

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Facilitating First-Year Student Adjustment: Towards a Model for Intentional Peer Mentoring

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Abstract

Attrition of first-year university students remains a global problem, and this is also of great concern in South African higher education. In an effort to address this challenge, many higher education institutions offer peer mentoring programmes to assist first-year students with their adjustment to university life, in order to improve their retention. However, evidence of the effectiveness of such peer mentoring programmes is still limited. This article intends to contribute in this regard. Stellenbosch University introduced its BeWell Peer Mentoring programme in 2013. In addition to providing psycho-social support, mentors offer developmental initiatives on holistic wellness to assist first-year students with their adjustment. After an institution-wide roll-out of the programme, the question arose whether the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme actually assisted first-year students in adjusting to campus life. In order to answer this question a research study with a sequential mixed-method design was employed. Our study found that adjustment outcomes were influenced by the intensity of peer mentoring participating students received. Mentor attributes, time invested in mentoring, reasons for mentoring and the wellness component of the programme all influenced the peer mentoring received. The findings underscored the importance of selecting intentional mentors, and effective programme implementation and monitoring. A model for intentional peer mentoring is proposed, to optimise the programme outcomes. Other institutions with similar programmes could also benefit from the proposed model.

Keywords

mentoring, peer mentoring, first-year adjustment, first-year experience

Introduction

Many first-year students embark on their university journey with great excitement, often oblivious to the multiple transitions that await them. Adjusting to their new educational environment is a complex and challenging process that entails coping with a range of interpersonal, social, academic and institutional demands (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). Adjustment is a multi-dimensional process of interaction between an individual and his/

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her environment, whereby the individual develops effective coping strategies in order to adapt to the new environment and the various demands it brings (Baker & Siryk, 2015). Baker and Siryk (2015) argue that the university environment requires students to adopt coping responses along four adjustment domains: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment (attachment).

The inability to adjust in the first year puts first-year students at risk of leaving prematurely (Tinto, 2012). While first-year attrition is a global problem (Beer & Lawson, 2017; Tinto, 2012), this is of particular concern in the South African context where attrition rates are highest amongst the previously underserved groups of black African and coloured students who still represent low participation rates in the system (CHE, 2013). Research has found that adjustment challenges can either directly lead to attrition (Abdullah et al., 2010; Credé & Niehorster, 2012), or indirectly as inadequate adjustment could lead to poor academic performance resulting in attrition (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). Peer mentoring programmes have become pivotal in the formal support offered to first-year students as a means of facilitating adjustment (Jacobi, 1991) and improving retention (Shotton et al., 2007; Ward et al., 2012). In spite of the popularity of peer mentoring programmes, however, there is still limited research available on the outcomes of these programmes (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Knowles & Parsons, 2006) and their effects on first-year adjustment.

In its efforts to best support first-year students, Stellenbosch University in South Africa introduced the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme in 2013. The study on which this article reports, investigated the adjustment outcomes of the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme, in an attempt to gain reliable data on whether the programme was achieving its goal of assisting first-year students in their adjustment to university, and to contribute to filling the gap in knowledge on the outcomes of peer mentoring programmes in higher education.

Literature Review

Defining peer mentoring

Mentoring relationships are complex, which makes mentoring difficult to define (Gehrke, 1988) and while there are many definitions of mentoring, the mentoring literature still lacks a widely accepted definition of the concept (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; Jacobi, 1991; Lane, 2020). For the purposes of this study the following Campbell and Campbell (1997, p. 727) definition was considered to be the most appropriate: mentoring is “a situation in which a more experienced member of an organisation maintains a relationship with a less-experienced, often new member to the organisation, and provides information, support, and guidance so as to enhance the less-experienced member’s chances of success in the organisation.” In traditional forms of mentoring, the more experienced member of the organisation is usually a staff member (Campbell & Campbell, 1997), whereas in peer mentoring initiatives, the more experienced member is a peer (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). While there is no

widely accepted definition of mentoring, the literature reports common functions that the mentor performs in relation to the mentee. These usually include a psycho-social and role modelling function (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985), and a career and professional development function (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985), but could also include academic subject knowledge support (Crisp & Cruz, 2009) and a liaison function (Holt & Lopez, 2014).

