Assessing skill capability of artisans and craftsmen in Nsukka industrial market, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Most tradesmen are trained through traditional apprenticeship system, hence ranked lowest in the labour market. Although, Nigerian artisans contribute significantly to skill acquisition and economic development, their poor training background seem to make them deficient to cope with current technological innovations and practices. For any teaching to be impactful, suitable training needs has to be standard; the survival strategies for entrepreneurship in a declining economy can be vested in training artisans, tradesmen and entrepreneurs who will man the small and medium enterprises for better economy.

Objectives: Assess strategies for teaching artisans and craftsmen in Nsukka Industrial Market; evaluate skill transfer process of master craftsmen to their apprentices; and to identify approaches for improving technical and theoretical skills of artisans and craftsmen.

Methodology: Descriptive survey design was used, questionnaire data from 544 registered tradesmen at the Nsukka Market was analysed using frequency and simple percentages.

Results: Independent learning by apprentice and introduction to visual demonstrations met rejection. The study also found illiteracy as a wedge in embracing new technological practices and equipment thereby slowing down creativity and entrepreneurship in the sector.

Conclusion: The training programme of artisans and craftsmen can be greatly enhanced through modern training in seminars, workshops, part-time & full-time and exposure through visits to other environments. Involvement of catalogues and manuals will eliminate waste of time and prevent apprentices learning by chance.

Unique Contribution: The traditional approach of tradesmen towards skill impartation was found to be prevalent; therefore, only modern methodologies and strategies can usher in creativity and entrepreneurship in improving the apprenticeship system.

Key Recommendation: Basic Education was recommended as benchmark to augment tradesmen's educational background for better performances.

Keywords: artisans; craftsmen; empowerment; poverty; skills, Nigeria

Introduction

Creativity is the status of an individual possessing skills and putting it to good use in order to change ideas or products into material that is valuable and can create wealth. Only recently, it has been proven that visual skills are becoming a sector to reckon with in supporting learners identify with their innate potential capacity; this is preparing individuals in becoming self-sufficient and self-reliant in situations of increasing unemployment (Umezulike & Amuche, 2011).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2012), titled *Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work* highlighted the imperative of investing in skills for youths which will increase their employability prospects. Skills mismatch which is capable of long-term damage is to be avoided in order to enhance human and productive resources for the young people. Right skill orientation can balance informal education with important distinct skills. Youth internship and voluntary outlook can

build up youth skills that also get better employability prospects, including entrepreneurship. Prospective young entrepreneurs who are trained in formal or informal sectors with skills and technical know-how to manage small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are capable of boosting production (Panke, 2016; Okorie and Ezeji, 1998). The saturation of SMEs in urban and rural areas will equally help in job creation and poverty reduction in Nigeria parallel to China, Singapore and other industrialised nations of the world. The time for trainers to make a paradigm shift from traditional training to evolving instructional strategies in order to support apprenticeship system develops the 21st century skills is now. Panke, (2016) stressed the need to incorporate life and career skills; flexibility and adaptability; initiative and self-discipline; productivity and accountability as these are skills necessary for job creation and achieving holistic development of the apprentice which is capable of withstanding exigent life circumstances. The need to introduce vibrant and impactful apprenticeship programmes to improve skills, entrepreneurship and literacy in informal sector cannot be over emphasised (Akpen-Ade, 2021) for our society to move forwards.

An artisan or craftsman is a potential industrialist, who is eager and keen in taking commercial risks for productive reasons. Such artisans have a tough craving for independence, he works at something that fascinates him and operates for prestige (Eneh, 2010). Majority of craftsmen learn creative and entrepreneurial skills through apprenticeship system in an informal setting. Apprenticeship training is any learning of trade through internship under the direction of the master. It embraces any form of arrangement that young people bond themselves to serve and learn for a specific period of time under a master who agrees to teach his own trade to the apprentice (Okorie and Ezeji, 1998). This is the case with tradesmen at Nsukka Industrial Market, Enugu State, Nigeria. Contemporary nature of apprenticeship is characterised by a written or oral contract between the master and the apprentice. The apprentice system in Nigeria is widely practiced by subjecting the apprentice to learn from the master by imitation, recitation, observation, imagination, and repetition of the trainers performances and morals (Oloidi, 1989). Ijaiyo (2009) questioned quality assurance of apprenticeship system in Nigeria as it lacks checks and balances; devoid of regular and effective supervision. Apprenticeship system can engage assessment mechanisms in order to obtain important feedback about ability to learn and relate the content of the training they received to the reality of job demand (Markgraf, 2017 and Olatunji, and Adewale, 2019).

