

**AFRICAN MENTORSHIP SYSTEM, STUDENT EMPOWERMENT
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN
SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship is increasingly recognised as an important mechanism for promoting student development, strengthening institutional capacity and advancing sustainable development in higher education. This study investigated the relationships between African mentorship practices, student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development in public universities in South-East Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The population comprised 52,684 undergraduate students, from which a sample of 420 respondents was selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using the researcher-developed African Mentorship Practices, Student Empowerment and Sustainable Development Questionnaire (AMPS-ESDQ). The instrument was validated by three experts and yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.91. Of the 420 copies of the questionnaire administered, 398 valid copies were analysed, representing a response rate of 94.8%. Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient and multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between African mentorship practices and student empowerment ($r = 0.68, p < 0.001$), institutional capacity development ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$) and quality education ($r = 0.72, p < 0.001$). The dimensions of African mentorship practices jointly explained 60.8% of the variation in sustainable development ($R = 0.780, R^2 = 0.608$), with the regression model being statistically significant ($F(6, 391) = 101.08, p < 0.001$). Knowledge transfer emerged as the strongest independent predictor of sustainable development ($\beta = 0.226, p < 0.001$), followed by ethical development ($\beta = 0.204, p < 0.001$). The study concluded that African mentorship practices constitute an important mechanism for promoting student empowerment, strengthening institutional capacity, improving educational quality and advancing sustainable development. It recommended the institutionalisation of culturally responsive and structured mentorship programmes in African universities.

Keywords: African mentorship practices, student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education, sustainable development

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I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions play a central role in the social, economic, intellectual and technological development of societies. Universities are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to develop competent graduates, promote research and innovation, strengthen institutional capacity and contribute to sustainable development. The effectiveness of higher education therefore depends substantially on the ability of universities to provide students with the knowledge, skills, values, guidance and institutional support required for meaningful participation in academic, professional and societal life (Berchin et al., 2021; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021).

The growing emphasis on sustainable development has expanded the responsibilities of universities beyond their conventional functions of teaching and research. Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to align their teaching, research, governance and community engagement activities with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Chankseliani and McCowan (2021) maintained that higher education contributes to sustainable development through knowledge production, human capital development and social transformation. Similarly, Owens (2017) emphasised the strategic position of higher education within the SDG framework, particularly in preparing individuals with the knowledge and competencies required to respond to complex societal challenges. Despite this important role, many higher education institutions continue to experience difficulties in translating institutional commitments to sustainable development into measurable student, institutional and societal outcomes. Aleixo, Leal, and Azeiteiro (2018) identified inadequate institutional structures, limited resources, weak stakeholder participation and difficulties integrating sustainability principles into university practices as

major challenges confronting sustainable higher education. Similarly, Leal Filho et al. (2017) reported that inadequate institutional support, resistance to organisational change and fragmented implementation approaches often hinder the effective integration of sustainable development within universities.

The effective integration of sustainability into higher education therefore requires institutional mechanisms that promote knowledge development, student participation, ethical responsibility and meaningful interaction among members of the university community. Leal Filho et al. (2019) observed that universities differ substantially in the extent to which sustainability principles are incorporated into teaching and institutional activities. This situation underscores the importance of developing systematic and institution-wide strategies capable of translating sustainability commitments into meaningful educational experiences and developmental outcomes (Kohl et al., 2021).

One of the mechanisms through which universities may strengthen student development and their contribution to sustainable development is mentorship. Within higher education, mentorship may involve academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development. Through these processes, students may acquire the confidence, knowledge, competencies and values required to navigate university education and participate meaningfully in professional and societal development. The importance of providing students with ability, motivation and opportunities for meaningful participation in higher education has been demonstrated by Akhtar et al. (2021).

Mentorship may be particularly relevant within the African higher education context because African societies have historically relied on intergenerational relationships for knowledge transfer, skills development, moral formation and social integration. Integrating these principles into contemporary university systems may provide a culturally responsive framework for supporting students' academic, professional and ethical development. Such an approach is consistent with the broader argument that higher education institutions must develop contextually relevant strategies for promoting inclusive participation and sustainable development (Heleta & Bagus, 2021; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021).

African mentorship practices may extend beyond conventional academic advising by responding to the academic, professional, emotional, social and ethical needs of students. Effective mentorship relationships can provide students with opportunities to acquire knowledge, receive constructive feedback, establish professional networks and develop confidence in their academic and professional abilities. These outcomes are consistent with the broader responsibility of universities to develop human capabilities and prepare individuals for meaningful participation in societal transformation (Berchin et al., 2021; Owens, 2017).

Student empowerment represents one of the important developmental outcomes that may be influenced by mentorship. Student empowerment encompasses the development of confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy, decision-making ability, leadership competence and active participation in learning. Empowered students are more likely to take responsibility for their education, identify opportunities, demonstrate resilience and participate meaningfully in institutional and societal activities. The importance of students' abilities, motivation and opportunities for encouraging positive behaviours within higher education has been demonstrated by Akhtar et al. (2021).

From the ability–motivation–opportunity perspective, mentorship can contribute to student empowerment in several ways. Academic and professional guidance may strengthen students' abilities through knowledge and competency development, while encouragement and psychosocial support may enhance their motivation. Mentors may also create opportunities for students through research participation, professional networking, leadership activities and career exposure. These processes can strengthen students' capacity to become active participants rather than passive recipients of university education (Akhtar et al., 2021; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021).

Student empowerment is also closely connected with institutional sustainability. Emanuel and Adams (2011) demonstrated that students' perceptions and participation constitute important components of campus sustainability. Similarly, Dabija et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of stakeholder involvement in strengthening the sustainability orientation of higher education institutions. Since students constitute one of the major stakeholder groups within universities, their empowerment may influence the extent to which they participate in institutional transformation and sustainable development initiatives.

