

**PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN GHANA ON THE ROLE OF MENTORING IN KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

**By**

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**Abstract**

*Mentoring, besides being said to have a positive effect on one's career has been proven to have enormous benefits not only to individuals but to organizations as well. It has made enormous contributions to retention and recruitment of talent, to succession planning, knowledge management and transfer, stress reduction, and eventually to increased production. This study attempts to investigate the perceptions of academic librarians in Ghana's universities about mentoring; and also to investigate the perceptions of academic librarians on knowledge transfer through mentoring for skill development. The survey design made use of a questionnaire to collect data from librarians in state-owned academic libraries in Ghana. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analyses of the results. Findings from the study indicate that mentoring was perceived by respondents as capable of fostering and aiding the acquisition of diverse professional skills and thus capable of ultimately having a positive impact on the career development of academic librarians in Ghana.*

**Introduction**

The word 'mentor' was made popular in Ghana by a weekly entertainment TV series titled *Mentor*. As a result, mentor in Ghana is highly associated with the entertainment and sporting industries. Mentorship, as we may all be aware has existed for ages. It traces its origins to ancient Greek mythology, in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* and it has been practiced in Europe for many years especially in business and education. It was during the 1970s that it found its way into the business world of the USA. Since then, it has caught on so fast that it has been described as 'an innovation in American Management' (Shaw, 2012). However, mentoring is said to have gained momentum for information professionals only within the mid-nineties.

Although there seems to be a general consensus on what mentoring is, yet there is no concise definition as a result of which it has been variously defined. Mentoring can, however, be said to

have taken place if an older, more experienced and/or more knowledgeable person exerts his way of life (of doing things) on a younger, less experienced and less knowledgeable person in a way that leads to a transformation in the younger person's life (Dittoh, 2011). Mentoring traditionally may involve activities conducted by a person (the mentor) for another person (the mentee) in order to help that other person acquire the needed expertise and to do a job more effectively and/or progress in his or her career. Ptolemey (2008) posits that mentoring basically involves a passing on of skills from a mentor to a mentee and goes on to see it as a guidance process which also has an element of building a relationship.

Mentoring is also said to be a powerful personal development and empowerment tool. It is thought of as one of the most effective ways of helping people to progress in their careers. It is indeed becoming increasingly popular as its potential is being more realised. It is usually said to be a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences and it is based on mutual trust and respect (Parsloe, 2008). Although Freedman (2009) indicates that there are some clearly recognized benefits to mentoring, it is still a rather mysterious concept for most people. This, Moore (2008) suggests is because the idea of mentoring is still an evolving concept. Mentoring may be formal or informal but to make the process work, there has to be a deliberate effort to mould and shape the individual. In the view of Dittoh (2011), mentoring is consciously done to achieve certain positive changes with regard to knowledge, attitudes, skills and ways of doing things.

There are basically two types of mentoring and these are the mentoring of a new employee or the mentoring of a staff considered to have a high potential for achieving in a particular profession. The latter is by far what pertains in many institutions and that is often what many people and organizations consider to be mentoring (Shaw, 2012). Mentoring is becoming increasingly popular because as Bello (2011) indicates, the mentoring process has such enormous and inexhaustible advantages or benefits that it can be explored in a variety of ways by many organizations. For libraries as institutions, mentoring is equally significant because it facilitates knowledge transfer and skill acquisition, especially the skills that cannot be learned from textbooks or in a formal structured class lecture.

Various studies indicate that mentoring's positive effect on one's career cannot be overemphasised. One study by Roche (1979) found that of the 63.5 percent of the 1,250 respondents who had a mentor (defined as "a person who took a personal interest in your career and who guided or sponsored you") were on the average better paid, reached their positions faster, and were more satisfied with their work and careers than their non-mentor counterparts. Munde (2002) buttresses this point further when he states from the results of his study 'Beyond mentoring:...' that for at least 15 years, career success in private enterprise in the USA has depended on the person having had a mentor.

