tools, both mentors and mentees must possess adequate technological competencies, including proficiency in social media, mobile messaging, and virtual communication platforms (Wimberly *et al.,* 2023; Nowell, 2022).

4.1.5 Constellation Mentorship Model

The literature has explored this mentorship model very little. It is the mentorship model whereby one mentee has multiple mentors who guide the mentee's development and advancement. In HLI, this mentorship model helps mentees to gain knowledge, skills, and experience from various points of view in terms of thinking, knowledge, experiences, and personal achievements (Wimberly *et al.,* 2023; Nowell, 2022). This is supported by Nowell (2018) & Nowell (2022), who ascertain that in academia, a junior staff member can have a mentor for teaching, a mentor for graduate supervision, or a mentor for long-term career goals. Each mentor serves a different purpose for growth and development. This model bridges the gap identified by Salinas *et al.* (2020), who pointed out the role of cross-mentoring from senior members of different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

4.2 Key Challenges Facing the Implementation of Structured Mentorship Programs in HLIs (RQ2)

Table 4
Major Challenges Facing Structured Mentorship in HLIS

S/N	Key findings	Authors
1	Time, scheduling, and workloads	Bung (2024); Nuis *et al.* (2023); Joe *et al.* (2023); Mosha (2022); Nowell (2018)
2	Limited/Lack of mentorship skills	Bung (2024); Salina *et al.* (2020); Nowell (2018); White *et al.* (2017)
3	Limited/Lack of institutional support and frameworks	Bung (2024); Drury et al. (2022); Salinas *et al.* (2020); Nowell (2018); Soklaridis *et al.* (2015)
4	Matching challenge	Joe et al. (2023); Diggs-Andrews *et al.* (2021); White *et al.* (2017); Soklaridis *et al.* (2015)
5	Scarcity of mentors	Joe *et al.* (2023); Nowell (2018); White *et al.* (2017)

4.2.1 Time, Scheduling, and Workload

This is among the top challenges identified by the literature. It is revealed that faculty members often face significant time constraints and workload pressures, which limit their availability and commitment to mentorship roles (Joe *et al.,* 2023; Nuis *et al.,* 2023). Mentors need enough time to spare for mentorship. However, academic pressure in HLIs is limiting their availability. Senior academics spend most of their time teaching undergraduate and postgraduate studies. At the same time, they are obliged to respond to calls, do research, and perform other activities, as a result spending more of their time in these activities than in the mentorship role. Studies by Bung (2024) supported that most senior lecturers serve on different university committees, while others hold administrative positions, thus spending their time dealing with administrative activities. In African universities, there is an increase in the admission of many students; hence, staff hold big classes to teach and supervise at different levels, thus limiting their participation in mentorship. For example, Mosha (2022) pointed out the case that one staff member had seven courses to teach; thus, most of their time was spent in teaching, marking assignments, and doing other related classroom activities; hence, they got less time to mentor junior staff.

4.2.2 Limited/Lack of Mentorship Skills

Limited/lack of mentorship skills among mentees and mentors hinders the effectiveness of structured mentorship programmes (Salinas *et al.,* 2020). For example, Bung (2024) identified organisational and interrelation skills, which are essential for developing mentorship programmes. They include time management skills, mentorship boundaries, contact skills, action planning, listening skills, and many more. However, some mentors lack a sufficient level of expertise for mentorship. This limits their influence and participation in mentorship roles. This aligns with the study by White *et al.* (2017), who identified that mentors and mentees lack a common understanding of mentorship, as they often confuse mentorship with other roles, such as orientation and preceptorship.

4.2.3 Limited/Lack of Institutional Support and Frameworks

It is reported that many HLIs lack formal policies, guidelines, and strategic frameworks for mentorship (Salinas *et al.,* 2020; Nowell, 2018). This results in fragmented efforts where programmes are implemented inconsistently across departments without institutional oversight. As a result, mentorship is often considered an extra activity rather than a strategic developmental tool. However, some of the HLIs have no mentorship programme; thus, mentorship relations are identified as more informal than structured (Bung, 2024). It is also depicted that institutions, mentors, and mentees have no common goals, which hinders the dissolution of the pairing. Further, a lack of financial support and professional incentives kills the effectiveness of mentorship in HLIs. They serve as an essential aspect of motivating mentors and supporting training programmes, workshops, and conferences, thus hindering commitment and engagement among mentors (Drury *et al.,* 2022; Soklaridis *et al.,* 2015). However, management problems like overregulation of the programme, overemphasis,

and demand for reporting everything affect the effectiveness of the programme as well.