Mentorship may equally contribute to institutional capacity development. Institutional capacity refers to the ability of universities to sustain effective teaching, research, governance, leadership and community engagement through adequate human resources, knowledge systems and organisational structures. Higher education institutions promote sustainable development through teaching, research, institutional management and community engagement, but the effectiveness of these functions depends substantially on institutional competence and the continuous development of human resources (Berchin et al., 2021).

Through mentorship, experienced academics can transfer research skills, professional knowledge, pedagogical competence, institutional experience and ethical values to students and emerging scholars. This process may

contribute to academic succession, research productivity, leadership development and institutional continuity. The importance of knowledge accessibility and resource sharing in strengthening research productivity and promoting social justice within higher education has been highlighted by Ochieng and Gyasi (2021).

The contribution of mentorship to institutional capacity is also consistent with the whole-institution approach to sustainable development. Kohl et al. (2021) argued that sustainability should be integrated into teaching, research, governance, institutional operations and community engagement. From this perspective, mentorship should not be considered solely as an informal relationship between experienced and less experienced individuals but as a potential institutional mechanism for human capacity development, knowledge continuity and organisational sustainability.

Institutional governance is equally important in determining the effectiveness of universities' sustainable development initiatives. Leal Filho et al. (2021) found that governance structures, institutional commitment and stakeholder participation play important roles in advancing sustainable development within higher education. Structured mentorship systems may complement these governance mechanisms by developing future academic leaders, strengthening professional competencies and facilitating the transfer of institutional knowledge across generations.

The relationship between mentorship and quality education is also important. Quality education extends beyond curriculum delivery and examination performance to include critical thinking, creativity, research competence, ethical judgement, problem-solving skills and professional preparedness. Ferguson and Rooft (2020) argued that achieving SDG 4 requires higher education institutions to respond comprehensively to the developmental and learning needs of students.

Similarly, MuhammedZein and Abdullateef (2025) emphasised that quality education for sustainable development requires an appropriate balance among knowledge, skills and values. Mentorship can contribute to achieving this balance because academic guidance may strengthen students' knowledge and research competencies, career guidance may enhance professional preparedness, psychosocial support may promote resilience, while role modelling and ethical development may strengthen students' personal and professional values.

Students' perceptions of institutional support may also influence their educational experiences. Chaudhary and Dey (2021) found that student-perceived service quality was associated with university sustainability practices and student satisfaction. This finding suggests that educational quality is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by the academic, professional and institutional support available to students. Effective mentorship may therefore contribute to quality education by providing personalised guidance and support that complement conventional teaching activities.

The integration of mentorship into higher education may further support education for sustainable development. Cebrián (2018) advocated comprehensive institutional models for embedding sustainability education within higher education institutions. Similarly, Leal Filho et al. (2019) emphasised the need for systematic approaches to integrating sustainability principles into university teaching. Structured mentorship programmes may support this process by providing opportunities for students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical, professional and societal challenges.

The importance of flexible and innovative educational strategies has also been highlighted in sustainability research. Holmes et al. (2022) demonstrated the need for universities to develop emerging teaching and learning strategies capable of advancing the SDGs. Although their study focused on online learning, the underlying principle suggests that quality education requires multiple forms of student support. Mentorship can complement classroom and online learning by providing personalised academic, professional and developmental assistance.

Higher education institutions are also expected to ensure that opportunities for participation and development are inclusive. Heleta and Bagus (2021) cautioned that approaches to implementing the SDGs within higher education may leave disadvantaged individuals and groups behind when inequalities in access and opportunities are not adequately addressed. Structured mentorship may contribute to educational inclusion by providing students from different socio-economic backgrounds with access to academic guidance, professional networks and developmental opportunities.

The relevance of mentorship becomes particularly evident when sustainable development is considered from a whole-institution perspective. Kohl et al. (2021) argued that meaningful university engagement with the SDGs requires the collective participation of institutional actors and the integration of sustainability principles across university activities. Mentorship can support this process by connecting students with academics, researchers, professional networks and community engagement opportunities.

The governance of sustainability initiatives also requires effective institutional structures and leadership. Leal Filho et al. (2023) demonstrated that governance arrangements significantly influence the implementation of the SDGs in higher education institutions. Similarly, Leal Filho et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of

institutional governance, stakeholder participation and organisational commitment to sustainable development. Mentorship may contribute to these institutional processes by developing future leaders and strengthening the competencies required for institutional transformation.

Furthermore, Leal Filho, Salvia, and Eustachio (2023) reported increasing engagement among higher education institutions in the implementation of the SDGs. However, the nature and extent of such engagement vary considerably among institutions. This suggests that formal institutional commitments to sustainability may be insufficient unless universities develop practical mechanisms for translating sustainability objectives into students' knowledge, competencies, values and behaviour.

The impact of universities on sustainable development is multidimensional and requires appropriate mechanisms for assessment. Findler et al. (2019) argued that higher education institutions influence sustainable development through different pathways and that appropriate indicators are required to assess such impacts. Similarly, Mendoza et al. (2019) demonstrated the importance of systematic institutional frameworks for integrating sustainability principles into university management and practices.

Although universities increasingly recognise their responsibilities towards sustainable development, significant implementation challenges remain. Aleixo, Azeiteiro, and Leal (2018) found that the implementation of sustainability practices depends on institutional commitment, organisational structures and stakeholder participation. Similarly, Aleixo, Leal, and Azeiteiro (2018) identified several barriers to the development of sustainable higher education institutions, including resource constraints and difficulties integrating sustainability into institutional activities.