Mentoring has been acknowledged to have numerous and enormous benefits for all involved – the mentor, the mentee or protégé as well as for the organization. Bello (2011) quoting (Ragins & Cotton, 1999) indicates that for mentees, the benefits may include increased professional opportunities and networks, access to power bases, growth of professional knowledge and skill development, career advancement and more effective, happier performers. Benefits for mentors may also include personal and professional satisfaction, enhancement of professional reputation, extension of networks and influence and rejuvenated careers by assisting in the personal and professional development of mentees (Ehrich, L.S., Hansford, B. & Tennent, L. , 2004). Research has also shown benefits of mentoring for organisations such as improved productivity and job satisfaction, development of organizational culture and commitment, and enhanced communication and relationships across different levels of the organization (Long, 1997).

It is in recognition of the numerous benefits of mentoring in facilitating professional development and growth of staff that the University for Development Studies' Centre for Continuing Education and Interdisciplinary Research developed a mentoring policy for the University. In the preamble to that policy, it is stated that there is the need for 'a clear-cut policy on mentoring so as to ensure the professional development of staff' (UDS, CCEIR, 2012).

With all these touted benefits of mentoring, the question one needs to ask is why have librarians and information professionals in Ghana not embraced it in these times of turbulent challenges in the profession as a result of dwindling finances and technological advances which are impacting heavily on the information landscape. In her "Fostering Librarian Leadership through Mentoring" Golian-Lui (2003) concludes that mentoring provides opportunities for significant

personal, professional and leadership development. It is therefore prudent that in these times of rapid change for the library and information science world due to the impact of technological innovation, mentoring will be adopted and it will definitely play a sizable role as a guiding light. Freedman (2009) affirms this by stating that effective mentoring is essential to the growth and success of librarianship in all types of libraries.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study attempts to investigate the perceptions of academic librarians about mentoring, as well as their perceptions about mentoring for skill development through knowledge transfer in academic libraries of Ghanaian universities.

A summary of the objectives of the study are to investigate the:

- current state of mentoring in academic libraries of Ghanaian universities;
- perceptions of academic librarians in Ghana's universities about mentoring; and
- perceptions of academic librarians on knowledge transfer through mentoring for skill development.

### **Significance of the Study**

Studies in mentoring have mainly been conducted in the western nations. In Ghana, no notable study on mentoring of librarians has as yet been sighted. As a result, some of the findings and recommendations of the studies from western nations may not be applicable to a developing country such as Ghana. This study therefore attempts to fill a gap in the published literature on mentoring in Ghanaian university libraries. Of particular significance is its practical relevance to practising university librarians. It is also hoped that the findings will be of benefit to library management in considering mentoring programmes as a tool for staff development as well as extending the frontiers of knowledge on the use of mentoring for knowledge transfer for eventual career development.

### **Methodology**

The survey design making use of a questionnaire was adopted for this study. The questionnaire which was based on a similar one used by Bello (2011) in his doctoral thesis on the use of

mentoring for knowledge transfer, skills development and career development of cataloguers in Nigerian University Libraries was divided into four sections. This was modified to suit this present study. The first section of the questionnaire dealt with the demography, the second concentrated on mentoring programmes in the library, the third section dwelt on how mentoring could aid knowledge transfer, and the final section dealt with the role of mentoring in the acquisition of managerial and research/publication skills.

Initially, professional librarians in all the six state owned university libraries were identified for this study. Since the number was small, the researchers decided to use the total population for the study. However as a result of noncooperation from professional librarians from the Balme Library of the University of Ghana, Legon, the researchers decided to exclude them and use the remaining five for the study. The five university libraries thus used were the University of Cape Coast (UCC) Library, where nine professional librarians were identified; the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) Library where 10 professionals were identified; the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) Library which had three professionals; the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Library which had 17 professionals at the time of the study and finally the University for Development Studies (UDS) Library which had nine professionals but only seven of who were sampled because the other two were to undertake this study. The total number of subjects in the population for this study amounted to 46.

In March 2012, 46 copies of the questionnaire were given to key persons who had been identified on each of the state-owned universities' libraries under study. In April and early May, 2012, 34 copies of the questionnaires were returned and they were found to be usable for analysis. A response rate of 73.9% was thus achieved and this in the view of Babbie (2010) is very good for analysis and reporting.