Scholars have documented concisely to show that early apprenticeship system gave rise to the development of vocational education in Nigeria, as evident in the traditional crafts and arts available in most parts of Nigeria, such as weaving, carving and iron mongering among others (Oloidi 1989; Okorie and Ezeji, 1998 and Oloidi 2011).

Craftsmen are hands-on workforce that relies absolutely on creative ingenuity and daily experiences in executing works and services to the specification of customers; they improve their standard of living in the process (Akosile, 2007). Artisans are deficient in formal training therefore, ranked low on the professional ladder even though their services are important to the public. The only way to redeem their image and improve on their products and services is exposure to modern methods and practices of production.

Entrepreneurship, Methods and Equipment

The poor training background of the artisans and craftsmen make them deficient in skill acquisition and knowledge, therefore, coping with advances in technological innovations posses a big challenge. They continue to do work with ‘trial and error or traditional method’ which waste time, waste materials and damage tools in the process, this pertain danger to businesses that aim to make profit and sustain living standards (Umezulike & Amuche 2011). Technological improvement has made products better, easier and more cost effective to benefit both artisans and final consumers. The abundance of diverse

vocational skills and creativity among artisans and craftsmen cannot be utilised due to poor state of equipment and experts to be in charge of such impactful skills to produce excellent results (Akpen-Ade, 2021).

These technical innovations also introduce challenges in vocational and technical education in Nigeria as these modern methods, equipment and work tools necessitated new skill competencies from artisans and craftsmen (Uwameiye & Iyamu, 2002), especially in Nsukka Industrial Market like elsewhere in the advanced societies of the world for better performance.

For citizens of a nation to attain any meaningful personal ambitions, as well as cooperatively contribute towards development, they need to embrace entrepreneurship because it is the most important factor that boosts development in developing nations like Nigeria. Despite differences in economic development, artisans and craftsmen who are motivated always take full advantage of economic achievement. Klamer (2012) and Oloidi (2011), visualizes entrepreneurship along with skill training as major ingredients of modern businesses as apprentice need to study not only usual subjects such as material or technique but also the socio-cultural and economic context of their future work.

Scholars like Getlein, (2002) and Klamar, (2012) share a common ground that traits like broad understanding, innovation, exceptional reaction to situations and solving problems, and finding out how they work are abilities of creative apprentice who put things back in a coherent order. Teaching skill in order to compete in the labour market is not good enough as apprentice need to acquire effective work habits (Idoko, 2014). The author buttress youth empowerment to engage different methods that can be made possible for youth to cause changes in their lives.

In a different contour, Marimuthu, Arokiasam, and Ismail, (2009), places premium on human resources above any other resource. They viewed human capital as a process of combining training alongside professional initiative like knowledge, skills, abilities and values which leads to individual's satisfaction in performance. The welfare of apprentice should occupy centre stage in any meaningful development which must be evaluated using people's capacity to chat a new cause they value (Enu-Kwesi & Asitik, 2012; Irivwieri, 2009).

An artisan is a skilled manual worker who makes items that may be functional or strictly decorative, including tools and machines. Craftsmen engage in the practice of a craft and gains expertise mainly from constant hands-on job exposure. In a traditional setup, artisans and craftsmen practice their trade in different media like wood, glass, metals, basketry, weaving, grass, pottery and leather works among others. Artisans and craftsmen usually make use of creativity as well as labour-intensive agility to produce goods (Eneh, 2010). These set of producers dominated production of goods and other services before the emergence of industrial revolution of 18^{th} and 19^{th} Century Europe and North America, correspondingly (Oloidi, 2011). Artisans also dominated Nigerian land space during the 1950s through early 1980s as they constituted a significant percentage of between 30 – 35% of Nigerian population. In this way, artisans were able to produce aesthetics, refinement, congenial and much of excitement for the citizens to take pleasure in life (Oloidi, 1989).

In Nigeria the creativity of artisans, technicians and craftsmen may be considered awesome (Adebowale, 2010) but poverty as a result of lack of opportunity, poor infrastructural development among others has always denied such tradesmen from translating such wealth of ideas into money. Research abounds to demonstrate that entrepreneurship and skill acquisition is more common among individuals suffering from oppression through marginalization, and suppressed through discrimination. They are also mistreated based on conditions presented by political misrule (Gilder in Muogbo & John-Akamelu, 2018).

