

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING IN NIGERIA: A NEGLECTED VARIABLE IN NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

Apprenticeship is a viable but an under used solution for the problems of training affecting the industrial community, employment, and consequently national development. This paper highlighted through a review of literature and an empirical study how the apprenticeship mode of training can be adapted to meet the challenges of manpower development in Nigeria in the next decades.

Introduction

For a nation to progress socially and experience technological growth, emphasis should be placed on the development of man who is responsible for the transformation of the resources. It is a recognized fact that for any sustainable development, investment in man is superior and more durable than any infrastructural development or the building of machines.

Education for development is usually to impart on the learner some form of skills in any of the domains of education namely; cognitive, affective or psychomotor. Any or all of these can be adequately harnessed for national development. The importance of providing skilled manpower is recognized in Nigeria and finds expression in the National Policy of Education NP11, (1977) in the following statements among others:

- (a) To provide manpower in applied science, technology and commerce, particularly at the sub-professional levels.
- (b) To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

The Federal and State Governments in their desire to achieve the objectives of the National Policy actually reorganized and substantially expanded technical and vocational institutions particularly during the third national development plan period of 1975 -] 980 (Aghenta, 1982).

However, such re-organization, expansion and even the subsequent adjustments did nothing to improve the apprenticeship training situation in Nigeria. The various levels of government in Nigeria did not show enough concern in this area. It is thus left in the hands of the private sector. And the private sector has run it without any form of co-ordination or guiding statements either from among themselves or from government. This apparent negligence is rather unfortunate especially when one considers the fact that apprenticeship training is one important way of solving the national unemployment problem.

The objective of this paper is to identify the need for apprenticeship system of training in nation building and to suggest ways in which the government (Federal and State) can streamline and co-ordinate this mode of manpower development with a view to improving and harnessing it to meet the challenges of the next decade.

Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of this paper, apprenticeship may be considered as a system of learning whereby an individual learns a professional skill in a practical way through a structured program of on-the-job training. It usually involves acquiring knowledge, mechanical skills and the development of an attitude or discipline for a particular job. Craig and Bittel (1967) opined that: apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related technical instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a skilled occupation, craft or trade. Anyanwu (1981) expatiated further that apprenticeship may also take the form of helping new employees to relate their previous education to the requirement of their new job.

Apprenticeship also incorporates a system of guidance and counselling as most apprentices are required to live with their masters so as to acquire through a process of acculturation the necessary altitude, diplomacy and decorum required for the job. It is the combination of (hese depositions that make graduates of apprenticeship training entrepreneurs instead of job seekers.

Curriculum, on the other hand, may he operationally defined as the program of training

through which learners pass to an intended goal. This means that all the activities done by the apprentice or experiences acquired by him in or outside the workshop under the guidance of his master constitute his training program and thus his curriculum.

Apprenticeship Training: An Overview

Apprenticeship as a means of thoroughly learning the intricacies of a trade has been well adapted to modern industries to meet work force needs. Even with innovations in industry, experience has shown that the learner masters a skilled trade only by diligently repeating job operations under capable supervision until they are fully mastered.

Apprenticeship, according to Hayei (1982) reaches back through 18th - 19th century to the journey-man system of Western and Northern Europe, the guild system of medieval Europe, and the artisan system of ancient Greece and Rome, of the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi which 4000 years ago adjured masters to train their craft to the youth.

Craig and Bittel (1967) explained that apprenticeship was not restricted to artisanship alone. It was also the vehicle for instruction in medicine, law and education. They stated further that as recently as the 1920s, it was possible in the U.S. for a man to read law in the office of a local attorney. This was a form of apprenticeship and guidance which after an extended period of study was followed by the apprentice taking a governmentally supervised examination which when passed legalized his practice of law. In Nigeria, apprentices lived with their masters and received no pay except maintenance and training. After their period of training and after satisfying the required standard of proficiency in that particular trade, the apprentice then graduates to a journeyman status. The journeyman is a worker who has passed from the stage of apprenticeship but is not yet qualified to be a master, they work under a master to receive more experience especially in management, leadership and customer handling. The journeyman receives a fixed wage for his labour.

Apprenticeship is a form of vocational training. Aghenta, (1992) noted that:

Vocational education emphasizes the preparation and participation in occupations of social value designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis.

In spite of this, Ogunowo (1991) opined that apprenticeship has a definite advantage over the formal vocational training as long as there is good correlation between job requirements and on-the-job training. He argued further that:

On-the-job training under an apprenticeship scheme is likely to produce much more highly qualified workforce, due to its close relationship with the production process and greater competence of the instructors. Moreover, there is the added advantage that industries tend to bear the cost of training which constitute a financial burden to schools.

