



Impact of Apprenticeship on Human Capital Development: Focus on Unemployment Reduction

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ABSTRACT

The apprenticeship system is a prevalent form of informal vocational training in many developing countries, including Nigeria. This system allows aspiring individuals to learn practical skills and gain knowledge from mentors over a period of time. The apprenticeship systems have a human development focus, hence, this paper assessed it's on human capital development. In Nigeria, majority of the workforce not absorbed by the formal sector are in the informal sector either through apprenticeship, economic circumstances and choice. The pressure on the limited educational institutions is not expected to change in the nearest future due to the increasing demand for western education and social values attached with getting a paid job. However setting up of specialized skills training and entrepreneurship institutions may be the antidote. Accordingly, reducing unemployment in Nigeria should be a priority for the government and policymakers, with the unemployment rate growing in almost the same proportion as the population. Efforts by the government to bring economic development to rural areas and relocation of more big organizations to rural areas will help curb the high rate of unemployment in the country. Moreover, boosting the size of the informal sector through the necessary support framework will further enhance socio-economic growth in the system. This makes it imperative for government at all levels to provide basic infrastructure and institutional framework to nurture and harness the apprenticeship system.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Informal Economy, Unemployment reduction, Impact, Human capital

INTRODUCTION

Apprenticeship policies have emerged as a promising avenue to foster human capital development [1-6]. The apprenticeship system is a prevalent form of informal vocational training in many developing countries, including Nigeria [7-10]. This system allows aspiring individuals to learn practical skills and gain knowledge from mentors over a period of time [2]. [3], posit that apprenticeship systems have a human development focus and are arranged in such a way that the apprentice lives and serves his master for a specified period of years, after which the master settles the apprentice by setting them up in business, that is, paying their rent for two or three years and also giving them cash infusion so that they can venture into businesses on their own. This system of funding is called locally generated venture capital. Analysts have described the apprenticeship system that governs their human capital development as the largest business incubator platform in the world [11-15]. According to the [2], apprenticeship system can be an effective way to develop human capital, as it provides participants with skills, knowledge, and experience needed to succeed in business [16-20]. By offering a structured and comprehensive training programme, apprenticeship help individuals develop deep understanding of financial markets, trading strategies, risk management, and other critical areas [21-26]. Additionally, apprenticeship provides participants with valuable networking opportunities, as they have the chance to interact with industry professionals, including successful traders and investment managers [27-32]. This help participants build relationships and develop a strong professional network, which is crucial to long term success [33-37]. Overall, the apprenticeship is an effective way to develop human capital. By offering comprehensive training, mentorship, and networking opportunities, apprenticeship help individuals acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to succeed in a competitive and challenging field [38-42]. According to [4], apprenticeship programmes offer individuals the opportunity to learn practical skills and acquire industry-specific knowledge through hands-on training and mentorship. By offering apprenticeships across various sectors, such as automotive repair, construction, tailoring, hospitality, and information technology, the apprenticeship programmes is able to meet the diverse needs of a local economy [43-47]. Apprenticeship benefits individuals, and contribute to the overall human capital development of the state. By providing structured training and mentorship, these programmes enhance the employability of apprentices and empower them to become self-reliant. Moreover, apprenticeships foster entrepreneurship and encourage the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises, thereby stimulating economic growth and job creation within the local community [5]. Albeit serving as a unique path to skill development, the apprenticeship

systems face wide range of challenges including poor completion rates, inconsistency in training offered, among others. These problems make it difficult to attract young graduates and youths of school age into the system. Also, the attitude of the experienced ones that should take the apprentice, in most cases constitutes a hindrance to the practice of apprenticeship. This is because most of them are not trained teachers. Consequently, lack of zeal toward apprenticeship has resulted in unemployment, shortage of efficient manpower, etc; and has led to unemployment which is responsible for social vices like robbery, kidnapping, among others [6]. This study therefore seeks to examine the effect of apprentice system on human capital development, with focus on employment reduction.

Concept of Apprenticeship

Basically, apprenticeship involves a contractual relationship between a master craftsman and a trainee. The trainee is trained for the prescribed work process through practical experience under the supervision of the master craftsman through formal instructions [7]. It is a process in which an aspiring trader works under the guidance and supervision of an experienced trader to learn skills, knowledge, and strategies necessary to become a successful trader. Apprenticeship is the main avenue for skill and manpower development in the informal sector. It provides refuge for the unemployed in most African countries, as they receive on-the-job training. Apprenticeship is a concept that revolves around a structured program designed to provide aspiring traders with the necessary knowledge, skills, and practical experience to become successful. It combines hands-on training, mentorship, and real-world trading opportunities. Apprenticeship typically operates within a trading firm, where experienced traders take on apprentices and guide them through the intricacies of trading. The goal is to equip the apprentice with the tools and understanding they need to make informed trading decisions [8]. The apprentice works closely with the mentor, observing and participating in trading activities, analyzing market trends and making trading decisions. The duration of the apprenticeship vary depending on the level of knowledge and skills the apprentice already possesses. Some apprenticeships may last for several years, while others may be completed in a shorter period. [9], provides that the goal of apprenticeship is to provide aspiring traders with a practical education that prepares them for a successful career in trading. By working with an experienced trader, the apprentice gain valuable insights into markets, learn from real world experiences, and develop a solid foundation of trading skills. Overall, apprenticeship is an effective way for aspiring traders to learn the ropes of trading and develop the necessary skills to succeed in business [10].