4.2.4 Matching Challenges

Incompatibility between mentor and mentee is very critical in developing and implementing an effective mentorship model in HLIs. Biases and diversity affect the matching process (Diggs-Andrews *et al.,* 2021). Studies by Joe *et al.* (2023) explained that the use of random selection and assignment of mentors hinders the compatibility of mentors and mentees in terms of interests, goals, and direction. Attributes like personality, interest, lack of self-direction, and uncertainty about career interests were also mentioned to have killed the sense of cohesiveness of mentorship programmes (Nowell, 2018). Furthermore, the mismatch in terms of time is a critical issue when matching mentors and mentees in the programme (Soklaridis *et al.,* 2015). Thus, voluntary mentorship that involves pairing mentors with desire, interests, sufficient time, and expertise is crucial in clearing this challenge.

4.2.3 Scarcity of Mentors

Scarcity of mentors in HLIs hinders the effectiveness of structured mentorship programmes. The faculty fails to assign mentees from the pool of mentors who are willing and available. Issues like unwillingness, lack of time, and workload greatly limit mentors' availability for mentorship roles in HLIs (White, Benzies & Rosenau, 2017). Furthermore, fear of transfer or competition between the mentor and mentee also minimises the effectiveness of mentorship in HLIs (Nowell, 2018). However, the lack of female mentors in some HLIs is critical; thus, organisations force female mentees to be paired with male mentors (Joe *et al.,* 2023). Despite the fact that it has no impact on mentorship, sometimes female mentees feel comfortable when placed with their fellow female mentors. They can be free to express personal and academic-related issues in relationships. Following this, institutions lack a big enough pool of mentors in the faculty to help junior academic staff excel in their activities.

Table 5
Best Practices for Effective and Sustainable Structured Mentorship Program

S/N	Key findings	Authors
1	Matching process	Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024); Nuis *et a*l. (2023); Deng *et a*l. (2022); Diggs-Andrews *et al.* (2021); Grocutt *et al.* (2020)
2	Adequate training	Bung (2024); Nuis *et al.* (2023); Diggs-Andrews *et al.* (2021); Trejo *et* al. (2021); Nowell (2018); White *et al.* (2017)
3	Dedicating time to a relationship	Nuis *et al.* (2023); Nowell, (2022); White *et al*., (2017)(Nuis, Segers and Beausaert, 2023a)
4	Organizational and Administrative Support	Bung, (2024); L. Nowell, (2018); Trejo *et al*., (2021); Treasure *et al*., (2022); Hairon *et al*., (2020); Mgaiwa & Kapinga, (2021)
5	Voluntary involvements & Mentees' freedom to select their mentors	Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024); Bung (2024); Trejo *et al.* (2021); Nowell (2018)
6	Compensation for mentors	Bung (2024); Nowell (2018)
7	Mentoring evaluation (M& E) framework	Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024); Joe *et al.* (2023); Treasure *et al.* (2022); Trejo *et al.* (2021); Nowell, (2018)
8	Clear Learning goals	Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024); Treasure *et al.* (2022); Diggs-Andrews *et al.* (2021); Grocutt *et al.* (2020); Hairon *et al.* (2020)

4.3 Best Practices for Institutionalizing Mentorship Programs in HLIs (RQ3)

4.3.1 Establish Clear Learning Goals

Mentorship serves various purposes in HLIs; thus, it should have well-defined goals aligned with institutional and individual development needs. Lack of clear and structured goals hinders the sustainability of mentorship programmes (Salinas *et al.,* 2020). Through the establishment of learning goals, organisations secure developmental opportunities and see failures as opportunities to learn and grow (Grocutt *et al.,* 2020). The mentorship programme should focus on the needs of the organisation. According to Diggs-Andrew *et al.* (2021), mentorship goals should be part of the organisational strategic plan executed by the departments or faculties. HLIs should develop an action plan that defines

activities, timeframes, and processes that guide communications, interaction, and commitment between mentor and mentee in implementing the mentorship programme. However, Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024) recommended that mentorship goals be formulated from scratch, meaning that lower management levels should be involved in setting and coordinating programme goals. This not only allows easy implementation of the programme but also increases ownership of the programme to the staff themselves. The study by Hairon *et al.* (2020) found that having clear goals helps provide structure, definition, and communication among peers. This means the program should define the leadership structures, roles, and responsibilities of both mentors and mentees to avoid any distractions and inconveniences.