Creativity: Creativity is the ability to generate, to create, or to discover new ideas, solutions, and possibilities of dealing with life problems. Outstanding discoveries, insights and developments do not happen in a vacuum (Kozulin, 1990). Creativity is the organization of our future behaviour which creates a transformed individual (Vygotsky, 1971). On key aspects that relate to human activity, compared to creativity theory, the postulations of Vygotsky indicated that all human beings, including children, are creative but efforts must be made to bring out such creativity. (Lindqvist, 2003). Even though creativity may usually be connected with the arts, it is in reality a very important form of intelligence which propels individuals of different backgrounds to become conscious of an original thing and share with the world.

In acknowledging the pivotal role of vocational and technical education, Ogakwu (2011) assured that quality training brings about essential competencies that can support sustainable ideas of any society. Getting hold of skills via apprenticeship system more often than not boost labour market through empowering unskilled, unemployed, underemployed and vulnerable youths for sound social living and inclusion. Skill empowerment also curbs youth restiveness, prevent crime and lessen poverty (Aminu, 2009). The study therefore, attempt to find out the creative and innovative competencies of the artisan and craftsmen, transfer methodology and the way forward for improving the apprenticeship programme in Nsukka Industrial Market, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study: Assess strategies for teaching artisans and craftsmen in Nsukka Industrial Market; evaluate skill transfer process of master craftsmen and artisans to their apprentices; and identify approaches for improving technical and theoretical skills of artisan and craftsmen. **Research Questions**: What are the strategies for teaching creative and innovative skills of artisans and craftsmen? How these skills are transferred from master craftsmen to apprentices? How can the technical and theoretical skills of apprenticeship programme be enhanced?

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey research design focuses on people, vital facts of people and their beliefs, opinions, attitude and behaviour. Therefore, 544 registered self-employed craftsmen within Nsukka Industrial Market who operate under **Association of Self-Employed Artisans and Craftsmen** form the population, there was no need for sampling as all of them were considered (See Table 1 below). Questionnaire and Participant Observation were the primary instruments for data collection. A 4-point Likert Scale of *Strongly Agree (**SA***), *Agree (**A**),Strongly Disagree (**SD**)* and *Disagree (**D**)* were used to collect data while frequency and simple percentages analysed the data. For the illiterate participants, the questionnaire was interpreted to them in 'Pidgin English or Igbo language'. Participants' observation was also carried out through visits to artisan's workshops while pictographic data was collected during such visits. Data was analysed using frequency and simple percentages.

Findings

The background check of artisans and craftsmen in the study showed that majority of participants hold Ordinary Level Certificates and below – 92%; Ordinary National Diploma and its equivalent – 5%; Bsc / HND / MSc – 3%. Majority of respondents have been in business for more than five years and their apprentices have been in training for two years and above.

Table 1: Description of Respondents and their definite Trades

S/N	**TRADE**	**No. of Respondents**	**%**
I	Automobile Mechanics	248	45.5

Ii	Auto-Electrician	43	7.9
Iii	Metal Workers	157	28.8
Iv	Perspex Fabricators	18	3.3
V	Computer Colour Mixers	8	1.4
Vi	Graphic Artists/Designers	6	1.1
Vii	Upholstery Makers	24	4.4
Viii	Wood Works	4	0.7
Ix	Vulcanising	28	5.1
X	Alignment / Lubricators	8	1.4
Total		**544**	**100%**

Table 2 Research Question One: *What are the strategies for teaching artisans and craftsmen in Nsukka Industrial Market?* N – 544

S/N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	TOTAL AGREE	TOTAL DISAGREE	% AGREE	% DISAGREE	REMARKS
I	Adequate and modern functional working tools	361	183	66.3	33.6	Agree
Ii	Use of overhead projectors for presenting new Concepts	196	348	30.0	63.9	Disagree
Iii	Use of manuals and catalogues in the workshop	207	337	38.0	61.9	Disagree
Iv	Resource management skills to effectively utilize and avoid waste of limited tools, materials and equipment.	398	146	73.1	26.8	Agree
V	Organising field trips for artisans& Craftsmen to witness Skill display in other places	362	182	66.5	33.4	Agree
Vi	Basic knowledge of industrial production technique in trade	390	154	71.6	28.3	Agree
vii	Adapt and adopt new technological developments	401	143	73.7	26.2	Agree
viii	Initiation and implementation of new ideas	444	100	81.6	18.3	Agree
Ix	NGOs / Govt agencies usually organise trade fares / trade expo in the Nsukka industrial market	166	378	30.5	69.4	Disagree