Human Capital Development

Human capital development refers to the process of enhancing and optimising the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes of individuals that can contribute to their personal and professional growth and ultimately to the growth and success of organisations and society as a whole. [2], provides that human capital development is a wide range of activities, including education and training programmes, mentorship and coaching, career development opportunities, leadership development, and talent management. The goal is to help individuals acquire and develop the skills and knowledge needed to perform their jobs effectively and advance their careers.

Apprenticeship and Human Capital Development

Apprenticeship as a form of vocational education and is closely linked to human capital development, and is instrumental to economic growth and development. Previous studies show that apprenticeship relates to different facets of human capital development and improves economic status of individuals. [7], examined the contribution of apprenticeship to skill development in the printing industry in Nigeria and reports that apprenticeship has significant positive impact on skill development in the informal sector, in particular in the printing industry. Similarly, [11] examined effect of apprentices' commitment on productivity of SMEs in Abuja, Nigeria. The study found that apprentice commitment had a positive effect on productivity of SMEs. Also, [5] examined effect of apprenticeship on unemployment reduction in Onitsha. The study found that apprenticeship has a significant effect on unemployment reduction at Onitsha. [12], examined traditional apprenticeship in Africa and its relevance to contemporary work practices and human capital development in modern Nigerian communities. The study concluded that using traditional apprenticeship to productively engage idle and unemployed youths would not only create employment and enhance technological advancement, but would also positively impact security in the country. In addition, [13] examined effect of apprenticeship on human capital development in Kaduna Metropolis and revealed that the effect of the scheme on the majority of participants was positive.

Theoretical Framework:

This paper adopted the System theory propounded by [14]. The theory holds that the elements of a system are interrelated and that the system can respond to forces in its environment. Inputs in form of demands and supports are sent into political system from the environment. Once an input enters the system, it undergoes transformation or refinement which translates to output. The output is fed back into the environment and the feedback mechanism ensures that the system endures. The relationship among the systems in this study are Trainees (input), conversion process, outputs, environments and feed. The trainees serve as the components of the social environment which form the inputs into the system. The trainees who in this case are unemployed graduates serve

as demand while budgetary allocations serve as support which enables the scheme to be effective. Finance which is also a crucial raw material is also injected into the system which serves as a lubricant for effective functioning of the system. Conversion process involves managers responsible for running the apprenticeship. The decisions they make either make or mar the entire system. The various skill acquisition schemes serve as the conversion process. The outputs of the system constitute “empowered” trainees who have acquired skills and with the necessary assistance create employment thereby becoming economically empowered. The Inputs and Conversion process determine the quality of the beneficiaries. The environment includes the social, socio-economic, and political dynamics of the society. Examples of which are, the higher institutions of learning since they produce the inputs, business environment such as economic stability, political, cultural and socio-cultural environment affect both the inputs and outputs. These to a large extent could determine the effectiveness of the output; while feedback serves as a mechanism for knowing how the “outputs” are faring. That is, the trainees getting informed of the effectiveness of scheme, the performance of beneficiaries, level of employment created through its skills acquisition schemes and also areas of the scheme that needs to be improved. The feedback mechanism creates an avenue to keep track of its activities. According to [14], an obstruction or slack in one of the systems will impinge the attainment of outputs. Thus, sub-systems must operate smoothly for the system to maintain a steady and effective state.

