

Apprenticeship Culture among Traditional Tailors in Atiba Local Government Area in Oyo State, South-Western, Nigeria

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Abstract *This paper assessed the apprenticeship culture among the traditional tailors in Atiba Local Government Area of Oyo State. Adopting qualitative methods, specifically the Focus Group Discussion and In-depth Interview, the study found that apprenticeship among the traditional tailors is shaped by common framework of guiding principles. The nature of traditional apprenticeship culture also varies among the tailors. In addition the traditional apprentice also possesses some unique characteristics that distinguished them from the lbo apprentice. Furthermore, they have unbreakable relationships that make for their unity against masters. The paper suggests government involvement through adequate supply of electricity, soft loan, training and retraining for masters as well as the organization of extra mural centres for them. The tailors and their apprentices should be alive to new ways of doing their trade so as to be much more marketable.*

Key Words: *Apprenticeship, Traditional Tailors, Culture, Master, Vocation*

1. Introduction

Globally, it is believed that the passage from childhood to adulthood and from school to work was not problematic in the 50s and 60s because the labour market was buoyant with readily available jobs and apprenticeships (Bynner, 1991, Pollock, 1997; Roberts, 1984). It was observed that there were mass movement of young men from the classroom to the factories and building sites, while young women followed the pathways leading straight from school to shops, offices and factories (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). The availability of relatively secure work led to the assumption that other transitions could be smooth and easy. Therefore, leaving school at the earliest opportunity and going straight into full-time work has the advantage of making a young person becomes financially independent' (Pollock, 1997). Full-time jobs and apprenticeships became readily available for young men in the period up to the mid 1970s but there was very little guidance or preparation for work (Carter, 1966) and many approached the end of school life with few concrete ideas about what they wanted to do in life. In Nigeria, the former National Policy on Education made recommendations for a system of education that segmented the system into 6 years of primary education. The six years of primary education are part of the 6-3-3-4 system. The system was designed to allow an exit point after nine years of schooling to continue careers through apprenticeships or other vocational training programs. The objectives for primary education put emphasis on a balance between physical and intellectual development (Moja, 2000).

Apparently, it is clear that the connection between class background and type of school attended did, and indeed still does, determine in large measure the labour market opportunities available to individuals. However, it cannot be assumed from this that the school-to-work transitions were experienced as easy, comfortable or unproblematic at the time. The traditional apprenticeship culture in practice among informal economy operators has attracted increasing local and international interest not only at the level of academic research but also at the level of policy making. Unless out –

– school youths, who will constitute the next generation of adults, can acquire skills that can enable them to earn cash incomes either through wages or self employment, they cannot expect to escape from poverty and destitution since their lack of formal educational qualifications can only allow them to hold low paying menial jobs, which are not readily available (Kishindo, 1995). Perhaps the more engaging argument for research interest in traditional apprenticeship culture is the inability of the informal system to deliver the type of skills that are required to ensure lateral conversion of its 'graduates' into the formal sector economy. The cause of growing concern about this phenomenon may be the policy implications of the influx of this large number of youths into the apprenticeship scheme for future manpower development of the nation. This trend is not unexpected given that the system has proved to be a stable form of informal source of skill cultivation for much of contemporary youths that has been experiencing high level of unemployment, skill mismatch and poverty most especially in the rural and semi-urban areas. Its enduring prevalence is also noticeably associated with the informal sector of the Nigerian economy.

Ordinarily, the traditional informal apprenticeship is recognized everywhere as a powerful process of training for young persons in different skills and vocations. These forms of training are common among traders, auto-mechanics, carpenters, battery chargers, basket weavers, tailors, hairdressers and so on. If a child is apprenticed to any of these trades, such remains in training to receive instruction not only on the technical skills needed for the trade but marketing and other business skills. After the master is convinced that the young trainee has acquired the required competence, s/he grants permission for freedom or 'graduation' for the young person to openly and legitimately practise the learnt trade/vocation

It is noteworthy that this apprenticeship culture is not peculiar to Nigeria. The Nigerian experience is however different from what obtains elsewhere in which apprenticeship combines somewhat seamlessly with workplace and institutional leaning of theories with techniques of trade learning. It against this background that this study intends to study the apprenticeship culture among the informal economy with particular reference to the master-apprentice relationship among the tailors in Atiba Local Government area of Oyo State, Nigeria,

