

APPRENTICESHIP ORIENTATION AND PERFORMANCE OF MICRO-BUSINESSES IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

Udu, Ama Aka; PhD

Entrepreneurship Development Centre
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki – Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *The study investigates the nexus between apprenticeship orientation and the performance of micro businesses that provide the direct training services in Ebonyi state Nigeria. The study is necessitated because in the world of work, apprenticeship has been a smooth means of inculcating requisite skills and trades to apprentices for which the benefits microbusinesses derive from apprenticeship have not been explored adequately. Consequently, extant literatures were reviewed with the Social learning theory by Bandura (1963) as the theoretical underpinning. The theory posits in part that learning (skill acquisition in this study) is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement. The methodical approach was the exploratory survey research design aimed at clarifying new insights to the study of apprenticeship as it benefits the organisation. With a population of 52,291, a sample size of 301 firms were chosen and administered with a structured questionnaire. The analytical tool adopted was the Pearson's product moment correlation, and p-value. The result shows positive values for LSQ ($r=38.2\%$), LFE ($r=88\%$), LFS ($r = 48\%$), EQA ($r=10.1\%$) and a negative value for AoA ($r= -55\%$). The implication is that microbusinesses engagement of youthful apprentices enhance their positive performance and should be explored by more microbusinesses.*

KEYWORDS: Apprenticeship, Microbusiness, Tutelage, Skill, Apprentice Activity

INTRODUCTION

Apprenticeship orientation appears to be a perfect educational solution providing a clear leeway into the labour market. Its heavy emphasis on on-the-job training makes it a potentially attractive option for individuals who are not inclined toward the classroom and lecture hall-based instruction of higher institutions of learning. It is concerned with learning a specific skill under the tutelage of a master that gives no financial reward to the apprentice within the period the training lasts. It is a source of livelihood, means of being employed and a way to actively engage in economically worthwhile ventures especially in the informal sector of the economy.

The informal sector of the economy is significantly characterised with micro businesses despite the fact that micro businesses are devoid of snap shot definitions. Specifically, the National Policy on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (2009) defines a micro enterprise as a business organization employing less than 10 persons and having total assets not exceeding N5 million, excluding land and buildings. Major players in the micro enterprises sector, according to the National Policy on MSMEs, include: wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, vehicle repair/servicing, transport, hotels and restaurants and building and construction; and are also mostly informal, family owned businesses with low output value and low levels of skills and technology and as well may not have access to traditional commercial

loans. As a form of education and training, apprenticeship contributes significantly to youth employment and empowerment, and as well ensures increased productivity and better employment opportunities.

Given the significance of apprenticeship orientation as change process, changing positively the life pattern of apprentice participants in terms of skills acquisition, employment and revenue earning status, it becomes necessary to investigate whether apprenticeship orientation contributes significantly to the performance of micro businesses that provide the direct training services in Ebonyi state.

Conceptual Issues

In the world of work, apprenticeship has been a smooth means of inculcating requisite skills and trades to would be employees/employers of labour. It involves master/servant relationship. Apprenticeship is a training contract between an employer and an employee in which the apprentice learns the skills needed for a particular occupation or trade. It is a system of trading a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession with on-the-job training and often some accompanying study (classroom work and reading). Apprenticeship also enables practitioners to gain a license to practice in a regulated profession. Apprentices build their careers from apprenticeships. Most of their training is done while observing and/or working for an employer who helps the apprentices learn their trade or profession, in exchange for their continued labour for an agreed period after they have achieved measurable competencies. People who successfully complete an apprenticeship reach the journeyman level of competence. As an apprentice, you and a master have a legal agreement called a training contract. This lasts until you have completed your training and both you and your master agree you are competent. A training contract cannot be terminated without the mutual agreement of both you and your master. In the training contract the duration for the training is usually specified. Depending on the profession, apprenticeship lasts between 2 – 7 years.