These challenges may be particularly significant within African universities, where students may experience inadequate academic guidance, weak professional networks, insufficient career support and limited exposure to research opportunities. Where mentorship remains informal and dependent primarily on individual relationships, access to academic and professional support may be uneven and difficult to evaluate. Such inequalities may weaken universities' efforts to provide inclusive and quality education, particularly when disadvantaged students lack access to the knowledge and opportunities required for academic and professional advancement (Heleta & Bagus, 2021; Ochieng & Gyasi, 2021).

The absence of structured mentorship may also limit universities' capacity to transfer knowledge, develop future academic leaders and strengthen research competence. Berchin et al. (2021) emphasised that universities' contributions to sustainable development depend on their capacity to effectively perform their teaching, research, management and community engagement responsibilities. Similarly, Leal Filho et al. (2021) demonstrated that institutional governance and organisational capacity are important determinants of sustainable development implementation.

Despite the growing body of literature on higher education and sustainable development, limited empirical attention has been given to the potential contribution of African mentorship practices to student empowerment, institutional capacity development and quality education. Existing studies have largely focused on sustainability practices, governance, teaching strategies, campus management and institutional engagement with the SDGs (Aleixo, Azeiteiro, & Leal, 2018; Findler et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2019, 2023).

Consequently, there remains a need for empirical evidence on whether culturally responsive mentorship practices contribute to student and institutional development within African universities. This research gap is particularly important because higher education institutions require mechanisms that connect knowledge development, student participation, educational quality and sustainable development outcomes (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Kohl et al., 2021).

Against this background, the present study examined the relationships between African mentorship practices and student empowerment, institutional capacity development and quality education in public universities in South-East Nigeria. The study further determined the joint and independent contributions of academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development to sustainable development.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the relationships between African mentorship practices and student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development without manipulating the study variables. The design also enabled the researchers to determine the extent to which the dimensions of African mentorship practices predicted sustainable development among undergraduate students in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

The predictor variable was African mentorship practices, operationalised through six dimensions: academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development. The criterion variables were student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development.

2.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in public universities in South-East Nigeria. South-East Nigeria comprises five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The zone has several federal and state-owned universities that provide undergraduate and postgraduate education across different academic disciplines.

The universities perform the core functions of teaching, research and community service and accommodate students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Within these institutions, mentorship occurs through academic advising, research supervision, career guidance, staff–student interactions and informal relationships between experienced academics and students.

South-East Nigeria was considered appropriate for the study because of the presence of several public universities and the need to generate empirical evidence on the contribution of African mentorship practices to student empowerment, institutional development, quality education and sustainable development.

2.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised 52,684 regular undergraduate students enrolled in selected public universities in South-East Nigeria during the 2025/2026 academic session.

The population consisted of students from different faculties, departments and levels of study. Undergraduate students were considered appropriate for the study because they are direct beneficiaries of academic, professional and psychosocial mentorship practices within the university system.

2.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e^2)]$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = population size

e = level of precision (0.05)

Substituting the population of the study into the formula:

$$n = 52,684 / [1 + 52,684(0.05^2)]$$

$$n = 52,684 / [1 + 52,684(0.0025)]$$

$$n = 52,684 / 132.71$$

$$n = 396.99$$

Therefore, the minimum sample size was approximately 397 respondents. However, to compensate for possible non-response and improperly completed questionnaires, the sample size was increased to 420 respondents.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select the respondents.

At the first stage, public universities in South-East Nigeria were stratified according to ownership into federal and state-owned universities.

At the second stage, six public universities, comprising three federal and three state-owned universities, were selected using simple random sampling.

At the third stage, faculties in the selected universities were classified into Arts and Humanities, Education, Social Sciences, Sciences and Professional disciplines. Faculties were selected proportionately from the participating universities.

At the fourth stage, two departments were selected from each participating faculty using simple random sampling.

At the final stage, proportionate stratified sampling was used to allocate the sample according to university, faculty and level of study. Individual respondents were subsequently selected using simple random sampling.

The multistage sampling procedure ensured adequate representation of students from different universities, academic disciplines and levels of study.

2.5 Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled **African Mentorship Practices, Student Empowerment and Sustainable Development Questionnaire (AMPS-ESDQ)**.

The questionnaire was developed following a review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature on African mentorship, student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development.

The instrument consisted of two parts.

Part I elicited demographic information from the respondents, including gender, age, university ownership, faculty and level of study.

Part II contained 48 items divided into five clusters.

Cluster A contained 18 items measuring African mentorship practices. The items covered six dimensions: academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development.

Cluster B contained eight items measuring student empowerment, including academic confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy, decision-making ability, leadership competence and active participation in learning.

Cluster C contained seven items measuring institutional capacity development, including knowledge transfer, research development, professional networking, institutional continuity and leadership development.

Cluster D contained seven items measuring quality education, including academic engagement, research competence, professional preparation, access to academic support and students' overall educational experiences.

Cluster E contained eight items measuring sustainable development, including social responsibility, innovation, employability, ethical leadership, community engagement and the capacity to contribute to societal development.

The items were structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively.

The four-point rating scale was adopted to encourage respondents to express a definite opinion regarding each questionnaire statement.

2.6 Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts. Two of the validators were experts in Educational Management and Policy, while one was an expert in Measurement and Evaluation.

The validators assessed the instrument in terms of clarity of language, relevance of the items to the objectives and research questions, appropriateness of the response format and adequacy of the items in measuring the study variables.

Based on the recommendations of the validators, ambiguous statements were revised, repetitive items were eliminated and some questionnaire items were reorganised under more appropriate dimensions. The corrections and suggestions made by the validators were incorporated into the final version of the instrument before data collection.

2.7 Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted using 40 undergraduate students from a public university outside the institutions selected for the main study. The university and respondents used for the pilot study possessed characteristics similar to those of the main study population.

Data obtained from the pilot study were analysed using Cronbach's alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the instrument.