2. Literature Review

Apprenticeship is defined by the Encyclopedia (1988) as 'training in art under a legal agreement defining the relationship between master and learner and the duration and conditions of the relationship'. Encyclopedia (2001) traced the tradition of apprenticeship to before early 16th century when earliest artists usually acquired their skills mainly through various systems of apprenticeship. The apprentice learned his trade and practiced it under the instruction and supervision of a master. Typically, a boy was bound to a master at the age of 14 and served for seven years. This system was in force throughout most of the renaissance period. In the 17th century, the system changed so that an apprentice lived and studied in the house of a master for an indefinite period and was free to leave when he felt he had learned enough (Sanni & Alabi 2008)

Apprenticeship is an old institution, deeply rooted in a wide range of societies (Halpern, 2006). In its historical form, a young man in his teens apprenticed himself to a master of some craft or trade for a period of years, emerged as a journeyman, and was inducted into the guild that controlled practice of that craft or trade. In addition to specific skills, the apprentice was taught a set of principles and precepts by which to live and a sense of his place in the world. Although apprenticeship was not available to all youth and was not always a positive experience, it was seen as a safe passage from childhood to adulthood in the social, economic and psychological ways (Rorabaugh, 1986). However, It subsequently declined in its vocational form, with the growth of schooling and, especially, of factory work, with the division of labor into jobs that can be learned in the space of a few days or at most a few weeks during the industrial revolution.

Apprenticeship-like experiences in crafts and industrial arts nonetheless continued to be found in summer schools and after-school programs until the 1960s (Halpern, 2003). Although vocational apprenticeship declined dramatically in the United States, a number of European countries adapted it to the changed economic circumstances, integrating it with secondary education and private corporations' own training programs. During the 1990s, there was some debate about the potential for instituting a vocationally oriented youth apprenticeship system in the United States, stimulated by research on the German system (Bailey & Merritt, 1993; Hamilton, 1990; Rosenbaum, 1992). Such activity is not yet a full-scale movement, in part because sponsors are disparate, in part because it remains modest in scope, and in part because no one has focused on it as such.

It is probably against this background of more structured tradition of apprenticeship that Hamilton (1987), Heinz (1999), Silverberg, Vazsonyi, Schlegel, & Schmidt (1998) conceived apprenticeship as a formalized training and educational experiences that include on the job learning as well as specialized classroom instruction. However, drawing public attention to the disadvantage that characterises the blending of formal education with apprenticeship, Steinberg &

Avenevoli (1998) noted that subsequent empirical work has also provided some evidence that part – time employees were less committed to school and generally lower achievers prior to commencing a part time job. Disagreeing with the foregoing position, Staff, Mortimer, and Uggen (2004) pointed out that other studies conducted in the USA also provide evidence that youth may benefit from high quality jobs if they include mentoring experiences. But especially in the USA, Vazsonyi and Snider (2008) warned that few studies have been conducted in this area.

Apprenticeship provides experiences that actualize the new capacities that arrive with adolescence, whether for planning, managing and sustaining effort, regulating emotional states, developing the skills of judgment, reflecting and self-correcting, or other (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005).

Apprenticeship is characterized by a distinct adult-youth relationship (Halpern, 2005). The relationship is task focused, not youth focused. The apprentice has some volition, a fact important to youth, but the adult structures tasks to create a sequence tied to the apprentice's growing experience. The adult does some teaching and is authoritative, but he or she is also an "exemplar," modeling skilled practice and the general behavior of one with that particular identity (i.e., scientist, dancer, filmmaker). The adult's discourse is typically task oriented, concrete, and specific. Identification with the adult as a skilled professional in a particular discipline becomes, over time, one motive for learning and part of the learning process. The apprentice is motivated toward mastery in some measure by a desire to "become" his or her teacher (Litowitz, 1993)

In Nigeria, apprenticeship system arose as a family institution, as a means of supplying artisans for the various crafts then in existence and as a means of propagating the heritage of the family (Agboola & Olaoye (2008). Agboola (1985) identified the inclusion of refugees, war captives and bondsmen as other sources of recruitment of apprentices before colonialization. With colonialization, the British introduced new building materials and building designs which needed specialized training to use and construct. In addition, as the country developed economically, there were more bicycles, auto cycles, motor-cars and Lorries. There was need for men to service and maintain them. A new breed of occupations, distinct and different from the traditional ones thus emerged (Agboola, 1985; and Onasanya, 1998; Agboola & Olaoye, 2008).