Peer mentoring and adjustment

Numerous studies indicate a positive relationship between adjustment and attrition (Abdullah et al., 2010; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Krotseng, 1992), hence the primary purpose of peer mentoring programmes is often to assist students with adjustment during the first year (Collings et al., 2014; Allen et al., 1999; Grant-Vallone & Eshner, 2000; Treston, 1999), as a means of improving retention. Various studies have reported peer mentoring programmes as being effective in buffering the transition from school to university for first-year students (Collings et al., 2014; Etzel et al., 2018; Swart et al., 2019). In their qualitative study, Swart et al. (2019) found that first-year engineering students who participated in a peer mentoring programme, reported that the programme assisted them in adapting to the higher education environment. Similarly, Yüksela and Bahadır-Yılmaz (2019) found that a peer mentoring programme had a positive effect on the adjustment of nursing students. Collings et al. (2014) also found that peer mentoring moderated the effects of the transition to university in terms of social support, positive affect and self-esteem. Etzel et al. (2018), too, found that a peer mentoring programme aided pharmacy students in their adjustment during their first year. In a recent study done in South Africa, Joorst (2021) found that the guidance and support offered by mentors assisted first-year students in a bridging course to adjust to university.

While the benefits of peer mentoring programmes are widely acknowledged, some studies have underscored factors that contribute to differences in peer mentoring outcomes. A study by Phinney et al. (2011) found that a good mentor-mentee connection was associated with the mentee's sense of belonging to the university, highlighting the quality of the mentor-mentee relationships. Holt and Lopez (2014) emphasised the importance of contact time, as their study found that variations in contact time influenced perceptions of support received, with mentees who reported less contact time also reporting lower levels of support received. The level of participation from the mentee, according to Smith (2007), is another important aspect of peer mentoring, as high participation from mentees often strengthens the peer mentoring relationship and increases the benefits of the programme. Goff (2011) also found that students with greater attendance, benefitted more from participation in the programme. Tremblay and Rodger (2003), too, highlighted the importance of participation and concluded that the level of participation by mentees influences the outcomes of peer mentoring programs. These findings are significant, as they underscore the importance of *how* peer mentoring programmes are implemented, and the effect this has on programme outcomes.

The BeWell Peer Mentoring Programme

The programme is offered by the Centre for Student Communities, which is part of the Student Affairs Division of Stellenbosch University. Broadly, the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme, pairs first-year students (mentees) with senior students (mentors), to support their transition to the university environment. Upon arrival on campus during the welcoming period, all first-year students are assigned a mentor. This is done within the residence or private student organisation (PSO) environment the first-year student is affiliated to. The primary responsibility for implementation of the programme, therefore, lies within the individual residence or PSO environments, while the programme coordinator fulfils an oversight role.

The programme has a two-pronged approach to facilitating the adjustment of first-year students. On the one hand mentors offer psycho-social support to first-year students (a common function of peer mentoring programmes), and on the other, they facilitate formal developmental initiatives that focus on holistic wellness (Botha & Cilliers, 2012). The aim is to facilitate the adjustment of first-year students through a combination of psycho-social support and the optimization of holistic wellness (Botha & Cilliers, 2012; Du Plessis, 2015). To achieve this, mentors are expected to offer individual psycho-social support to their mentees, when required, and to facilitate at least six wellness sessions with their group of mentees. The wellness component of the programme is embedded in the holistic wellness model of Hettler (1984), which includes six wellness domains: intellectual, emotional, social, physical, spiritual and occupational wellness (Botha & Cilliers, 2012). Additionally, first-year students are supported by an individualised wellness website with numerous resources such as assessments, e-books, audiobooks, e-workshops and journals (Du Plessis, 2015).

New mentors are recruited annually in every residence and PSO. Seeing that mentors are not recruited via a centralised system, the recruitment criteria may differ. Mentor training takes place twice: the first opportunity is provided shortly after their selection (in the final term of the preceding year), followed by a second training session before the arrival of the first-year students the following year. The first training session focuses on the role and duties of a mentor, as well as on the implementation of the six wellness components of the peer mentoring programme. Mentors are trained extensively in the different wellness domains and are provided with “wellness cards” to facilitate wellness discussions with their mentor groups. The cards contain definitions of wellness, as well as suggested activities to guide mentors in engaging their first-year mentees in discussions about the various aspects of wellness, and “to help coach their mentees to adopt a lifestyle that promotes health and wellbeing” (Du Plessis, 2015, p. 3). The second training session focuses on all the available resources that first-year students can access via their individualised wellness websites.