The results yielded reliability coefficients of 0.89 for African mentorship practices, 0.86 for student empowerment, 0.83 for institutional capacity development, 0.85 for quality education and 0.88 for sustainable development. The overall reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.91.

The reliability coefficients obtained were considered sufficiently high to establish the internal consistency and suitability of the instrument for data collection.

2.8 Method of Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the relevant authorities of the participating universities before the commencement of data collection.

The researchers, with the assistance of six trained research assistants, administered copies of the questionnaire directly to the selected respondents. The research assistants were briefed on the purpose of the study, sampling procedure, questionnaire administration and ethical principles guiding the research.

A total of 420 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Of these, 405 copies were retrieved. Seven copies were excluded from the analysis because they were substantially incomplete. Consequently, 398 properly completed copies of the questionnaire were considered valid and used for statistical analysis, representing a valid response rate of 94.8%.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles governing research involving human participants were observed throughout the study. The respondents were adequately informed about the purpose and procedures of the study before questionnaire administration.

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the respondents. They were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences.

The questionnaire did not require respondents to provide their names, registration numbers or other personally identifiable information. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data collection, analysis and reporting processes.

All information obtained from the respondents was used strictly for academic purposes, and the findings were reported in aggregate form.

2.10 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents were coded and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Mean and standard deviation were used to describe respondents' perceptions of African mentorship practices, student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development.

A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for interpreting the descriptive results. A mean score of 2.50 or above was interpreted as a high or positive perception of the variable, while a mean score below 2.50 was interpreted as a low or negative perception.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationships between African mentorship practices and student empowerment, institutional capacity development and quality education.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the joint and independent contributions of the six dimensions of African mentorship practices—academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development—to sustainable development.

The multiple correlation coefficient (R) was used to determine the overall relationship between the predictor variables and sustainable development, while the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to establish the proportion of variation in sustainable development explained by the dimensions of African mentorship practices. The standardised beta coefficients (β), t-values and associated probability values were used to determine the relative contribution and statistical significance of each predictor variable.

All null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A null hypothesis was rejected when the associated p-value was less than 0.05 and retained when the p-value was equal to or greater than 0.05.

III. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the data analysis based on the research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study. A total of 420 copies of the questionnaire were administered to undergraduate students in the selected public universities in South-East Nigeria. Of these, 405 copies were retrieved, while seven were excluded because they were substantially incomplete. Consequently, 398 valid copies of the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 94.8%, were used for the analysis.

The results are presented according to the demographic characteristics of the respondents, descriptive analysis of the study variables, research questions and hypotheses.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 398)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	181	45.5
	Female	217	54.5
Age	Below 20 years	64	16.1
	20–24 years	248	62.3
	25 years and above	86	21.6
University ownership	Federal	203	51.0
	State	195	49.0
Level of study	100 Level	76	19.1

	200 Level	104	26.1
	300 Level	112	28.1
	400 Level and above	106	26.6

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Of the 398 respondents who participated in the study, 181 (45.5%) were male, while 217 (54.5%) were female. This indicates that both male and female undergraduate students were adequately represented in the study, although female respondents constituted a slightly higher proportion.

Regarding age distribution, 64 (16.1%) respondents were below 20 years, 248 (62.3%) were between 20 and 24 years, while 86 (21.6%) were aged 25 years and above. The results indicate that most of the respondents were between 20 and 24 years of age.

With respect to university ownership, 203 (51.0%) respondents were drawn from federal universities, while 195 (49.0%) were from state-owned universities. The relatively balanced distribution ensured adequate representation of students from the two categories of public universities.

Regarding level of study, 76 (19.1%) respondents were in 100 Level, 104 (26.1%) were in 200 Level, 112 (28.1%) were in 300 Level, while 106 (26.6%) were in 400 Level and above. The findings demonstrate that students at different levels of undergraduate education were adequately represented.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
African mentorship practices	398	3.08	0.55	High
Student empowerment	398	3.14	0.51	High
Institutional capacity development	398	2.93	0.58	High
Quality education	398	3.11	0.53	High
Sustainable development	398	3.05	0.56	High

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation scores of the major variables investigated in the study. African mentorship practices recorded a mean score of 3.08 and a standard deviation of 0.55, indicating a high level of mentorship practices among the respondents.

Student empowerment recorded the highest mean score of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 0.51. This indicates that the respondents generally perceived themselves as empowered in terms of academic confidence, self-efficacy, decision-making, leadership competence and active participation in learning.

Institutional capacity development recorded a mean score of 2.93 and a standard deviation of 0.58, while quality education recorded a mean score of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 0.53. Sustainable development recorded a mean score of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.56.

Since all the mean scores were above the criterion mean of 2.50, the findings indicate high levels of African mentorship practices, student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development among the respondents.

3.3 Research Question One

What is the relationship between African mentorship practices and student empowerment in public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between African Mentorship Practices and Student Empowerment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	Relationship
African mentorship practices	398	3.08	0.55		
Student empowerment	398	3.14	0.51	0.68	Strong positive

Table 3 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.68$ between African mentorship practices and student empowerment. The coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables.

The positive correlation implies that an increase in African mentorship practices was associated with a corresponding increase in student empowerment. Thus, students who reported greater exposure to academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development also demonstrated higher levels of academic confidence, autonomy, leadership competence, self-efficacy and decision-making ability.

3.4 Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between African mentorship practices and student empowerment in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 4: Test of Significance of the Relationship Between African Mentorship Practices and Student Empowerment

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
African mentorship practices and student empowerment	398	0.68	<0.001	Reject H ₀

Table 4 shows that African mentorship practices had a strong positive relationship with student empowerment ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$).