Apprenticeship System in Nigeria and other Countries

Many countries in the world practice apprenticeship systems but what differs is the mode of operation. Reviewed literature shows that a developing country like Nigeria operates unorganized and unregulated apprenticeship system while the developed countries operate organized and regulated apprenticeship system with defined vocational profile and framework. In regulated apprenticeship system the government helps to provide the platform that brings the apprentice and the organisation together through polices, structures and other necessary incentives. In the unregulated system, there are no externally driven structure or motivations that encourage participants to be so engaged. However, most apprentices especially in the unregulated system are people with poor backgrounds though it is latently misconstrued to be youths with academic failure but are able to grasp practical skills and not theory. Consequently, in the countries with organized and regulated apprenticeship system, dual education system obtains – a situation in which apprentices spend about 70 – 80% of their time in companies and the rest in formal vocational school.

Over the years, Nigeria has practiced an unorganized and unregulated apprenticeship system. To become an apprentice of any trade, a father chooses a profession for his son and consequently takes him to a known master of that profession to train. There is always a tutelage agreement entered into in which the conditions and terms will be spelt out. The agreement comes in two ways. In one hand, the boy lives with the master for the number of

years agreed upon. At the end of the agreed period, the master settles him and enables him to establish his own trade. This is called 'Igba odibo' as the father does not pay the master any premium for the training. The period for igba odibo lasts between 3-7 years. Another way of becoming an apprentice in Nigeria is through 'imu oru aka'. Here a boy is given to a master craft to be under his tutelage. The father of the boy pays a certain some of money to the master in what could be probably called a tuition fee. The payment is usually accompanied with some drinks meant for the entertainment of witnesses who are usually tradesmen within the environment in which the boy learns the trade. The fee is usually a lump sum of money paid before the training is commenced. The apprentice in this case does not live with the master within the period of the training and the master only blesses the apprentice at the end of successful completion of the training. The master may employ him if the father is not able to establish him immediately. The time period for 'imu oru aka' is usually 2-5 years. In both 'igba odibo' and 'imu oru aka' boys between the ages of 15-25 years are engaged and classroom work and reading are not involved. Certificates are not issued for successful completion of the training rather there is usually a celebration to void the tutelage agreement. Many years of hard work and disciplining under the authority of the master is the key to the young apprentice's education and learning process.

Palmer (2009) writes that Ghana has a highly developed apprenticeship system where young men and women undertake sector-specific private training in skills that are generally utilized in the informal sector. Presently, non-formal apprenticeships training accounts for 80-90% of all skills training in Ghana, compared with 5-10% from public training institutes, and 10-15% from NGOs. A survey of the apprenticeship system by Monk et al. (2008) observes that apprenticeship is undertaken primarily by those with junior high school or lower levels of education.

The government has attempted several reforms to traditional apprenticeship. Early efforts at regulating non-formal training included the 1970 National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) and the 1990 National Coordinating Committee on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACVET). These coordinating bodies and complementing legislation were ineffective due to a failure to create national policy, capacity issues, and diverse inter-ministerial objectives (Palmer 2009). Other skills training development projects have included the Vocational Skills and Informal Sector Support Project, the Rural Enterprise Project, and the Skills Training Entrepreneurship Programme.

In 2008, ambitious plans were put in place to develop a regulated, or formalized, informal apprenticeship system, called the National Apprentice Programme (NAP). This program's key components include targeting junior secondary school graduates who could not access further schooling and providing them with twelve months of skills training. During the training, the apprentices receive toolkits, which they can keep after completion of the training. The program was officially launched in 2011, in Sogakope in the South Tongu District of the Volta Region (Akpalu 2011).

Modern apprenticeship schemes in Egypt are in principle, with minor exception, a part of, or equivalent to the secondary stage. Ministries and agencies offer technical and vocational training using different platforms that includes apprenticeship

The Ministries and agencies have continued to establish modern apprenticeship schemes, (Badawi, 2009), but these schemes have never been integrated, articulated or even regulated as a national system. Each scheme is regulated through the official decree of establishment, be it

a presidential, ministerial or other. The duration of most modern apprenticeship schemes are three years after passing the basic school certificate (9-years). There is no mandate to complete work-based training to be eligible for employment in any of the skills' fields except in Law and Medicine. Egypt has four apprenticeship schemes with common interest in duration, entry qualification and certification.