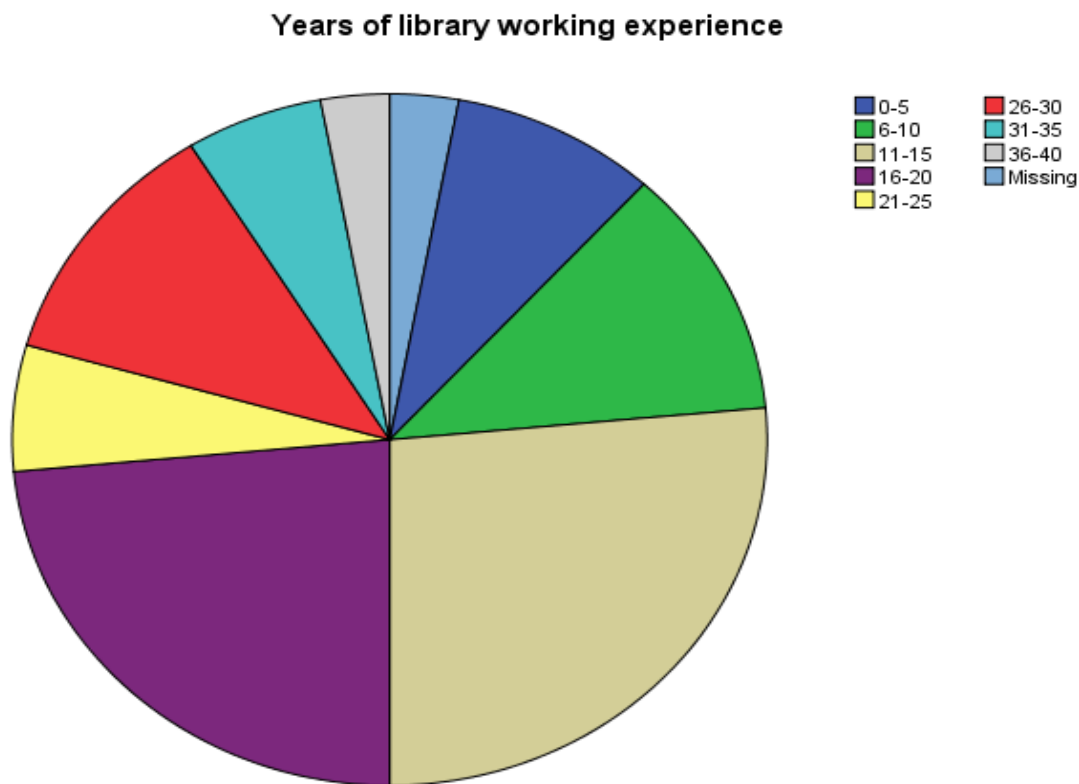
### **Results and Discussion**

Data for this study was collected mainly from completed copies of the questionnaire distributed to professional librarians at five of the six state owned university libraries in Ghana.

From the study, it was realized that though 20 (58.8%) of the respondents obtained their library professional degree only in the 2000s, yet 27 (79.4%) had worked in the library for between 6 -

30 years. What was even more remarkable was that 50% of all respondents had worked for between 11 – 20 years in the library. Obviously, many of the respondents were very experienced and this showed in their ages as 22 (66.7%) were between 36-55 years old with an additional seven (20.58%) between 56-60 years. It was thus evident that over 70% of respondents were in the middle or twilight of their careers, thus it was expected they would have been mentored or they were mentoring younger people in the profession.

Figure 1 below depicts the library working experience of respondents.



*Source: Field Study, 2012*

The notion that librarianship is a female dominated profession does not appear to be so in Ghana since data collected from the completed questionnaires showed that, 22 respondents constituting 64.7% of subjects under study were male whilst only 12 (35.3) were female. This, according to Bello (2011) confirms the literature that in advanced countries, females dominate the library

profession but this trend is reversed in developing countries where males dominate the profession. It also needs to be mentioned that this male dominance could be attributable to the fact that one needs a post-graduate academic qualification to qualify as a professional librarian and since the incidence of female drop-out rate in education is much higher than that of males in Ghana, very few females manage to pursue graduate programmes.