Since the p-value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study therefore found a statistically significant positive relationship between African mentorship practices and student empowerment in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

3.5 Research Question Two

What is the relationship between African mentorship practices and institutional capacity development in public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between African Mentorship Practices and Institutional Capacity Development

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	Relationship
African mentorship practices	398	3.08	0.55		
Institutional capacity development	398	2.93	0.58	0.61	Strong positive

Table 5 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.61$ between African mentorship practices and institutional capacity development. The result indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables. The positive relationship implies that improvements in mentorship practices were associated with improvements in knowledge transfer, research capacity, professional networking, institutional continuity and leadership development.

3.6 Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between African mentorship practices and institutional capacity development in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 6: Test of Significance of the Relationship Between African Mentorship Practices and Institutional Capacity Development

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
African mentorship practices and institutional capacity development	398	0.61	<0.001	Reject H ₀

As shown in Table 6, African mentorship practices had a statistically significant positive relationship with institutional capacity development ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$).

Since the p-value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding therefore indicates that there was a significant positive relationship between African mentorship practices and institutional capacity development.

3.7 Research Question Three

What is the relationship between African mentorship practices and quality education in public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between African Mentorship Practices and Quality Education

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	Relationship
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African mentorship practices	398	3.08	0.55		
Quality education	398	3.11	0.53	0.72	Strong positive

Table 7 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.72$ between African mentorship practices and quality education. The coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables.

The finding implies that students who experienced higher levels of mentorship also reported better academic engagement, research competence, professional preparation, access to academic support and overall educational experiences.

Among the three bivariate relationships investigated in the study, the relationship between African mentorship practices and quality education produced the highest correlation coefficient.

3.8 Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between African mentorship practices and quality education in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 8: Test of Significance of the Relationship Between African Mentorship Practices and Quality Education

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
African mentorship practices and quality education	398	0.72	<0.001	Reject H ₀

Table 8 shows that African mentorship practices had a statistically significant positive relationship with quality education ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$).

Since the p-value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between African mentorship practices and quality education in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

3.9 Research Question Four

To what extent do the dimensions of African mentorship practices jointly predict sustainable development in public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 9: Model Summary of the Joint Contribution of African Mentorship Dimensions to Sustainable Development

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error of Estimate
1	0.780	0.608	0.602	0.353

Predictors: Academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development.

Table 9 presents the multiple regression analysis of the joint contribution of the six dimensions of African mentorship practices to sustainable development.

The results produced a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = 0.780$, indicating a strong positive relationship between the combined predictor variables and sustainable development.

The coefficient of determination was $R^2 = 0.608$, while the adjusted R^2 was 0.602. This indicates that academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development jointly explained 60.8% of the variation in sustainable development.

The remaining 39.2% of the variation in sustainable development was attributable to other factors not included in the regression model.

3.10 Hypothesis Four

H₀₄: The dimensions of African mentorship practices do not significantly predict sustainable development in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 10: ANOVA of the Regression Model Predicting Sustainable Development

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	75.62	6	12.60	101.08	<0.001
Residual	48.76	391	0.125		
Total	124.38	397			

Table 10 shows that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(6, 391) = 101.08$, $p < 0.001$. Since the p-value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the six dimensions of African mentorship practices jointly and significantly predicted sustainable development in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

3.11 Independent Contributions of the Dimensions of African Mentorship Practices to Sustainable Development

Table 11: Multiple Regression Coefficients of the Dimensions of African Mentorship Practices Predicting Sustainable Development

Predictor Variable	B	Standard Error	Standardised β	t	p-value	Decision
Constant	0.384	0.121	—	3.17	0.002	Significant
Academic guidance	0.162	0.041	0.181	3.95	<0.001	Significant
Career guidance	0.118	0.039	0.132	3.03	0.003	Significant
Psychosocial support	0.094	0.037	0.108	2.54	0.011	Significant
Role modelling	0.151	0.040	0.169	3.78	<0.001	Significant
Knowledge transfer	0.207	0.043	0.226	4.81	<0.001	Significant
Ethical development	0.185	0.042	0.204	4.40	<0.001	Significant

Table 11 presents the independent contributions of the six dimensions of African mentorship practices to sustainable development.

Knowledge transfer emerged as the strongest independent predictor of sustainable development ($\beta = 0.226$, $t = 4.81$, $p < 0.001$). This was followed by ethical development ($\beta = 0.204$, $t = 4.40$, $p < 0.001$), academic guidance ($\beta = 0.181$, $t = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$) and role modelling ($\beta = 0.169$, $t = 3.78$, $p < 0.001$).

Career guidance also made a significant independent contribution to sustainable development ($\beta = 0.132$, $t = 3.03$, $p = 0.003$), while psychosocial support recorded the lowest, although statistically significant, contribution ($\beta = 0.108$, $t = 2.54$, $p = 0.011$).

The results indicate that all six dimensions of African mentorship practices significantly predicted sustainable development. However, knowledge transfer and ethical development made the greatest relative contributions.

Based on the unstandardised regression coefficients, the estimated regression equation was:

$$SD = 0.384 + 0.162(AG) + 0.118(CG) + 0.094(PS) + 0.151(RM) + 0.207(KT) + 0.185(ED)$$

Where:

SD = Sustainable Development

AG = Academic Guidance

CG = Career Guidance

PS = Psychosocial Support

RM = Role Modelling

KT = Knowledge Transfer

ED = Ethical Development

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships between African mentorship practices and student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development in public universities in South-East Nigeria. It further determined the joint and independent predictive contributions of six dimensions of African mentorship practices, namely academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development, to sustainable development. The findings generally demonstrated that African mentorship practices were significantly associated with positive student, institutional and sustainable development outcomes.