Australia has a well-organized and regulated apprenticeship system. There exists Australian apprenticeships centers that administer and facilitate Australia Apprenticeships. Through the Apprenticeships Centers the government disburses funds to eligible apprentices and businesses to support the process as it determines the available future skills of Australian industry. Australian Apprenticeship Centers covers all industrial sectors in Australia. The objectives of the Centers include to train new entrants and as well help others to upgrade their skills. Australia uses dual education system. Australian Apprenticeship system is unique as it makes effort to match applicants with the right apprenticeship, dedicate service to promote retention, put in place safety net through the provision of Group Training Scheme that is able to provide continuity of employment and training for the Australian Apprentice.

In Austria, Apprenticeship system is organised in a dual education system and is well regulated. Australia has 250 legally recognised apprenticeship trades. An individual becomes an apprentice in Austria only after completing a compulsory education perhaps at the age of 15 years. The apprenticeship training takes between 2-4 years to be completed. Upon successful completion an apprentice is issued with Apprenticeship Leave Certificate which qualifies him for two different vocational careers.

Apprenticeships have a long tradition in the United Kingdom though in 2009, the National Apprenticeship Service was founded to coordinate apprenticeships in England with over 180 apprenticeship frameworks. The scheme extends beyond manufacturing and high technology industry to parts of the service sector with no apprenticeship tradition. The parents or guardians of a minor would agree with a Guild's Master craftsman the conditions for an apprenticeship which would bind the minor for 5–9 years (e.g., from age 14 to 21). They would pay a "premium" to the craftsman and the contract would be recorded in an indenture.

The traditional apprenticeship framework's purpose was to provide traditionally skilled occupations and higher technician and engineering professionals, e.g., through the UK Industry Training Boards (ITBs). The apprenticeship framework offered a clear pathway and competency outcomes that addressed the issues facing the industry sector and specific companies. Though rare, it was possible for an apprentice to advance from vocational studies, to undergraduate degree, to graduate study and earn a master's degree or a PhD. The system was effective; industry was assured of a supply of well-educated and fit for work staff, local technical colleges offered industry relevant courses that had a high measure of academic content and an apprentice was prepared for professional life or higher education by the age of 21.

The UK government has implemented a rigorous apprenticeship structure in many ways. There are three levels of apprenticeship available, what level (Intermediate Apprenticeship, Advanced Apprenticeship or Higher Apprenticeship) a student starts at would depend on one's current qualifications and the opportunities available in the sector of interest.

Apprenticeship programs in the United States are regulated by the Smith-Hughes Act (1917), The National Industrial Recovery Act (1933), and National Apprenticeship Act, also known as

the "Fitzgerald Act." In the modern era, the number of apprenticeships have declined greatly in the United States. Free traditional apprenticeship job training has largely been replaced with on-the-job training (pay as you work), vocational classes, or college courses, which requires the student or an organization to pay for tuition. Some legislators raised the issue of child labour laws for unpaid labour or jobs with hazards.

Germany's apprenticeship system enjoys dual education system. Finding employment without having completed an apprenticeship is almost impossible. In Germany, there are 342 recognized trades (*Ausbildungsberufe*) where an apprenticeship can be completed. In 1969, a law (the *Berufsbildungsgesetz*) was passed which regulated and unified the vocational training system and codified the shared responsibility of the state, the unions, associations and the chambers of trade and industry.

The precise skills and theory taught on German apprenticeships are strictly regulated. The employer is responsible for the entire education programme coordinated by the German chamber of commerce. The defined content and skillset of the apprentice profession must be fully provided and taught by the employer. The time taken is also regulated. Each profession takes a different time, usually between 24 and 36 months.

Thus, everyone who had completed an apprenticeship e.g., as an industrial manager (*Industriekaufmann*) has learned the same skills and has attended the same courses in procurement and stocking up, controlling, staffing, accounting procedures, production planning, terms of trade and transport logistics and various other subjects. Someone who has not taken this apprenticeship or did not pass the final examinations at the chamber of industry and commerce is not allowed to call himself an *Industriekaufmann*. Most job titles are legally standardized and restricted. An employment in such function in any company would require this completed degree.

One observable evidence in all the countries is that apprenticeship system operates though adopting different models but with the sole aim of providing present and future technical skill manpower for all industrial sectors.