Informal Economy in Nigeria

Nigeria represents Africa’s largest economy with a rebased GDP of 521.5 billion NGN in 2013 [9], yet economic activities of informal MSMEs constitutes a significant segment of the economy. The geographic location, complexity of Nigeria’s business environment, volatile domain has not prevented Nigeria from being an “investment and business hub” within the sub-Saharan region. The existence of economic clusters in Lagos, Aba, Onitsha, Kano and most urban locations coupled with the tempo of rural-urban migration is a major contributing factor to the parallel growth of the informal sector. Nigeria’s growing population rate along with the high unemployment rates has enabled the informal sector to provide an alternate route for a significant percentage of the citizens to earn a living. It is difficult to track the growth and contribution of most of the players in the informal sector because of their transitory life cycle, modus operandi and the lack of institutional records by the state and federal governments in Nigeria. Evidences from International Labor Organization surveys, Nigerian Bureau of Statistics and studies by [15, 16, 17] attest to the universality of informal and shadow economies globally, with several factors such as motives, regulatory authorities, illiteracy and taxes contributing to their continued existence and desire to remain informal and small in their respective domains. Although the informal sector exists in both developing and developed countries, the context of their environment, cultures and dynamics shape their evolution. Historical evidence and evolutionary trends suggest that the informal economy predates the initial researches in Africa and have always existed prior to early civilization. Societies had always existed in informal settings with unwritten norms and informal settings that have experienced various forms of creative destruction [18]. Nigeria’s burgeoning economy and population comprises of complex subsets of economic agents and activities that sustain and boost the performance and growth of the informal sector. The nature and concentration of the informal sector economy in each state is a reflection of the population, economic opportunities, rural–urban location, cultural norms and traditional institutional frameworks that exist in the state. Though several scholars view the sector as a shadow economy distinct from the formal economy, this apparent dichotomy is a major underlying factor sustaining their continued existence. The peripheries of informal and formal economies are thin and interwoven in developing countries such as Nigeria. A study by the National Bureau of Statistics reveals that the informal sector accounted for 54% of total jobs created in 2013 while the private and public sector accounted for 37% and 9% respectively. Factors aiding this are easily traced to the high growth rate of the population, the limited opportunities in the private and public sector, rural-urban drift and innate desire to survive. The formal sector cannot absorb all the participants of the informal sector, even if government were to create jobs for all. The informal sector will continue to exist because most civil servants and workers in the urban areas engage in one form of informal activity to supplement their income. The governments at various levels have viewed the informal sector differently. For instance, the Lagos State Government’s model of partnering with the informal sector is yielding some positive results. The model includes the establishment of one-stop tax stations in markets and the deployment of field officers in different locations to educate players in the informal sector on the benefits of paying their taxes. Most states in Nigeria have implemented business reforms with Cross River, Nasarawa, Ogun, Delta and Edo states taking the lead, while Lagos and Abuja are among the leading states in the ease of starting a business.

Apprenticeship and Unemployment in the Informal Sector

Apprenticeship remains one of the most commonly used means of capacity building, knowledge transfer and training in most informal sector settings [19, 20]. This informal mode of training has been used to pass down business skills, secrets and empowerment from one generation to the next generation. The apprenticeship model

has proved effective and beneficial in developing social network for business and nurturing new and graduating apprenticeship through their chosen business life cycle. The informal sector provides an antidote to unemployment. It is the biggest contributor to employment across Nigeria, the sector in the first quarter of 2014 created 158,894 jobs or 65.97% of the total jobs mostly in agriculture, retail trade trailed by the formal sector 76,018 or 31.56% and public institutions 5,959 jobs or 2.47%; the same trend continued in the second quarter of 2014, informal sector created 175,786 jobs or 65.97%, formal jobs represented 31.56% and public institutions 1.86% of the total jobs created [21]. The failure of public institutions in job creation is a major contributor to the dominance of the informal sector in Nigeria, as most people address the work deficit by engaging in activities to sustain their livelihood. A tenured apprenticeship programme provides a means of earning some income in the short-run and possibly becoming a business owner upon completion of the apprenticeship. It is estimated that 93% of new jobs created in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1990s were in the informal sector [22]. Other studies attest to the spate of rural-urban migration across all frontiers globally and this drift is a major contributor to the continuous supply of apprentices in urban areas where the new migrants receive training through apprenticeship [20]. Examining the modes of apprenticeship reflects wide differences nationwide. In general, three factors were identified for the differences in the approach to apprenticeship within Nigeria. The factors are: cultural value, resource availability and training time frame. Nigeria's National Policy posits that "informal sector is covered at the household level and is a residual of formal and public sector jobs from total employment generated and includes jobs such as those generated by individuals or household businesses engaging less than 10 or those ventures with fuzzy structures e.g. those in agriculture, wholesale and retail trade". The formality of enterprises and organizations in the formal sector is often noticed in their organizational artifacts and corporate culture as seen in staff handbooks, mission and vision statement, in sharp contrast to the institutional frameworks in informal sector, which consist of mostly micro, small and medium enterprises, part-time employees and self-employed individuals which exist in diverse clusters and segments of the economy.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, majority of the workforce not absorbed by the formal sector are in the informal sector either through apprenticeship, economic circumstances and choice. The pressure on the limited educational institutions is not expected to change in the nearest future due to the increasing demand for western education and social values attached with getting a paid job. However setting up of specialized skills training and entrepreneurship institutions may be the antidote. Accordingly, reducing unemployment in Nigeria should be a priority for the government and policymakers, with the unemployment rate growing in almost the same proportion as the population. Efforts by the government to bring economic development to rural areas and relocation of more big organizations to rural areas will help curb the high rate of unemployment in the country. Moreover, boosting the size of the informal sector through the necessary support framework will further enhance socio-economic growth in the system. This makes it imperative for government at all levels to provide basic infrastructure and institutional framework to nurture and harness these potentials.

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CITE AS: Hadija Afiya J.M. (2024). Impact of Apprenticeship on Human Capital Development: Focus on Unemployment Reduction. RESEARCH INVENTION JOURNAL OF CURRENT ISSUES IN ARTS AND MANAGEMENT 3(1):1-6.