First-year students are assigned a mentor upon their arrival on campus during the university’s official welcoming period. Officially, mentors remain in their peer mentoring role throughout the mentee’s first year. Both residential and commuter students are targeted. Every mentor is responsible for eight to ten mentees and

collectively they form a mentor group. Mentors are required to provide their mentees with individual support and to facilitate six wellness sessions (in group format). The aim of each wellness session is to create an awareness of the wellness domain concerned, to facilitate reflection on personal wellness, and to foster insight on how to manage personal wellness more effectively. While clear guidelines exist for the facilitation of the wellness sessions, how individual support is provided to mentees is left to the discretion of mentors. Both mentors and mentees are required to log the wellness group sessions and any individual sessions on the BeWell electronic portal for tracking and monitoring purposes.

Research Methodology

Our study investigated the effect that the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme had on the adjustment of first-time entering first-year students. The goal of the study was to investigate whether participation in the programme influenced the adjustment of participating first-year students. A mixed-methods approach was employed, and an explanatory sequential mixed-method design used. Data were collected in two phases: quantitative data were first collected by means of a survey, followed by the collection of qualitative data through focus group discussions. The rationale behind collecting the second strand of data was to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative data (Creswell, 2015)

Participants and sampling

For the purposes of this study, first time entering first-year students at Stellenbosch University's main campus were targeted, more specifically, the first-year students from the 2017 cohort of registered students at the university (a total of 5,024). No sampling was required for the quasi-experiment, as the researcher had access to all registered first-year students. For the focus group discussions purposive sampling was applied.

Data collection and analysis

Two data strands were collected. In the first phase, a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest non-equivalent group design was used to compare the adjustment of students who participated in the peer mentoring programme (the experimental group) with the adjustment of students who did not participate in the programme (control group). Given that all first-year students are assigned a mentor during the welcoming period, the control group comprised of students who only participated in peer mentoring during the welcoming period or who did not participate at all. The experimental group comprised of students who participated in the programme beyond the welcoming period. The quasi-experiment was followed by focus group discussions, in phase 2, to explain the first data set.

Phase 1: Quasi-experiment

A standardised instrument, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), constructed by Baker and Siryk (2015), was employed to measure respondents' levels of adjustment. This instrument's multi-faceted approach to measuring adjustment to university was the primary reason for using the SACQ in this study. Other reasons included, amongst others, the fact that it is a widely used standardised instrument whose reliability and validity has been tested and proven. The SACQ is a 67-item self-report questionnaire that conceptualises adjustment along four adjustment domains: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment (attachment). The instrument yields a full-scale score for overall adjustment to university as well as scores in four subscales for the different adjustment domains (Baker & Siryk, 2015). The SACQ was administered at two points in time: in March 2017 (pre-test version) and again in October 2017 (post-test version), to measure the post-intervention adjustment for both groups. A total of 1,064 respondents completed the pre-test version (response rate of 21.18%) and 425 respondents completed the post-test version (response rate of 8.46%). The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Only completed questionnaires were analysed. Once the data had been checked, the quality of scores from the SACQ was examined to assess the reliability of the instrument itself. Cronbach alpha calculations were $>.80$ for all the adjustment subscales as well as for the overall adjustment score, indicating an acceptable reliability score. This was followed by a distribution of the demographic variables for the pre- and for the post-test samples.

Inferential statistics were thereafter employed to analyse and compare the responses to the questionnaires from the two groups, pre- and post-intervention, in order to determine whether the experimental group had in fact benefitted from participation in the peer mentoring programme, as indicated by higher scores on the SACQ. The null hypothesis was that there would be no significant change in adjustment between the control group and experimental group in the post-test results. Analysis of variance was performed on the pre-test and post-test adjustment scores. For the pre-test, the differences in adjustment between the two groups were analysed. In the post-test the changes in the adjustment of these two groups, over time, were compared.