The study identified possession and use of adequate and functional working tools and materials; 66.3% acceptance compared to 33.6 disagreement as some of the ways and strategies for teaching artisans and craftsmen in Nsukka Industrial Market. The use of overhead projectors and television for presenting new concepts and watching valid documentations met resistance with 63.9%, only 30% agreed to these learning devices as aiding training. The use of manuals and catalogues in workshops for displaying and presenting instructions was disagreed with 61.9% as against 38% agreement. Resource management skill is to effectively utilize and avoid the waste of limited tools, materials and equipment by trainers and trainees via new methods and techniques – 73.1% agreement and 26.8% disagreement. Organising field trips for artisans to witness skill display in other places got 66.5% approval and 33.4% rejection.

In the acquisition of basic knowledge in industrial production in trade, respondents agreed with 71.6%. In both adaptation to new technologies and also embrace initiation and implementation of new ideas, artisans had 73.7% and 81.6% positive responses respectively as opposed to 26.2% and 18.3% correspondingly. Organisation of trade fares by government or Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was aptly discarded with 69.4%, only 30.5% agreed.

Table 3 Research Question Two: *How these skills are transferred from master craftsmen to apprentices?* N – 544

S/N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	TOTAL AGREE	TOTAL DISAGREE	% AGREE	% DISAGREE	REMARKS
I	Allow apprentice to critically observe master's performance	383	151	70.4	29.6	Agree
Ii	Vernacular as a medium of instruction to Apprentices	377	167	69.3	30.7	Agree
Iii	Use of discussion techniques to teach	365	171	67.1	32.9	Agree
Iv	Giving minor projects to the apprentice to undertake	388	156	71.3	28.6	Agree
V	Independent learning with minor supervision	146	398	26.8	73.1	Disagree
Vi	Use of chalkboard to teach	171	373	31.4	68.5	Disagree
Vii	Use of demonstration and room to tryout such Expressions	414	130	76.1	23.9	Agree
Viii	Old apprentice usually teach younger and inexperience ones	403	141	74	25.9	Agree
Ix	Use of work manuals and catalogues	141	403	25.9	74	Disagree
X	Use of question to create critical thinking by Masters	173	371	31.8	68.2	Disagree
Xi	Masters do not take apprentices out of studio to Work	369	175	67.8	32.1	Agree

To answer the above research question two succinctly, the masters do allow apprentices to observe production procedure; 70.4% agreement to 29.6% disagreement; respondents established the use of vernacular as a medium of instruction by the master to the apprentice with 69.3% as opposed to 30.7% refusal. In the aspect of discussion method during practical sessions, respondents agreed with 67.1% presence of discussion as opposed to 32.1%; while 71.3% and 28.6% agreement and disagreement in that order. Independent learning by apprentice and also use of chalkboard were vehemently rejected with 73.1% and 68.5% respectively. The use of demonstration method for training (76.1% agree, 23.9% disagree) and allowing older apprentices to teach younger ones (74.0% agree, 25.9% disagree) showed evidence of keen observation and integration of various classes of learners for better output. There was low use of work manual and catalogues for training – 74 % disagree, 25.9% agree. In the same vein, masters don't pose questions to ginger critical thinking or allow questions that will challenge their authority; 68.2% disagree, 31.8% agree. It was generally agreed that masters don't take apprentices outside their workshop to work in other locations – 67.8% as contrasting 32.1% variance.

Table 4: Research Question Three: *How can the technical and theoretical skills of apprenticeship programme be enhanced?* N – 544

S/N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	TOTAL AGREE	TOTAL DISAGREE	% AGREE	% DISAGREE	REMARKS

I	Master artisans and apprentices need evening or part-time classes in technical colleges / centres	426	118	78.3	21.9	Agree
Ii	Nsukka artisan union should include deliberate training of members as part of their main agenda	368	176	67.6	32.3	Agree
Iii	Compulsory communication training programme for artisans in English language	321	223	59.	40.9	Agree
Iv	Routine examination for certification should be conducted for artisans & craftsmen by Ministry of Labour & Productivity	158	386	29.	70.9	Disagree
V	Organising seminars on how to improve on valuation and pricing of products & services	341	203	62.6	37.3	Agree
Vi	Encourage definition of information needs of every work brought	442	102	81.2	18.7	Agree
Vii	Introduction of compulsory basic education	220	324	40.4	59.5	Disagree
Viii	Enforcing mandatory workshop minimum standard by ministry of labour & productivity	313	231	57.5	42.4	Agree
Ix	Enforcing the use of training manual and catalogues	123	421	22.4	77.5	Disagree
X	Introduction of working visits to other workshops	108	436	19.8	80.1	Disagree
Xi	Exposure to trade-expo on new technologies, products & techniques	139	405	25.5	74.4	Disagree