### **Mentoring Programmes in the Library**

The researchers sought to find out if new staff were taken through any form of mentorship and how often this was done. This was because according to Hicks (2011) mentorship is often considered as one of the best ways to develop leadership potential in new library and information professionals. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate whether or not their university library engages its staff in any mentoring activity. Twenty four (70.6%) of them indicated that their libraries engaged staff in mentoring activities, seven constituting 20.6% said no with three respondents stating they were not aware of any such activities in their library. It is indeed intriguing to realize that in all the institutions under study, there were respondents who indicated yes and no across all the libraries. This was buttressed by a few respondents who were not aware. The question that readily comes to mind is, is it that there are mentoring activities in the respective libraries which some of the staff do not know about? Whatever it is, it gives an indication that if there are any mentoring activities, they could be informal or they could be highly selective.

It is deemed essential to mentor new employees into the library environment and this is reemphasized by Kram (1986) with his discovery that mentoring facilitates the socialization of new employees into the organization, as well as enhances the transfer of knowledge and values. It was gathered from the data that new staff were often engaged in mentoring. Seventeen (17) respondents constituting 50% indicated that new staff were engaged daily in mentoring. Another seven (20.6%) stated that new staff were engaged monthly in mentoring, while five (14.7) respondents indicated this was a yearly affair, a further 5 (14.7%) stated that new staff were never mentored. Is this then an indication that not enough effort is being put into garnering the leadership potential of new employees?

Respondents, however, indicated that other types of professional development programmes were available to staff. All respondents indicated more than one type, the most used by itself as well as in combination with others such as staff rotation was staff orientation. Twenty eight (82.4%) respondents indicated staff orientation as the main type of professional development programme which was used in combination with others. Job rotation was also significant as 19 (55.9%) of respondents also stated it was one of the professional development programmes which was used in combination with others. Other professional development programmes which were mentioned and stated as being used in combination with others were ‘attached to others’ which was stated by 12 (35.2%) respondents, ‘manual for self study’ by nine (26.47%) respondents and finally ‘short time coaching’ which was stated by seven (20.58%) respondents. It was therefore realized that deliberate effort is being put into staff development at all the institutions under study. This is commendable and should be sustained since staff development ultimately enhances optimal performance.

Respondents were then requested to assess the effectiveness of the staff mentoring programmes at their respective institutions since the benefits of mentorship can be made more manifest when the mentoring programme is effective. Very few respondents thought that mentoring programmes at their institutions were not effective. For 18 (52.9%) of the respondents, the mentoring programme in their institutions were either ‘very effective’ or ‘effective’, nine (26.5%) also thought that it was moderate, four (11.8%) did not know whether the programmes were effective or not. However, three (8.8%) respondents were categorical that the mentoring programmes were not effective at all. Interestingly, while two of the libraries had no respondents indicating that it was not effective, another two had respondents stating that it was not effective with no respondent describing their mentoring programme as being ‘very effective’. The fifth library however had respondents stating both extremes.

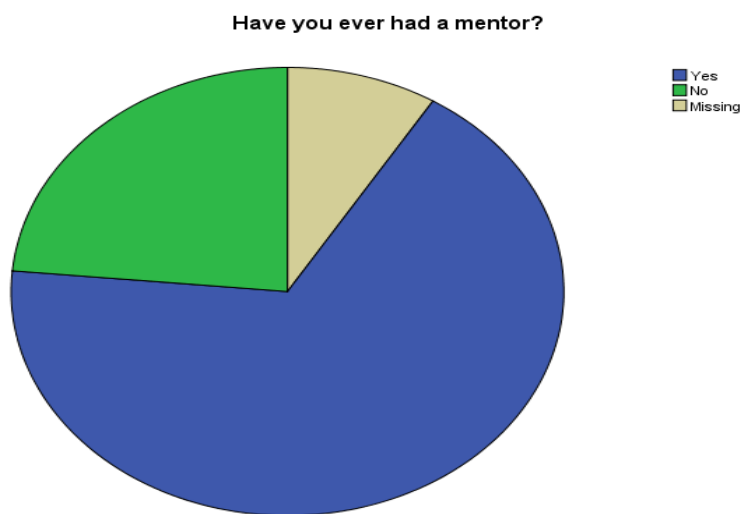
In a bid to find out the adequacy and importance of the mentoring activities in the libraries, respondents were asked to indicate this. All respondents with the exception of three (8.8%) thought that the mentoring activities in their libraries were important or very important. The three who did not think so were of the opinion that it was just moderately important. With regards to its adequacy, 16 (47%) respondents indicated that it was adequate, 11(32.4%) thought it was moderate with four (11.8%) indicating it was inadequate. Three (8.8%) however were