4.3.2 Matching Process

An effective mentorship model depends on the alignment of mentors' and mentees' expectations, interests, and beliefs (Grocutt *et al.*, 2020). A mismatch between these elements can undermine the success of the mentorship relationship. Nuis *et al.* (2023) emphasise that an effective mentor provides support tailored to the mentee's specific needs, highlighting the importance of deliberate and thoughtful matching. Matching procedures should therefore consider factors such as mentor preference, shared background, expertise, academic interests, gender, and time availability. Similarly, Bedinghaus *et al.* (2024) underscore the relevance of goals, personality, and interests in the pairing process, while Bung (2024) and White *et al.* (2017) identify volunteerism, compatibility, interpersonal chemistry, and mentorship style as additional determinants of successful matching. Deng *et al.* (2022) propose a two-dimensional model for matching based on (1) the *matching process* – where mentors and mentees provide input to ensure mutual satisfaction and commitment – and (2) individual characteristics**.** The latter includes experiential attributes (educational background, career experience, and geographical location), surface-level attributes (gender, race, and ethnicity), and deep-level attributes (values, interests, beliefs, and personality). Consequently, organisations should conduct comprehensive analyses of both mentees' and mentors' characteristics, including assessing current skills and identifying areas for development, to ensure optimal alignment and enhance mentorship outcomes.

4.3.3 Adequate Training

Mentorship requires skills like self-awareness, listening, questioning, giving and receiving feedback, and action planning. Thus, training programmes are essential for the acquisition of those skills (Bung, 2024; Trejo *et al.,* 2021). Studies revealed that the provision of adequate training to mentors has increased the effectiveness of mentorship programmes in HLIs. Mentors should be given training before the initial commencement of the mentorship programme. This is because some mentors have no mentorship skills, thus minimising the risk of pairing a mentee with the wrong one (White, Benzies & Rosenau, 2017). Provision of this training not only increases skills but also supports behavioural changes across multiple mentoring domains needed for a successful mentorship programme, including aligning expectations with mentees and addressing equity and inclusion issues (Diggs-Andrews *et al.,* 2021). Given the case by Nuis *et al.* (2023), two days of training were provided to faculty mentors, while peer mentors were given training for 10 days. The follow-up training was still provided during the entire mentorship programme, which strengthened the entire mentorship programme. However, Bung (2024) insisted that mentorship training should not only be provided to mentors but also to all parties related to the implementation of the mentorship programme. Therefore, a steering committee and/or the faculty shall design and offer at least a three-hour mentorship training workshop for mentors before the initial mentorship programme. The workshop can be designed to impart mentors with critical skills on matters related to mentorship, adult learning, communication skills, critical thinking, etc.

4.3.4 Workload and Dedicating Time to the Relationship

Time is one of the greatest gifts that a mentor should provide to a mentee (White, Benzies & Rosenau, 2017). Therefore, a mentor's readiness

in dedicating their time to the mentorship relationship is very important in order to have a sustainable mentorship programme in HLIs. The study by Nuis *et al.* (2023) identified time availability as an essential component for sustainable and structured mentorship. Pairings between mentors and mentees should only be done with those mentors who are available on time. Since most of the mentors are congested with high academic and non-academic pressure, Nowell (2022) suggested reducing the workload for the senior academic staff so that they can have enough time for mentorship activities. Conversely, unprepared mentors cannot fulfil their mentorship role effectively.

4.3.5 Organisational and Administrative Support

Mentorship initiatives have failed in HLIs because they were left behind by the management plans (Hakro & Mathew, 2020; Nowell, 2018; White, Benzies & Rosenau, 2017). Structured mentorship programmes often require leadership support in many ways, including assigning mentors, coordination, and implementation (Treasure *et al.*, 2022). The study by Bung (2024) highlighted the need for organisations to support mentorship through the development of strategic goals, in which mentorship is fragmented between the goals of the business. This goes hand in hand with developing a mentorship structure that will clearly define the role, responsibility, and coordination of the programme. Other studies also pointed to financial support from the management to motivate efforts and initiatives championed by mentors (Hairon *et al.,* 2020). The suggestion was also supported by Trejo *et al.* (2021) and Mgaiwa and Kapinga (2021), who reported that the university management provided funding to facilitate mentoring activities, including reduction of workloads, mentoring retreats, mentoring steering committee meetings, invited speakers, mentors, and grant writing training sessions.