The study revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between African mentorship practices and student empowerment ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that higher levels of academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development were associated with increased academic confidence, self-efficacy, autonomy, leadership competence and decision-making abilities among undergraduate students. The correlation coefficient of 0.68 suggests a substantial relationship between the variables and demonstrates that mentorship constitutes an important mechanism for empowering students within the university environment.

The finding can be explained by the multidimensional nature of student empowerment. Students require more than classroom instruction to develop the confidence, competencies and opportunities necessary to participate actively in their educational and professional development. Effective mentorship provides access to experienced individuals who can offer guidance, encouragement, professional exposure and opportunities for personal and academic development. This interpretation is supported by Akhtar et al. (2021), who demonstrated the importance of ability, motivation and opportunity in stimulating positive student behaviour within higher education institutions. Although their study specifically examined pro-environmental behaviour, the ability–motivation–opportunity framework provides relevant support for the present findings. Academic and professional mentorship can strengthen students' abilities through knowledge acquisition, enhance their motivation through encouragement and psychosocial support, and create opportunities through professional networking, research participation and career exposure.

The significant relationship between mentorship and student empowerment also supports the position of Chankseliani and McCowan (2021), who argued that the contribution of higher education to sustainable development depends considerably on universities' capacity to develop individuals capable of participating meaningfully in social, economic and institutional transformation. The present finding of $r = 0.68$ suggests that effective mentor–mentee relationships can facilitate this developmental process by strengthening students' confidence, independence and capacity for active participation in university and societal activities.

Similarly, Emanuel and Adams (2011) emphasised the importance of students' perceptions and participation in institutional sustainability. Their study demonstrated that students are important stakeholders in universities' sustainability efforts. The present finding extends this position by suggesting that students' capacity to participate meaningfully in institutional development may be strengthened through effective mentorship. Students who have access to experienced mentors may develop greater confidence and competence to participate in academic, leadership and community development activities.

Dabija et al. (2017) similarly highlighted the importance of stakeholder involvement in strengthening the sustainability orientation of higher education institutions. Since students represent a major stakeholder group, the statistically significant relationship observed in the present study ($p < 0.001$) suggests that empowering students through mentorship could strengthen their participation in institutional and societal development.

The magnitude of the observed relationship further has important implications for African higher education. Traditional African societies have historically relied on intergenerational relationships for knowledge transfer, moral development and social integration. The strong positive relationship between African mentorship practices and student empowerment suggests that integrating these traditional principles with contemporary academic mentorship could provide a culturally responsive mechanism for developing confident, competent and socially responsible university graduates.

The study further revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between African mentorship practices and institutional capacity development ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation coefficient demonstrates that improvements in mentorship practices were associated with increased knowledge transfer, research capacity, professional networking, institutional continuity and leadership development. The rejection of the corresponding null hypothesis confirms that this relationship was statistically significant.

The finding demonstrates that mentorship has implications beyond the development of individual students. Mentorship can contribute to institutional sustainability by providing mechanisms through which knowledge, skills, experience and professional values are transferred from experienced academics to students and emerging scholars. The observed correlation of $r = 0.61$ indicates that strengthening mentorship practices may contribute substantially to strengthening institutional capacity.

This finding is supported by Berchin et al. (2021), who established that higher education institutions contribute to sustainable development through teaching, research, institutional management and community engagement. Effective performance across these areas requires adequate institutional capacity and the continuous development of human resources. The present finding suggests that mentorship can contribute to this process by facilitating the transfer of academic knowledge, research competencies and institutional experience.

Similarly, Aleixo, Azeiteiro, and Leal (2018) reported that the effective implementation of sustainability practices within higher education institutions requires appropriate institutional structures, organisational commitment and active stakeholder participation. The significant positive relationship between mentorship and institutional capacity development found in the present study supports this position. Structured mentorship programmes can serve as institutional mechanisms for human capital development, professional networking and organisational continuity.

The finding also supports Aleixo, Leal, and Azeiteiro (2018), who identified several roles, barriers and challenges associated with the development of sustainable higher education institutions. Among these challenges are inadequate resources, limited institutional commitment and difficulties in integrating sustainability principles into institutional practices. The present finding suggests that effective mentorship could

contribute to overcoming some of these challenges by strengthening human capital and preparing students and younger academics for future research, teaching and leadership responsibilities.

Leal Filho et al. (2021) similarly emphasised the importance of effective governance for sustainable development within higher education institutions. Institutional governance requires competent leadership, stakeholder participation, knowledge continuity and appropriate organisational structures. The observed relationship between mentorship and institutional capacity development ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that mentorship can support these institutional requirements by preparing students and emerging academics for future responsibilities.

The finding is further consistent with the whole-institution approach proposed by Kohl et al. (2021). The authors argued that sustainability should be integrated across teaching, research, governance, institutional operations and community engagement. From this perspective, mentorship should not be regarded solely as a personal relationship between an experienced and less experienced individual. Instead, it should be incorporated into universities' broader strategies for institutional development and sustainability.

The present finding has considerable relevance to African universities, where inadequate knowledge transfer, the retirement and migration of experienced academics, limited research capacity and insufficient preparation of younger academics for leadership responsibilities continue to present institutional challenges. The significant relationship found in the present study suggests that institutionalised mentorship could contribute to addressing these challenges by facilitating academic succession, knowledge continuity and research capacity development.

The study also found a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between African mentorship practices and quality education ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). This was the strongest bivariate relationship recorded among the three major outcome variables investigated. The correlation coefficient of 0.72 indicates that students who experienced higher levels of mentorship also reported better academic engagement, research competence, professional preparation, access to educational support and overall educational experiences.

The finding suggests that mentorship represents an important component of quality education within higher education institutions. Although adequate infrastructure, qualified academic personnel, appropriate curricula and educational resources remain essential, the present finding demonstrates that supportive interpersonal relationships between students and experienced academics may also contribute substantially to educational quality.