unsure as to its adequacy or inadequacy. It was realized from the study that the time frame for the mentoring activities were as varied as the definitions of mentoring. Some respondents who had stated their libraries undertook mentoring activities were unsure as to the number of years the activities took. Interestingly, many of the respondents were also unaware as to when the mentoring activities started in their libraries. All these answers attest to the fact that none of the libraries under study had a formal mentoring programme in place.

With regards to mentoring being in agreement with the library’s structures and values, 26 (76.47%) of the respondents agreed with four (11.76%) disagreeing. A further four (11.76%) refused to state whether they agreed or disagreed.

From the data, it was realized that majority of respondents had ever mentored a staff with some having mentored over 10 staff. Twenty four (70.6%) respondents indicated they had ever mentored a staff with seven (20.6%) stating they had never mentored any one. Three (8.8%) respondents did not answer this question. It is worth noting that it was only at one library that besides one respondent who did not answer the question, all other respondents from that library had never mentored any one. Respondents who indicated they had mentored more than 10 people were nine (26.5%). Majority of respondents had mentored between 1-10. Significantly, another nine (26.5%) respondents had never mentored anybody. Figure 2 below depicts this.



*Source: Field Study, 2012*

It is again worth noting that besides one respondent, all the other respondents who had ever mentored someone indicated they had had some mentoring training as well as having had mentors themselves. This then could explain how some of them had mentored up to ten people in spite of the fact that there were no formal mentoring programmes at their institutions.

**Perceptions of Mentoring**

On a five-point Likert scale with 1 standing for ‘Strongly disagree’ (SA), 2 being ‘Disagree’, 3 being ‘Inclined to Agree’, 4 being ‘Agree’ and 5 being ‘Strongly Agree’, the researchers posed 14 questions to find out the perceptions of academic librarians in Ghana on the role of mentoring in knowledge transfer for staff development.

From the responses, it was evident that most respondents had the perception that mentoring was positive and necessary for staff in the academic library, especially its ability to train new and inexperienced staff as well as its ability to enhance staff development in the library profession.

Nineteen (55.9%) respondents strongly agreed that mentoring enhances a staff’s abilities for development in the library profession with an additional 12 (35.3%) agreeing to this. Table 1 below depicts the findings vividly.

**Table 1: Perceptions on role of Mentoring in Knowledge Transfer**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	SD	1	2.9
	IA	1	2.9
	A	12	35.3
	SA	19	55.9
	Total	33	97.1
Missing	System	1	2.9
Total		34	100

*Source: Field Study, 2012*

From the study, it can be gathered that 31 (91.2%) respondents agreed to this statement. With this recognition, it is a bit intriguing why academic libraries in Ghana have not wholeheartedly accepted mentoring so staff development can be greatly enhanced.

In conformity with the literature, 30 respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with mentoring's ability to teach or train new and inexperienced staff in the acquisition of skills for library work. It was only two (5.8%) respondents who disagreed with this assertion.

Again, 29 (85.29%) respondents indicated that mentoring grooms new staff faster for the profession while two (5.8%) respondents disagreed. Even more (32 constituting 94.2%) of those who agreed to this were also of the view that mentoring by way of guidance could help develop talented staff who could confidently solve problems. However, those who believed mentoring could inspire staff on the job constituted the majority but they were not so many, as only 24 (70.58%) agreed with as many as seven (20.6%) disagreeing.

Respondents were also of the view that the application of mentoring activities could even facilitate the future success of the Library. Twenty nine (85.3%) respondents agreed to this with only one (2.94%) disagreeing. Comparatively, many more respondents disagreed with the notion that mentoring could help in retaining staff of the library. Twenty five (73.5%) agreed that mentoring could assist in retaining staff but 7 (20.58%) disagreed.