4.3.6 Voluntary Involvement and Mentees' Freedom to Select Their Mentors

Appropriate fit between mentor and mentees is a vital aspect for creating a successful mentorship model. This begins with the selection process. In that regard, mentors' participation in mentorship relationships should be voluntary (White, Benzies & Rosenau, 2017). Organisations should not use force to match mentors and mentees; however, they can strengthen already established relationships (Diggs-Andrews *et al.,* 2021). It should be known that informal relationships initiate formal mentorship relationships; thus, mentees should be given the freedom to select mentors from among the available ones (Bung, 2024; Trejo *et al.,* 2021). Provided that mentors and mentees should be given freedom to shape their relationships, this will be obtained once the screening process is done to assess the readiness of each participant in the mentorship. The compatibility between mentor and mentee primarily started from socialisation between them. Therefore, cultural heritage, philosophies, and other individual characteristics drive the need for mentorship relations with those they anticipate having positive working relationships with.

4.3.7 Compensation for Mentors

The academic system of promotion and tenure often rewards faculty members in various ways. Similar to research, publications, and consultancies, the academic system must also reward mentors based on their roles, responsibilities, and the initiatives they lead in mentorship (Nowell, 2018). Financial and non-financial rewards are key aspects of compensation. For example, in non-financial rewards, reducing the workload for mentors plays multiple roles (Bung, 2024). In spite of this analysis, sometimes mentors' and mentees' self-motivation has a greater impact on the sustainability of the mentorship programme, even if there is no financial compensation. Therefore, every part of the mentorship programme must be self-committed regardless of the economic gains expected from the management of the university.

4.3.8 Design a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

For mentorship to be successful, HLIs should plan beforehand how monitoring and evaluation will be conducted. There need to be clear mentorship goals that emanate from the overall organisational, faculty, or departmental strategic

plan. Once they are established, they facilitate evaluation of the outcomes (Nowell, 2022; White *et al.*, 2017). Evaluation is very important, as it enables the improvement of the overall mentorship process. There must be a follow-up mechanism that will help to track the response of the mentor/mentee during the mentorship period (Bedinghaus, Hillman & Hillman, 2024). Literature proposes different tools/frameworks that can be used to monitor and evaluate a mentorship programme. For example, Treasure *et al.* (2022) propose the theory of change and the logical framework approach as among the popular frameworks for planning, monitoring, and evaluation, while Trejo *et al.* (2021) used the Kirkpatrick model to evaluate the impact of mentorship training by using those four steps, namely reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. Similarly, Joe *et al.* (2023) propose the use of a satisfaction survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the mentorship programme among mentors and mentees. It should be the culture of the organisation to have ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the mentorship programme so as to have an equitable and inclusive mentorship model in the faculty/department.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper sought to identify mentorship models applicable in HLIs other than the structured mentorship model, challenges facing the structured mentorship model, and the best practices for an effective and sustainable mentorship model. It offers additional insights into the body of knowledge on the current status and the best practices that HLIs may adopt to develop strong, effective, and sustainable mentorship models. The findings in Table 3 provide useful insight into the selection of the best modes in line with the structured mentorship programme. They support and strengthen the power of mentorship that facilitates learners having multiple sources of knowledge, experience, and skills relevant to his or her career goals. But the organisation should consider the best way of coordinating and implementing them in line with the strategic plan and goals of the faculty/department. However, findings in Table 4 show critical issues that affect the effectiveness of mentorship in HLIs. It is the call to all actors, mainly management, mentors, and mentees, to look forward to embarking on these challenges. This includes being responsible and accountable for each step of the mentorship programme. Finally, Table 5 proposes the best practices for an effective and sustainable mentorship model. It is the call for the HLIs to have a strong mentorship culture that will help young and early academic staff navigate major academic responsibilities through mentors. Although literature identifies effective mentorship program strategies, few sources detail how much each factor influences the mentorship program. Therefore, this calls for the need for further research to explore the extent to which each factor affects mentorship in higher learning institutions, specifically in developing countries.

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7.0 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

8.0 Ethical Statement

This material is the author's own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.

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