Master artisans and craftsmen need evening or part-time training to enhance their performance – 78.3% acceptance and only 21.9% rejection by respondents. On the item of inclusion of Nsukka artisan union to make training part of its main policy, respondents seconded with 67.6% as opposed to 32.3%. Training in English language as a major medium of communication was accented to with 59% as compared to 40.9%; however, artisans turned down conduct of any examination (70.9% disagree) in preference to no evaluation by government agencies. On routine seminars on improving work valuation (62.2% agree) and information needs of every work brought (81.2% agree), agreement scored high in both cases. Compulsory basic education training met resistance with 59.5% disagreement as opposed to 40.4% agreement. Enforcement of compulsory minimum workshop standard was established– 57.5% agree and 42.4% disagree. Artisans and craftsmen rejected the rest of the items concerning use of training manual and catalogues (77.5 disagree); working visit to other shops by trainees (80.1% disagree) as well as organisation of trade expo / fares (74.4% disagree).

Discussion of findings

The study revealed among other things the level of gross incompetence as over 90% of artisans and craftsmen at Nsukka Industrial Market hold Senior School Certificates and below, this placed them at the lowest ladder of professionals in Nigeria. Only learning and retraining can address the imbalance and elevate them for better performance, status upgrade and better income generation. The heavy presence of apprentices at the Nsukka Industrial Market is an indication of meeting aspirations of apprenticeship training programme being the dominant method of training artisan and craftsmen to transfer practical skills to the younger generations. Eneh, (2010); Armstrong (2012) and Solomon (2008) collaborated that for any teaching to be important, proper preparation needs has to be

recognized; the survival strategies for entrepreneurship in a dwindling Nigerian economy is to a large extent vested in training artisans, tradesmen and entrepreneurs who will man the Small and Medium Enterprises for a robust economy.

On the technical and theoretical competency of tradesmen, the respondents rejected the introduction of compulsory basic education and rigorous seminars and workshops; this affirmation is based on low educational qualification. In agreement with this rejection, Enu-Kwesi, Asitik (2012) in a study found that many skill acquisition trainees disagreed on rigorous training but rather wish to concentrate on the work they know. As the master tradesmen are usually busy controlling apprentices and customers; they think participating in prolong training is a waste of time instead of making money.

The training programme of artisans and craftsmen can be greatly enhanced through training in seminars, workshop, part-time & full-time and exposure to visits in other workshops in different environments. Involvement of catalogues and manuals will ensure step-by-step approach in learning and teaching instead of the present day apprentice learning by chance. The strange stance signifies the secretive nature of master-trainers who also think exposure to more training is waste of time or exposure of their secret skills or trade to undeserving persons. As entry into apprenticeship system attracts payments (in kind or cash), only those who formally attach themselves to the master trainer are allowed to learn. It is also interesting to note that master trainers keep or delay exposure to some vital skills and practices until close to the time of graduation. We also learnt that this technique help in maintaining loyalty of the apprentice and keep the moral intact.

World Bank, (2010) align to this finding when they published those technologies through traditions are considered novel to a particular culture; it's about tough personality who is willing to gain knowledge from others. The organization concluded that creativity grows via continuous assessment and exposure to new environments through travel and engagement with exhibitions. Artisans gain proficiency by always indulging in hands-on products or services as skills endowed in individuals will do little if they are not exposed to meaningful training to help them become conscious of such gifts.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that tradesmen and artisans are currently not making good use of modern methods, equipment and techniques in apprenticeship training programme. This has slowed down the level of creativity and economic power of the artisans for better living standards. There is critical and urgent need to upgrade traditional apprenticeship training status to accommodate and reform teaching methodology to align with modern technology and trends of easing skill competency and entrepreneurship. This will remove the conservative traditional approach of tradesmen towards skill acquisition and usher in a new down of apprenticeship system in Nigeria. The study recommended basic education as requisite condition for entry into the apprenticeship system in Nigeria.

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