According to Bequel and Meyers (1965) apprenticeship system of training keeps away youths from the abusive and exploitative conditions of child labour. They argued that: If it is assumed that certain children are going to work, perhaps out of economic necessity, no matter what attempts are made to discourage them, then one way to keep them out of work that is hazardous is to provide them with employment that is safe by offering them vocational and other training to help prepare the participating children in life skills.

However, there is the risk that apprenticeship in some workshops may degenerate into child labour. Consequently, master craftsmen need to be aware of child labour laws. Their role must be that of in-loco-parentis especially critical in the protection of their wards who have initially no negotiating power in the labour market, and are therefore the least able to protect themselves. Because of this and the peculiar economic situation in Nigeria which has made parents to turn their children into street

hawkers or household helps in a bid to augment the family income, this paper posits that for apprenticeship to really develop and fill the need for skilled manpower and entrepreneurs, the minimum age for admission into apprenticeship should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling, which in Nigeria is not less than fifteen years.

It is popularly said that one of the most traditional and best known measures for promoting education at the same time as vocational skills is the apprenticeship system. But in Nigeria, its considerable potential for educating and training large numbers of poor children while offering them work in safe

condition has rarely been explored. Government can play an effective role in promoting this system through organizing a sort of formal training for apprenticeship and by setting out the conditions under which apprenticeship may be engaged. Sequel (1991) summed up this view thus: Child labour cannot be abolished so long as poverty persists. The best that can be done is perhaps to legitimize child employment and to ensure that child workers are provided with legal protection and adequate training through the apprenticeship system.

The relationship between master and apprentice in Nigeria is based on a contractual agreement between the parent/guardian of the child and the master of the workshop or trade. This agreement in its general terms stipulates that the parents give out his child to be trained in a specified trade by the master craftsman for a definite period of time until the child acquires the necessary skill to set up on his own. For this period of training, the parents may or may not make a financial deposit. It is however understood by both parties that the apprentice would live with the master who shall care for him. The apprentice on his own must help with the domestic chores. Furthermore, the contribution of the apprentice in the workshop or trade shall not earn any wage. It is more of a father-son relationship than the formal teacher - pupil relationship of the school.

It is on the premise of the above that the apprentice training scheme of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) failed. The Federal Government as a result of the uproar against unemployment and the persistent call for a definite policy of action, instituted the apprentice training scheme, and in doing so flouted the age old principles, norms and values of the apprenticeship tradition. For instance, the relationship between the master and apprentice became formalized; the apprentice had to come to work from his home, following the government approved working hours, the apprentice draw a wage directly from Government whether or not he had learnt anything, consequently, the master had no direct control over the apprentice. The result is truancy of the apprentice and finally failure of the scheme. This paper is however of the opinion that the ease with which Government abandoned the scheme is an admission of improper planning and vision, a lack of commitment, and a poor desire to face challenges. The apprentice scheme can be resuscitated, its principles, norms and values respected, then built and strengthened into a veritable scheme for national development. One way of doing this is to incorporate the apprentice training scheme into the formal school system.

Apprenticeship: The Contemporary Situation

A survey was conducted in Kogi State with the aim of soliciting from apprentices of various trades, their contemporary situation and desire for the future. Questionnaires were distributed to 100 apprentices in various trades spread in the Central and Western Senatorial Districts of Kogi State. They were collected back immediately after responses had been made. The opinions were collated and studied using percentile analysis. Among the questionnaire items were the following:

- (a) Why were they in training, instead of school?
- (b) Are they satisfied with their choice of trade?
- (c) Do they think they can learn as much in the conventional school system as in apprenticeship?
- (d) Would they like to combine their apprenticeship training with formal schooling?

The result of the survey research was straightforward and unambiguous. For instance, 80% (80) of the respondents claimed that were in training because they lacked sponsorship to go to school. 15% (15) were in it out of choice (theirs or parental). But as a matter of fact all had dropped out of school at one stage of the other.

For the degree of satisfaction with their choice of trade only 25% (25) were satisfied with it. The reason for this is not far fetched; any job attained through apprenticeship training is not white collar and can rarely lead to the upper class of society. They were however all agreed on the fact that they can never learn as much of their trade in a conventional school as in the apprenticeship training. On whether they would like to combine their training, with formal schooling, 87% (87) of the respondents agreed, as long as school fees would not be required and they would be free to continue their training as apprentices.