There are diverse forms of apprenticeship which has replaced the old system of hereditary craft as the basic form of apprenticeship has given way to the processes of free recruitment in Nigeria. Agboola & Olaoye (2008) observe that since apprenticeship existed in the form of a relatively well developed and organized training system in the traditional crafts, it was not difficult to introduce, adapt and incorporate the new occupations into the existing apprenticeship system. Onasanya (1998) stressed that apprenticeship is a good means of teaching skill but it is not without its disadvantages, which include lack of programmed training. To him, in most cases, the masters teach their apprentices as work comes, not as planned, and there is lack of end-of-course test or examination to standardize the level of craftsmanship and differences in standards of craftsmanship from one employer or master to another.

Callaway (1965) observed that the duration of apprenticeship is either three or five years. Fees vary considerably by craft, and when the apprentice extends beyond five years, there is usually little or no fee paid. In some cases, small payments are made by the master to the apprentice and sometimes contributions in the form of food, clothing or shelter. Masters in the old crafts often accommodate apprentices in their houses, but this is less true in the new-line artisan workshops (Agboola & Olaoye, 2008).

3. Methods

Atiba Local Government is one of the 33 local governments in Oyo State. Its headquarters are in the town of Ofa Mefa. It has an area of 1,757 km² and a population of 168,246 at the 2006 census. Atiba local government is an agrarian town that hosts the Alafin of Oyo. It is one of the local governments within the Oyo axis of the state. Most of the inhabitants of this town are the indigents of Oyo as well as the royal family. Apart from being an agrarian community, it also play host to weavers, Oyo State is homogenous, mainly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group who are primarily agrarian but have a predilection for living in high density urban centers. The indigenes mainly comprise the Oyos, the Oke-Oguns, the Ibadans and the Ibarapas, all belonging to the Yoruba family and indigenous city in Africa, south of the Sahara.

Qualitative Method was used to collect information for the study. Both Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interview were employed in this study. For the in-depth interviews, 25 Masters Tailors were randomly chosen for interview within Atiba Local Government for the two days. While three sessions of Focus Group Discussions comprising of 10 respondents were held for selected apprentices in various locations within the Local Government. It took the researchers six days to organize these sessions after seeking the permission of the masters.

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

The study generated salient findings regarding apprenticeship culture among the tailors in informal economy operating in Oyo town of Atiba Local Government Area

The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents show that the age of owners (Masters) ranges between 32 and 77 years, while the ages of apprentice ranges between 15 and 25 years. The number of apprentice under the mentoring of the masters depends on the size of the shop in terms of availability of machines. The minimum numbers of apprentices admitted by owners were 2 while the maximum/highest number found in the course of the field research was 10 apprentices. Majority of the respondents practice Islamic religion, while few were Christians and some claim to be adherents of traditional religion.

4.2 Guiding Culture

The work of apprenticeship among the Traditional tailors is shaped by a common framework of guiding principles and required elements and by the specific goals set by each Master. The common principle includes: authentic tasks involved in the vocation, rituals, routines and rules guiding the conduct of the apprentice, paying attention to fundamentals, early success based on the determination and willingness to master the craft or vocation, identification of specific skills to be developed, a culminating product, event or performance, and some kind of community service which every apprentice must do before graduating. Within these guiding principles, the master focuses on two kinds of goals: those related to substantive mastery within the discipline and those relating to broad developmental capacities of the apprentices within the stipulated times to be spent on the vocation.