Whereas 23 (67.64%) respondents agreed that mentoring instills discipline in staff, nine (26.5%) disagreed.

Mentorship has been touted as having immense benefits as a result of which it is applied very much in management, sports and in education. In view of this, the researchers sought to find out respondents' perception of mentoring's ability in improving managerial skills. Whereas three (8.8%) disagreed to this assertion, 26 (82.4%) agreed. Table 2 below depicts the responses.

**Table 2: Mentoring role in improving Managerial Skills**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	DA	4	11.8
	IA	3	8.8
	A	21	61.8
	SA	6	17.6
	Total	34	100

*Source: Field Study, 2012*

Academic librarians in other parts of the world are expected to publish extensively in both local and international journals to merit promotion (Odusanya & Amusa, 2006). Mentoring, as Yusif (2011) states is perceived by librarians in Nigeria as having a positive impact on their research output. Bello (2011) confirms this when he states that mentoring is capable of enhancing research and publication requirements. Taking cognisance of this, the researchers attempted to find out the perceptions of academic librarians on the role of mentoring in enhancing publication output. Whereas 27 (79.4%) respondents agreed that mentoring, by way of consultation, could help develop research and publication skills, only two (5.9%) disagreed. Again, five (14.7%) respondents disagreed with the statement that mentoring training deals with publication constraints and requirements for promotion with 21 (61.74%) agreeing to this.

Apart from two (5.9%) respondents who disagreed with the assertion that mentoring provides an opportunity to learn and acquire leadership skills, all other respondents agreed.

### **Mentoring and Knowledge Transfer**

Knowledge transfer, Bello (2011) states is the means by which an experienced librarian directly transmits his/her experience, skills, expertise to a less experienced librarian through the systematic process of mentoring in a bid to develop and attain proficiency and expertise in librarianship. This is affirmed by Fleig Palmer (2009) when he quotes Grover and Davenport, (2001) who define knowledge transfer as an exchange of organizational knowledge between a

source and a recipient (Grover and Davenport, 2001) in which the exchange consists of information and advice about resources and relationships (Szulanski, 1996). The researchers thus sought to find out respondents perceptions about knowledge transfer and how it leads to the acquisition of competence or skill development and eventually career enhancement. Again, a five-point Likert scale consisting of ten statements was used to assess the perceptions of respondents.

Respondents were affirmative that knowledge transfer by way of mentoring develops verbal, written and interpersonal communication skills. Apart from one (2.9%) respondent who disagreed that verbal and written communication skills could be developed through knowledge transfer, all other respondents (33 constituting 94.1%) either agreed or were inclined to agree. There was one non respondent. Interestingly, no respondent disagreed with the statement that interpersonal communication skills could be developed by means of knowledge transfer.

All respondents, except two (5.9%) who did not respond, were unanimous in agreeing that leadership skills could be promoted by means of knowledge transfer through mentoring. Table three below depicts this.

**Table 3: Knowledge transfer through mentoring promotes leadership skills**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	IA	2	5.9
	A	23	67.6
	SA	7	20.6
	Total	32	94.1
Missing	System	2	5.9
Total		34	100

*Source: Field Study, 2012*

The need for managerial and supervisory skills is a pre-requisite in academic librarianship since every professional librarian in a Ghanaian academic library has subordinate staff. The researchers therefore sought to find out from respondents whether knowledge transfer through mentoring could develop managerial and or supervisory skills. Whilst all respondents (100%) indicated that supervisory skills could be developed through knowledge transfer, two (5.8%) disagreed that managerial skills could equally be developed through knowledge transfer by means of mentoring. It can be gleaned from the responses that respondents generally felt knowledge transfer by way of mentoring could enhance the leadership skills of librarians by inculcating in them strong supervisory and managerial skills.