This result is consistent with Ferguson and Roofe (2020), who examined the challenges and opportunities associated with achieving SDG 4 within higher education. The authors argued that quality education requires higher education institutions to address multiple dimensions of student learning and development. The present finding extends this argument by demonstrating that mentorship may provide an important mechanism for strengthening students' educational experiences.

The finding is also supported by MuhammedZein and Abdullateef (2025), who emphasised that quality education for sustainable development requires an appropriate balance between knowledge, skills and values. The strong relationship between mentorship and quality education found in the present study ($r = 0.72$) reflects this multidimensional understanding of education. Academic guidance may strengthen knowledge acquisition and research competence, career guidance may develop professional skills, while role modelling and ethical development may contribute to students' character and values.

Similarly, Chaudhary and Dey (2021) demonstrated that student-perceived service quality was associated with university sustainability practices and student satisfaction. Their findings suggest that students' perceptions of educational quality are influenced by the support and opportunities available within their institutions. The present study supports this position by demonstrating that students who experienced stronger mentorship practices also reported higher levels of educational quality.

The findings are also consistent with Cebrián (2018), who advocated comprehensive institutional approaches to embedding education for sustainability within higher education institutions. The strong positive relationship observed between mentorship and quality education suggests that mentorship could constitute an important institutional strategy for integrating sustainability knowledge, competencies and values into students' educational experiences.

Leal Filho et al. (2019) similarly reported that universities differ substantially in the extent to which sustainability is integrated into teaching and other educational activities. They advocated more systematic and institution-wide strategies for sustainability education. The present finding suggests that structured mentorship programmes could contribute to such strategies by helping students connect academic knowledge with practical, professional and societal challenges.

The result also supports Holmes et al. (2022), who emphasised the importance of innovative and flexible learning strategies for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Mentorship can complement conventional classroom instruction by providing personalised academic and professional support that may be difficult to achieve through formal teaching alone.

Furthermore, Heleta and Bagus (2021) cautioned that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals within higher education may leave disadvantaged students behind when inequalities in access, participation and opportunities are not adequately addressed. The strong relationship between mentorship and quality education found in this study suggests that structured mentorship programmes could contribute to educational inclusion by providing students from different socio-economic backgrounds with greater access to academic guidance, professional networks and development opportunities.

The fourth major finding revealed that the six dimensions of African mentorship practices jointly had a strong positive relationship with sustainable development ($R = 0.780$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.608$) showed that academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development jointly explained 60.8% of the variation in sustainable development. The adjusted R^2 of 0.602 further demonstrates that the regression model retained substantial explanatory power after adjustment for the number of predictors included in the analysis.

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(6, 391) = 101.08$, $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that the probability of obtaining the observed relationship by chance was extremely low. Consequently, the dimensions of African mentorship practices collectively constituted significant predictors of sustainable development.

The finding that mentorship practices explained 60.8% of the variance in sustainable development is particularly significant. It demonstrates that the development of students' knowledge, professional competencies, ethical values, social responsibility and capacity for societal participation may be substantially influenced by the quality of mentorship they receive within universities. However, the remaining 39.2% of unexplained variance also indicates that sustainable development is influenced by other factors outside the model, including institutional policies, funding, infrastructure, governance, curriculum, economic conditions and broader societal factors.

This finding supports Chankseliani and McCowan (2021), who argued that higher education institutions have a complex but important role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Universities contribute to development through knowledge creation, human capital development, research and social engagement. The present finding demonstrates that mentorship may represent an important mechanism connecting these institutional functions with student development and sustainable development outcomes.

The finding is equally consistent with Owens (2017), who emphasised the strategic position of higher education within the Sustainable Development Goals framework. The significant predictive power of mentorship practices found in this study suggests that universities' contribution to sustainable development may partly depend on their capacity to establish effective developmental relationships between experienced academics and students.

Leal Filho et al. (2023) similarly observed increasing engagement among higher education institutions in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. However, institutional commitments to sustainability must ultimately be translated into students' knowledge, competencies, values and behaviour. The present finding suggests that mentorship can provide one mechanism through which institutional sustainability objectives are translated into student development outcomes.

The finding also agrees with Findler et al. (2019), who argued that the contribution of higher education institutions to sustainable development is multidimensional and should be evaluated using appropriate indicators. The present study similarly demonstrates that sustainable development cannot be adequately explained by a single aspect of mentorship. Rather, the combined contributions of academic guidance, career guidance, psychosocial support, role modelling, knowledge transfer and ethical development produced the strongest explanatory model.

Berchin et al. (2021) also emphasised that universities contribute to sustainable development through teaching, research, institutional management and community engagement. The present finding provides empirical support for the potential role of mentorship across these institutional responsibilities. Academic mentors can support students' learning, involve them in research activities, provide professional guidance and encourage participation in community development.

The result is also consistent with the whole-institution approach of Kohl et al. (2021). Sustainable development requires the integration of institutional policies, educational activities and stakeholder participation. The strong overall relationship of $R = 0.780$ found in the present study suggests that mentorship can contribute to such an integrated institutional approach by connecting students with academic staff, research activities, professional opportunities and institutional development initiatives.

The independent regression coefficients provided further insight into the relative importance of the different dimensions of African mentorship practices. Knowledge transfer emerged as the strongest independent predictor of sustainable development ($\beta = 0.226$, $t = 4.81$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that a one-standard-deviation increase in knowledge transfer was associated with a 0.226 standard-deviation increase in sustainable development when the effects of the other mentorship dimensions were statistically controlled.

The emergence of knowledge transfer as the strongest predictor demonstrates the fundamental role of universities as institutions responsible for creating, preserving and transferring knowledge across generations. Sustainable development requires individuals who possess relevant knowledge and the capacity to apply such knowledge to complex social, economic and environmental problems.