As expressed by one of the Masters (Trainers)

"We teach them the skills that they need to know to master the trade and also the knowledge they need to know to succeed in this trade"

4.3 Nature of the Traditional Apprenticeship Culture

The nature of the traditional apprenticeship culture varies among the tailors in Atiba Local Government. There are no laws guiding the number of apprentices to be recruited on daily, monthly or yearly basis. The system allows for free entry and exit of apprentice at will. This makes it difficult for the masters to have a clear number of trainees that have graduated under them from time to time. Most of the time, those who eventually stay and graduate and those that abscond after few days or weeks have been introduced to the fundamental of the vocation or skill such as the techniques or methods, materials, particular tools or technology, language, components or dimensions of skills or vocations needed. This is done by allowing the apprentices to begin to develop the approach of an expert the discipline. This means looking at one's own or others' work with a "knowledgeable eye" or developing an educated aesthetic sense. It means being able to visualize what the craft or vocation is all about. A higher level of expertise means being able to describe what one is doing or aiming for in a creative piece of work. As observed by one of the respondents

"It is very difficult to say how many people have been enrolled in a week, month or year. Most times when they bring them for apprenticeship, some will not stay longer than a day, some a week and some months. It is only those that finished their training programme that we can say have finally gone through the apprenticeship scheme"

As noted by Onasanya (1998) apprenticeship is a good means of teaching skill but it is not without its disadvantages, which include lack of programmed training. In most cases, the masters teach their apprentices as work comes, not as planned, and there is lack of end-of-course test or examination to standardize the level of craftsmanship and differences in standards of craftsmanship from one employer or master to another

On yearly basis, minimum of two and maximum of 5 apprentices were recruited irrespective of gender, cultural or religious affiliation. It was observed that apprenticeship in the Local Government were gender biased. That is, male owners recruits male apprentice while female apprentice were found with female owners. One noticeable feature of the traditional apprentice system of the tailoring is that no female apprentice was found with male owners and vice versa.

For tailoring, female owner sew only female dresses and male owners sew male dresses. Apprentices were not paid salaries, feeding, transportation and housing allowance. Parents or guardians are responsible for the upkeep of their wards for 2-3 years (minimum) training, depending on how fast the apprentice could learn. Contrary to Agbola and Olaoye (2008) assertion that in some case, that small payment are made by the master to the apprentice and sometimes contributions in the form of food, clothing or shelter. This was not the case with the apprenticeship culture among the Tailors in Atiba Local Government. Also, apprentice paid unspecified amount for the training programme. The amount charged varies, depending on relationship with the apprentice parents.

"We charge based on relationship with the apprentice family or relative. We charge a small amount of money but during graduation ceremony we collect some items from the parents of the apprentice as a form of blessing."

A minimum of primary school certificate is required for tailoring. Again, ethnic and religious affiliation has no barrier for enrolment. Most of the apprentices have kinship ties with their trainers. The profession becomes a generational occupation. Therefore, it means that ascribed generational occupations are still very much in existence in Oyo Kingdom.

"Most parents still want the children to learn their trade or vocation especially when they are successful, also it may be the decision of the child to learn the trade or maybe because someone in the family is successful in a chosen vocation"

Agboola and Olaoye (2008) noted that apprenticeship is a means of propagating the heritage of the family. Most times an apprentice may decide to opt out of the system as a result of not wanting to continue to propagate the heritage of the family. This is often the case for those young, under age apprentices who find it difficult to adjust to the reality of the work environment. They find it intimidating and not conducive. As pointed out by one of the respondents

"It is very common to have cases of drop-out from time to time. Some of the apprentices may have something in mind as against what their parents want them to do. The clash of interest results in drop out. Also some of these apprentices are just not ready for mentorship"

Most of these apprentices ordinarily wanted to get engaged in paid employment like something that would bring them income to sustain their livelihood. But their parents insisted that they must get a trade or vocation that would lead eventually to better prospects. This belief is based on the fact that if they are apprenticed for two to three years, they will be getting low wages or no wages at all. But as soon as they graduate and established their own business, they start earning big money and forget about their sufferings. It is common among the Yoruba, especially among the local people that a child that is not educationally sound should be enrolled for apprenticeship so that the child could be useful to himself and the society at large.

One noticeable features of this traditional apprenticeship culture is the compulsory community service that all trainees must render during their apprenticeship. It is pertinent to note that every trainee must serve his or her master at home apart from the normal services rendered in the shop. This community service however varies from one master to the other. As expressed by one of the respondents

"It is a must that every trainee must compulsorily serve his or her trainer by rendering services such as washing his master's clothes, running errand, assisting in domestic chores of his/her master and any other duties from time to time as his master want him to do. It is what we have gone through and is like a norm that they would also do to their own trainees. It is like a ritual handed over from generation to generation. It is part of blessing the trainee will receive on the day of his graduation."