Phase 2: Focus group discussions

For the second data strand, focus group discussions were facilitated. Focus group discussions were employed to collect the qualitative data because of the interactive nature of this method. As stated by Creswell (1998), focus group discussions are ideal in contexts where the interaction amongst participants is likely to yield the best information. This method enables discussion to develop and responses by one participant might trigger reflection by another (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Morgan, 1997). Five focus group discussions were facilitated with a total of 22 participants. A semi-structured interview schedule was used, informed by the results from the quasi-experiment. The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Interview transcripts were

analysed according to accepted qualitative analysis procedures of coding and re-coding, categorising and interpreting, using the content analysis method. Inferences were then made from both data strands.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University. Due to ethical concerns, the researchers opted for a quasi-experiment as having a randomized control group would have meant that participation in the programme would intentionally have been withheld from some students to form a control group. The licensing fee of the questionnaire used in the study was funded by Stellenbosch University. All standard ethical considerations were respected (confidentiality, informed consent, debriefing, right to withdraw participation) and consent was received from all participants.

Research Findings

Questions on demographic details included in the SACQ were gender, race, language, nationality, geographic origin, living environment, parents' educational background and grade 12 results. Factorial analysis of variance was used to determine whether the demographic variables had any influence on difference in adjustment between groups and over time. No significant demographic interaction effects were found, meaning that the demographic variables did not influence the main results, namely group and time differences.

Adjustment scores from the SACQ

The overall adjustment scores from the pre-test data were compared with the adjustment scores from the post-test data. Analysis of variance was calculated to determine whether there was any statistically significant difference in the overall adjustment of the two groups. No statistically significant difference in post-test adjustment scores for the two groups ($p=0.7916$) was found. For the pre-test, Cohen D effect sizes showed a small difference between the two groups (0.3 small), and in this instance the control group had higher adjustment scores. For the post-test, however, the difference between the two groups was smaller (0.12 negligible), because the adjustment of the experimental group increased from the pre-test, while the adjustment of the control group showed a decrease. Despite the lack of a statistically significant difference in the overall adjustment of the two groups, this trend does suggest that participating students could have derived some benefit from participation in the programme, but that this was not as significant as the programme had intended it to be.

No statistically significant differences ($p<0.05$) were found between the two groups over time for any of the subscales either. The following p-values were found for the subscales: attachment $p=0.06078$, personal-emotional adjustment $p=0.07740$, academic adjustment $p=0.15205$, and social adjustment $p=0.25824$. As mentioned, none of the

demographic variables influenced the main results, namely group and time differences, for any of these subscales or the overall adjustment scores.

The results from the quasi-experiment raised questions about the extent to which the programme was actually assisting first-year students to adjust to campus. To understand these results, particularly why participating students were not optimally benefitting from participation in the peer mentoring programme, focus group discussions were facilitated in the second phase of this mixed-method study.

Results of the focus group discussions

Five focus group discussions were facilitated with four or five students each, giving a total of 22 participants. The focus group discussions were facilitated by one of the researchers, guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. Fourteen of the participants (63.64%) were female students, while eight (36.36%) were male students. The vast majority of the participants lived in university residences (86.36%), while only three participants (13.64%) lived in private accommodation. The participants were racially diverse: 36.37% were black African, 31.82% were coloured and 31.82% white.

Intensity of peer mentoring

The intensity of mentoring received emerged as a central theme during the focus group discussions. We use the term “intensity of peer mentoring” to refer to the level of involvement (support and/or guidance) the mentors invested in their first-year mentees. Some participants experienced high intensity mentoring, that is their mentors were actively supporting them through their first year (they were committed), and this assisted first-year students in adjusting to campus life. However, not all first-year students experienced the same level of support or involvement from their mentors, resulting in less intense mentoring. These students’ mentors were less involved after the welcoming period, and therefore the first-year students did not benefit much from participation in the programme. The focus group discussions provided in-depth insights into what contributed to the differences in the intensity of mentoring received.

Factors influencing the intensity of peer mentoring

Two main factors influenced the intensity of the peer mentoring: (1) the nature of the peer mentoring relationship and (2) the nature of mentor-mentee interaction. First-year students who experienced intense peer mentoring described the relationship they shared with their mentors in positive terms. They described their mentors as their advisors, a go-to person or a friend, and in these instances the peer mentoring assisted them in their adjustment. Respondent 2, for example, said:

You become friends, so it's like this whole, not hierarchy, but they know more than you, they then teach you until the point where you guys know an equal amount of information. (R2)

With less intense peer mentoring, the relationships were not as close and supportive. In some instances, the mentors served as a resource to their mentees (i.e. provided

information that was useful to their adjustment). This held some benefit, but the mentor did not provide guidance or serve as that “go-to-person” to support mentees during the first year. Respondent 17 shared:

It wasn't as close of a relationship ... when I need directions, I just go to her. But we didn't have a close relationship. (R17)