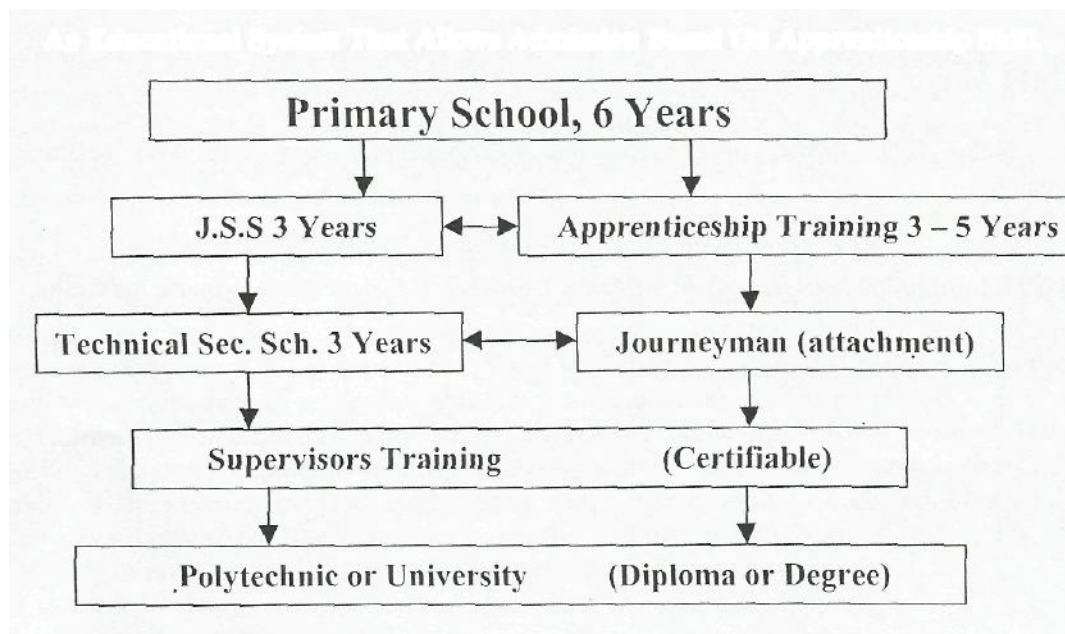
From the result of the survey, the following inference can be drawn. The contemporary mode of apprenticeship training is only suitable for middle level manpower since the trainees are limited by their level of education and risk of their experience quickly becoming obsolete in the face of fast changing technology. Although the apprentices desire to further their education through conventional schools, they cannot afford the cost. Furthermore, government does not actually have a definite study program for apprentices where trainees of each trade can go to develop the theoretical knowledge of their trade while

still available for the day to day practical experience at the workshop.

Apprentices In School: A Curriculum Proposal

The apprenticeship training or training on-the-job has to be supplemented in certain vocational fields by training centres which have the capacity to teach more complex processes than are possible in the smaller workshops. A sort of dual system can be adopted whereby the practical training provided in the shop is backed up by a more theoretical study. The Government needs to put in place official guidelines to harmonize the curriculum of both places of training. For instance, during the theoretical training classes, students maybe grouped first according to their trade, then their year of apprenticeship and/or the degree of proficiency at their job. On completion of the training (practical and theoretical) the apprentice is evaluated and certified.

A slight modification of the above is rationalized on the fact that most apprentices are school dropouts, not necessarily out of poor performance but because of their economic situation. Subsequently however, their economic situation may improve creating a desire to go back to formal schooling. Unfortunately, age may not be on their side at this time so they may not wish to start at the point where they left off. It is therefore important for a school system that is more open for admission to be created especially for apprentices, so they can enter at any level their degree of practical competence qualifies them for. Cognitive attainment alone should not be used to determine admission. It is the contention of this paper for instance that a good motor mechanic can cope with the requirements of diploma in auto, engineering if he is not bugged down with too many theoretical details. In fact, Bishop (1981) suggested quite rightly that the public educational system will have to provide multiple entry points. So that a child can re-enter the formal school system at whatever point he is motivated to do so. The following figure provides in a flow chart how this can be done in the case of apprentices,



An Educational System That Allows Admission Based On Apprenticeship Skill.

The diagram above advocates for a system where functional or minimum literacy level should be the completion of primary school. Thereafter apprentices may start their training. During this training, they have the option of taking advantage of the day school system of secondary education where they can attend formal school in the morning and apprenticeship training in the evening. On completion of their apprenticeship training, they are certified and this should qualify them for admission into Polytechnic or University. Alternatively, they may re-enter the formal school system at the Junior or Technical Secondary School level whenever they feel motivated and are technically prepared to do so. This way their technical ability is augmented with theoretical knowledge and the scientific approach to doing things.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the apprentice system of training is a viable mode of manpower development which if properly harnessed can be used cheaply to solve our employment problem. Different versions of it have been used all through history for such purpose. Its underdevelopment in Nigeria is rather unfortunate, however, this can be set right by putting in place a school system that recognizes or accepts psychomotor ability and/or potential as a basic requirement for admission. Furthermore, the traditional system of advancing educationally from one step to another according to a definite sequence must be liberalized in the ease of apprentices so that their practical skill can be used to compensate for any lack in cognitive attachment. If this is done, then Nigeria would be set ready to tap vast potential of a hitherto neglected cheap and efficient mode of manpower training.

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