It was observed that conflict resolution mechanism for resolving disputes among trainees exist. Contrary to the practice of the senior trainee disciplining the junior trainee, it is the duties of all trainees under the mentorship of master to report all cases of abuse, insubordination, stealing, fighting and backbiting to the master who in turn investigate and carry out appropriate sanctions and discipline as the case may be from time to time.

In order to be objective and remove all elements of bias in this study, we organized Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) with some selected trainees based on age, sex and years of experience.

4.4 Apprentices' Own Views

Based on our observation and what we were told by the trainers, we decided to hear the views of the trainees on their choice of apprenticeship, despite the fact that they could easily make quick money by going for paid employment. They strongly agreed that they value the choice of their vocations and also corroborated some of the things said by their masters. However, they frowned at the way their master engaged them in community service. One of the male trainees said

"Apart from learning the trade Monday to Saturday and closing very late, I will still have to go and assist my master in his house on Sundays to wash his clothes and that of his family, despite the fact that he has grown up children at home. After doing the chores, he would not offer me any food or transport money and if I failed to come on any Sunday he would punish me for three days"

Apart from the community service, they all complained about the rules and regulations which to them are very cumbersome and rigid. Part of the rules and regulations is making the trainees responsible for the refund in part or full of any damage items belonging to the customers. They argued that most times it is not as if the master actually took them through the rudiment, they only learn by observing what the masters did and getting the experience from their seniors. This had made some trainees to abscond when they could not afford the payment for damaged materials.

A female trainee explained:

"This is my third place of learning tailoring. I have been taken to two masters who were just too wicked and always beat me. I left the last place because I damaged a client cloth and I was asked to pay N5, 000 which I could not afford. But this Master is very nice and that is why I have spent two years with her". Although we are somehow related but she is nice to others too who are not related to her"

Despite their challenges in learning their vocation they still find time to make some money whenever their trainers or masters are not around. Whenever opportunities to make quick money occur they take advantage of such situation. There is an informal relationship which binds them together against their masters. Any apprentice that does not align with the group is frustrated out of the vocation. As explained by one of the respondents

"We have our own norms that are different from the mainstream norms and it is binding on every apprentice to abide by these rules. Anyone that goes against the group norms will be frustrated"

5. Conclusion

There is no doubt that apprenticeship system is expected to play crucial role in the manpower development of any nation. The mass exodus of our teeming youths into the various traditional and modern apprenticeship schemes is expected to rise in the years to come as government has continue to make education exclusive rights of the rich. The traditional apprenticeship systems are gradually being replaced by modern apprenticeship system which allows the masters to accommodate, feed and set-up the apprentice after graduation as being practiced by the Ibo traders. This system not only empowers the apprentice but also allows them to grow in business. One noticeable features of the traditional apprenticeship system is that it does not duly encourage manpower development. Most of these trained apprentices end up not making livelihood from these vocations. This is due to the fact that they have to switch job to either purchase the materials for the trade. Most of them end up new found job or vocation. The incessant power outage has not helped artisans as most of them have abandoned their various vocations for commercial motor cycling

6. Recommendations

Despite few hitches in the traditional apprentice system, its contributions cannot be overemphasized in the nation's developmental efforts. As part of the efforts of creating the needed manpower for development, it therefore becomes pertinent to make the following recommendations.

- Government must ensure that the problem of power is given urgent and accelerated attention as this is important in order to achieve the needed economic development

- Government should support the traditional apprenticeship system by ensuring that apprentices under this system can compete favourably with the modern apprenticeship system. This can be done by conducting skill tests for apprentices to maintain standards
- Master tradesmen for the required crafts from the traditional and modern scheme should be trained and retrained from time to time by relevant government agencies to keep them in tune with modern trends in their various vocations
- There should be a uniform training for all apprentices in the same vocations to ensure competitions.
- Soft loans facilities should be made available for the people in this system
- Atiba local government should organize extra-mural lesson for the practitioners, especially the apprentice so as to improve the level their level of education as many of them only had first school leaving certificates

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