In other instances, the mentor-mentee relationship was experienced as quite distant, with minimal or no benefits experienced by first-year students, as articulated by Respondent 18:

I think she'd be like a distant acquaintance; I think. Yes, that's how I would describe it. (R18)

The nature of the mentor-mentee interaction emerged as the second reason for the differences in the intensity of peer mentoring received, as well as the platform used for mentor-mentee interaction. Three modes of interaction were identified: WhatsApp messages, group sessions and one-on-one interactions with individual mentees. Individual contact was experienced as most beneficial. When only group sessions were used to engage with mentees, they became a barrier to the mentoring relationship and resulted in less intense peer mentoring received, as expressed by Respondent 8:

And because it's in a group I don't think you can interact, and be like, I'm not fine, and that stepping forward to someone that you kind of are still a stranger to. Cause we never actually got to know the mentor properly. (R8)

Factors contributing to the nature of the peer mentoring relationship were also identified from the focus group discussions. Mentor attributes, time invested in mentoring, reasons for mentoring and the wellness component of the programme all contributed to the nature of the peer mentoring relationship and consequently the intensity of peer mentoring.

Mentor attributes

A genuine interest in their mentees and a sincere desire to be there for them, emerged as important mentor attributes that foster a good peer mentoring relationship, as illustrated by the responses given below:

Show interest. Actually, care about the person, not just do it because it is their job as a mentor. (R13)

I think genuine interest. Not just doing it to do it, but to actually want to be there and making sure that your mentees feel seen and wanted to be there. (R4)

Unfortunately, not all mentees experienced their mentors as genuinely caring and invested in them. When this was absent, mentors were perceived as only performing their duties as an obligation, as articulated by Respondent 12:

He had to help me. That's what it felt like. I didn't feel like he wanted to. (R12)

The second mentor attribute that fostered a good peer mentoring relationship was expressed as being “relatable”, as seen from the following responses:

I feel like we're just looking for a person who's going to be able to relate to us. (R17)

He was much more relatable, and we just spoke easily. (R10)

What students meant by relatable, was that mentors should have an openness to them and show empathy, especially for their struggles as first-year students. When mentees experienced their mentors as relatable, they were more open and engaging with their mentors, which contributed to a positive peer mentoring relationship. In contrast, a perception of not being relatable led to distance in the peer mentoring relationship.

Time invested in mentoring

The time that the mentors invested in mentoring affected the nature of the peer mentoring relationship. Mentors who invested time and availed themselves to their mentees fostered a stronger peer mentoring relationship, as explained by Respondent 16:

It was really a good experience because my mentor was there at all times. So, whenever I needed help, she was there ... (R16)

In contrast, when mentors did not invest enough time, there was no real connection between the mentor and mentee, as expressed by Respondent 15:

She couldn't connect with us. She never really did make an effort in that sense, trying to be like, so, you know, what are you doing? (R15)

Reasons for mentoring

Reasons for mentoring also emerged as a factor contributing to the nature of peer mentoring relationships. Intense peer mentoring was facilitated by mentors who were perceived as genuinely motivated to support first-year students. Respondent 18 explains what makes a good mentor:

I think personally a good mentor is someone who doesn't particularly have an agenda in the sense that by them becoming a mentor they aim to gain something. (R18)

In contrast, other mentors were perceived as being driven by personal gain. Respondent 2 explains:

I felt like after looking back at it and after we've done ... everything I felt like the reason she was a mentor was to become or to have a single room, to get enough room points to have a single room. (R2)

Administration of the wellness component of the programme

The logging of wellness sessions became a barrier to intense mentoring at times. Some participants expressed their frustration with the administration of the programme, as expressed by Respondent 15:

We had to do formal things instead of it just being about talking. Now there were cards and we had to log in and it took away from the intimacy of having that kind of mentor/mentee relationship.
(R15)

To some participants, the administrative requirements of the programme were too time consuming for mentors and/or mentees and detracted from the primary focus (i.e. time invested in the peer mentoring relationship).

Discussion

The results of the study suggest that the programme assisted some students with their adjustment, but that it did not to a great extent contribute to the adjustment of participating students. This finding differed from other studies that showed more positive results. Studies like those of Swart et al. (2019) and Yüksela and Bahadır-Yılmaz (2019) and Etzel et al. (2018) showed more positive results on the contribution of the peer mentoring programme to the adjustment of first-year students. The differences in adjustment outcomes, found in our study, underscore the importance of scientific studies on the outcomes of student support programmes such as the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme. We can no longer rely on anecdotal reports alone, as these are generally positive and may not accurately reflect what is happening with the programme implementation and/or outcomes.