This finding supports Berchin et al. (2021), who identified knowledge generation, teaching, research and community engagement as important mechanisms through which universities promote sustainable development. Mentorship strengthens this function by creating direct opportunities for experienced academics to transfer knowledge, research competencies and professional expertise to students.

Ochieng and Gyasi (2021) similarly emphasised the importance of knowledge accessibility and educational resources for strengthening research productivity and promoting social justice in higher education. The finding that knowledge transfer recorded the highest standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.226$) supports the position that access to knowledge and academic opportunities is fundamental to student and societal development.

Ethical development emerged as the second strongest predictor of sustainable development ($\beta = 0.204$, $t = 4.40$, $p < 0.001$). The result demonstrates that sustainable development requires more than knowledge and technical competence. It also depends on integrity, accountability, social responsibility and commitment to collective welfare.

The importance of ethical development is supported by MuhammedZein and Abdullateef (2025), who emphasised the need to maintain an appropriate balance between knowledge, skills and values within education for sustainable development. The present finding provides empirical support for this position, as ethical development made a substantial independent contribution to sustainable development even after controlling for the effects of the other mentorship dimensions.

Academic guidance was the third strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.181$, $t = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$). This finding demonstrates that effective academic support contributes significantly to students' capacity to participate in sustainable development. Academic mentorship can strengthen critical thinking, problem-solving, research competence and intellectual independence, all of which are important for addressing contemporary developmental challenges.

The finding supports Ferguson and Roofe (2020), who emphasised the importance of strengthening the quality and relevance of higher education in achieving SDG 4. Academic guidance can help students maximise available educational opportunities and develop the competencies necessary for professional and societal participation.

Role modelling also made a significant contribution to sustainable development ($\beta = 0.169$, $t = 3.78$, $p < 0.001$). The finding suggests that students are influenced not only by the information and advice provided by mentors but also by the professional and ethical behaviours demonstrated by them. Mentors who demonstrate academic excellence, integrity, social responsibility and commitment to lifelong learning can provide students with practical examples of the attitudes and behaviours required for sustainable development.

Career guidance significantly predicted sustainable development ($\beta = 0.132$, $t = 3.03$, $p = 0.003$). This finding indicates that assisting students to understand career opportunities, employment expectations and professional pathways contributes positively to sustainable development. Career mentorship may help students connect academic training with employment, entrepreneurship, innovation and societal needs.

The finding can be related to the position of Chankseliani and McCowan (2021), who emphasised the contribution of higher education to economic and social development. Career guidance can strengthen this contribution by helping graduates apply their knowledge and competencies productively within society.

Psychosocial support recorded the lowest standardised regression coefficient but nevertheless made a statistically significant contribution to sustainable development ($\beta = 0.108$, $t = 2.54$, $p = 0.011$). This finding indicates that students' emotional well-being, resilience and capacity to manage academic and personal challenges are relevant to their long-term development.

Although the contribution of psychosocial support was smaller than those of knowledge transfer and ethical development, its statistical significance demonstrates that sustainable development requires attention to the holistic development of students. Students who receive encouragement and emotional support may be more capable of persisting through academic challenges and participating effectively in professional and societal activities.

Taken collectively, the results demonstrate that African mentorship practices are multidimensional and that each dimension makes a distinctive contribution to sustainable development. The regression findings suggest that universities should avoid limiting mentorship to occasional academic advice. Effective mentorship should integrate knowledge transfer, ethical development, academic guidance, positive role modelling, career preparation and psychosocial support.

To this end, the findings demonstrate that African mentorship practices have considerable implications for students, universities and sustainable development. The strong relationships observed between mentorship and student empowerment ($r = 0.68$), institutional capacity development ($r = 0.61$) and quality education ($r = 0.72$),

together with the substantial predictive capacity of the combined mentorship dimensions ($R = 0.780$, $R^2 = 0.608$), provide empirical evidence of the potential importance of mentorship within higher education.

The findings reinforce the whole-institution perspective advanced by Kohl et al. (2021) and the governance approaches discussed by Leal Filho et al. (2021, 2023). Mentorship should therefore be institutionalised rather than treated exclusively as an informal relationship dependent on the personal commitment of individual academics. For African universities, the findings have additional cultural and developmental significance. Traditional African systems of intergenerational knowledge transfer, communal responsibility, respect for experience and collective development provide a valuable foundation for contemporary mentorship. Integrating these cultural principles with structured institutional policies and contemporary higher education practices could create mentorship systems that respond more effectively to the developmental needs of African students.

V. CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationships between African mentorship practices, student empowerment, institutional capacity development, quality education and sustainable development in public universities in South-East Nigeria. The findings established that African mentorship practices had significant positive relationships with student empowerment, institutional capacity development and quality education. This demonstrates that effective mentorship can contribute to students' academic confidence, professional development and active participation while simultaneously strengthening institutional capacity and improving the quality of educational experiences.

The study further established that the dimensions of African mentorship practices jointly and significantly predicted sustainable development. Knowledge transfer emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by ethical development, academic guidance, role modelling, career guidance and psychosocial support. These findings demonstrate that effective mentorship is multidimensional and that sustainable development requires not only the transfer of knowledge and professional competencies but also the development of ethical values, positive role models, career preparedness and psychosocial well-being among university students.

The study concludes that African mentorship practices constitute an important mechanism for promoting student empowerment, strengthening institutional capacity, improving quality education and advancing sustainable development. Therefore, mentorship should move beyond informal and uncoordinated relationships to become an integral component of university policies and practices. Institutionalising culturally responsive and structured mentorship programmes can enhance knowledge transfer, develop competent and ethically responsible graduates, strengthen university systems and improve the capacity of higher education institutions to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development.

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