Respondents were then requested to indicate whether certain specified library skills could be developed by knowledge transfer. All respondents (100%) agreed that planning skills, organizing skills and strategic skills, all for library activities, network and networking strategic skills as well as guidance on skills needed to lead the way in researching new library techniques and challenges could be developed by means of knowledge transfer through mentoring. However it was only 30 (88.2%) who agreed that both effective working skills and cordial team working skills could be so developed, 28 (82.4%) agreed that knowledge transfer through mentoring could promote stress management skills as well as staff's ability to interpret library policies/procedures with 26 (76.5%) agreeing that time management could be promoted in a similar manner. The need to develop professional skills of academic librarians is not in doubt. Curry and Smithee (2007) believe that libraries have been unable to provide adequate opportunity for the next generation of leaders although there is competition for the few skilled library staff. Why are libraries then not using mentoring as a means of equipping staff with needed library skills? With such positive attitudes towards knowledge transfer by means of mentoring, it is surprising that these academic libraries have as yet not formalized their mentoring programmes.

### **Managerial Skills**

Academic librarians need managerial skills as they progress up the career ladder, unfortunately, as Saye (2002) indicates they are deficient in managerial, leadership and technological skills. Since mentoring has been touted as improving leadership and managerial skills, the researchers

sought to find out respondents' perceptions about the enhancement of managerial skills of academic librarians through mentoring. Again, a five-point Likert scale consisting of four questions was used.

All respondents (100%) unanimously agreed that mentoring in knowledge transfer provides staff the opportunity to attempt new professional and tactical approaches to challenges without anxiety; guidance on staff work flow; exposure to a variety of library duties and responsibilities as well as exposing staff to direct library administrative and managerial skills and it also motivates staff to improve in task performance. Thirty one (91.2%) respondents however agreed that mentoring through knowledge transfer provides an opportunity for staff to develop leadership skill; 30 (88.2%) agreed that it teaches staff resources planning skills and also it positively affects staff's rate of promotion. Mentoring's ability to provide staff the prospect of taking part in Library and University Committee meetings were the most disagreed to by respondents. Respondents generally perceived mentoring as being capable of enhancing their managerial skills.

### **Research and Publication Skills**

Research and publications are deemed an essential component to the development of all academics worldwide. Academic librarians are therefore not exempted from publishing since scholarship is one of the criteria used for promoting them and for them to be at par with the academics in the faculties, they must have articles published in reputable journals (Yusif, 2011). Verzosa (2007) affirms this when she states that it is very important for librarians to engage in research, as this will add value to librarianship. The study therefore sought to find out from respondents their perceptions of mentoring on publishing output among Ghanaian academic librarians.

All the respondents agreed that knowledge transfer through mentoring enhances seminar presentation activities of staff; 30 (88.2%) respondents agreed that it provides staff guidance on professional conference attendance, familiarises staff with professional literature and also provides staff guidance on research writing and publication skills; 29 (85.3%) respondents were also of the opinion that knowledge transfer through mentoring familiarises staff with literature

search skills, rate of research activities as well as enhancing research skills; another 28 (82.4%) respondents also agreed that it enhances publishing skills and publication output, research presentation skills and it inspires librarians for continuing education/training requirements. The statement that knowledge transfer through mentoring has an effect on rate of staff publications had the least number of respondents (23 constituting 67.6%) agreeing to it.

Respondents on the whole perceived mentoring as having a positive impact on research and publication output. This conforms to a study conducted by Yusif (2011) on academic librarians in Nigeria that indicated that mentoring was perceived by the librarians to have a positive impact on their research and publication output, and ultimately their career development as academics.

### **Conclusion**

This study which concentrated basically on academic librarians in Ghana sought to find out the perceptions of academic librarians about mentoring, as well as their perceptions about mentoring for skills development through knowledge transfer in academic libraries of Ghanaian universities. Findings from the study indicate that there are a lot of mentoring activities in all the libraries under the study. However, all of them were informal.

Mentoring was perceived by respondents as capable of fostering and aiding in the acquisition of diverse professional skills, and thus capable of ultimately having a positive impact on the career development of academic librarians in Ghana. Mentoring, it was also perceived facilitates the transfer of knowledge which eventually benefits all parties.

### **Recommendations**

There is the need to adopt and formalize mentoring activities in all academic libraries in Ghana. In this regard, mentoring policies should be formulated to guide these activities. Also, the Ghana Library Association should undertake mentoring training programmes for all librarians, especially at the regional level.



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