The level of mentee participation influenced the programme outcomes, as previously underscored by Smith (2007), Goff (2011), and Tremblay and Rodger (2003). However, the study went a step further by providing valuable insights into the factors that influenced the level of participation from mentees. The intensity of mentoring received was central to the level of participation from first-year mentees. First-year students who experienced high intensity mentoring reported greater benefits, as their mentors were more involved and offered the needed support to help them adjust in their first year. When intense peer mentoring occurred, students experienced the mentor as an advisor, supporter and a resource, as per the definition of the mentor proposed by Campbell and Campbell (1997), and this helped them with coping and adjusting in their first year. In the event of low intensity peer mentoring, this role was not fulfilled by the mentors, as the mentors were either absent or, after the welcoming period, mainly provided their mentees with information. Consequently, for these mentees, the programme did not assist them with their adjustment, as more intentional mentoring beyond the welcoming period was needed.

The role that the mentor played in the intensity of the peer mentoring emerged as a central theme in the focus group discussion. While this raised concerns about the implementation of the programme by some individual mentors, the findings also provided us with insight on the attributes of the ideal mentor that the programme should be more intentional in recruiting.

In addition to the mentor attributes, the study further underscored the differences in how the mentors interacted with mentees. Group sessions were most commonly used for

mentor-mentee contact. This could be due to the requirement that all mentors facilitate the six wellness sessions with their mentor groups. However, group interaction has to be supplemented with one-on-one engagements, as this is more effective in fostering a strong peer mentoring relationship and makes first-year students more comfortable to reach out for guidance when needed.

Another important finding of the study was the unintended outcome of the wellness component of the programme. The administration thereof became a barrier to some students, as it was experienced as too time consuming, and at times it overshadowed the importance of investing time in building a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

In summary, it is important for higher education institutions to select appropriate mentors who will be intentional in their mentoring and to monitor more closely if mentors do so beyond the welcoming period. The following model for intentional mentoring is proposed to assist Stellenbosch University and other higher education institutions in strengthening their peer mentoring programmes:

Table 1: A proposed model for intentional mentoring

A model for intentional peer mentoring	
The aim of the model is to select intentional mentors who will facilitate high intensity peer mentoring.	
Mentor selection	Focus on selecting intentional mentors. This can be facilitated through selection practices that focus on our proposed mentor attributes.
Mentor attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caring: shows a caring attitude to mentees - Genuine: shows a genuine interest in helping mentees - Invested in the mentoring relationship - Relatable: open and empathetic to mentees
Reasons for mentoring	Primarily to support mentees. Mentors should not be primarily driven by personal gain. However, mentors can pursue personal growth while genuinely supporting others.
Contact time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual contact - Group contact (if applicable), but not replacing individual contact. - Informal contact aimed at building a peer mentoring relationship and showing interest in their mentees. - Formal contact, as indicated.
Administration	Administration for mentors and mentees to be kept simple and minimal.
Monitoring	Monitoring systems to track the level and nature of mentor-mentee interaction should be implemented.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of the study is that it focused only on the perspectives of the mentees. In the focus group discussions, gaps pertaining to how mentors implemented the programme were identified. These gaps were expressed from the perspective of the first-year students and did not account for the perspective of the mentors. Future studies

aimed at understanding the experiences of the programme from the mentor perspective are recommended. Furthermore, the study was context-specific and its contribution is practice-based. The results are, therefore, not necessarily generalisable to other contexts, but the proposed model for peer mentoring could assist institutions with similar programmes.

Conclusion

This study found that the BeWell Peer Mentoring programme was not reaching its intended adjustment outcomes, and also surfaced some reasons for why this was not being achieved. In addition, the study has brought about an appreciation for the complexities inherent in the implementation of peer mentoring programmes. We trust that the results, and particularly the proposed model of intentional peer mentoring, will be of use to all higher education institutions offering peer mentoring programmes.

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How to cite:

McConney, A., & Fourie-Malherbe, M. (2022). Facilitating first-year student adjustment: Towards a model for intentional peer mentoring. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 10(2), 163-177. DOI: 10.24085/jsaa.v10i2.3781