Microbusinesses

In Ebonyi state, there is visible little presence of functional small, medium and large-scale business enterprises. Consequently, greater population of the residents depend on government or micro businesses for employment and economic empowerment. Major players in the micro business sector, in Ebonyi state include: fabrication, farming and agro business, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, vehicle repair/servicing, hotels and restaurants, building and construction and so on. These businesses are mostly informal, family owned with low output value and low levels of skills and technology and do not usually have access to traditional commercial loans. Micro businesses are in the main found in every sector; do not have shareholders and most importantly hold the hub for apprenticeship practices.

Deduced from the foregoing and consequent upon the Nigerian economic environment micro business could be said to be a business with few number of employees if any; having its asset base not in millions of naira excluding land and buildings. Specifically, the National Policy on MSMEs defines a micro enterprise as a business organization employing less than 10 persons and having total assets not exceeding N5 million, excluding land and buildings. Given the

ceiling of 10 persons and N5 million naira respectively, it is observed that about 98% of business operations in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, fall into the realm of micro business category.

Micro businesses are integral parts of a market economy and a prime provider of goods and services in the dynamic environment where the ability to change is crucial to long-term viability (Sexton, 1999; Small Business Administration, 1998). Micro businesses start small, but can grow quickly into large job-generating businesses. These very small firms generate close to 25% of all jobs in US economy and about 63% in Ebonyi state economy. Micro businesses apart from creating jobs, increase local income and wealth, and connect the community to the larger, global economy (Henderson, 2002).

Despite the contributions of microbusinesses to any economy, little consideration is given to this subgroup, in terms of research or how they may differ from other "small businesses." The owners in this subgroup may face different issues, or similar issues may have different "best solutions." One such example may be the differences in the utilization of technology between the micro and the small business firm. Another may be in terms of philosophy and scope of operation.

Benefit of Apprentice to Employer

Employers of labour and indeed firms derive a lot of benefits from apprentices especially where apprenticeship is organized and regulated. Reviewed literature (Wagner 1999, Bauernschuster *et al*, 2009, Wolter and Ryan 2011, Muehlemann, Stefaln and Wolter, 2013, Lerman 2014, and AAT, 2014) have discussed the causal and real benefits firms and employers receive from apprentices. A careful glean at the extant literature reveals that none of the studies focussed on microbusinesses. It is worthy of note that studies of the benefits of apprentices in unorganized and unregulated areas are still emerging.

AAT (2014) identified that apprentice activities benefit also the employer and posits:

"We now need to do more to engage with smaller businesses - to break down the misconceptions and make it easier for smaller enterprises to unlock the full potential of training apprentices on the job and to gain specific skills relevant to their business. Our research clearly reveals that apprentices far from being a cost to business are often a tangible benefit"

Indeed, apprentices are tangible assets rendering tangible benefits to the employer. In the micro business sector especially in the vocational and technical areas the apprentice influences some of the customers that patronize the firm. Wagner (1999) observes that the employer enjoys substantial savings in recruitment and initial training because apprentices tend to reach full proficiency faster than other new hires. To this Wolter and Ryan (2011) add reduced turnover and enhanced productivity. Apprenticeship investment adds a net gain for employers (Lerman, 2014) including reduced errors in placing employees, avoiding excessive costs when the demand for skilled workers cannot be quickly filled, and performance advantages favouring internally trained workers who understand company processes over skilled workers recruited from outside.

Firm's ability to innovate has been identified as another benefit of apprentice activities to firms. The complex nature of business environment calls for innovations which are dire to success in a competitive and dynamic environment. Trained and exposed workers are more likely to understand the complexities of a firm's production processes and therefore more likely to

identify and implement technological improvements, especially incremental innovations to improve existing products and processes. A study of German establishments by Bauernschuster *et al* (2009) documents this connection. Apart from innovation, Muehleemann, Stefaln and Wolter (2013) have identified the value of apprentices' productive work and allude that training benefits to the firm for the apprenticeship period are given by the value of apprentices' productive work, which is typically divided into skilled and unskilled tasks:

1. The value of having apprentices perform skilled tasks is calculated as the time that apprentices spend on such tasks, multiplied by the wage that a firm would need to pay skilled workers if no apprentices had been hired. That value, however, is further multiplied by the productivity of an apprentice relative to that of a skilled worker.
2. For unskilled tasks, the value to the firm from having an apprentice perform such work is simply the wage that the firm would have had to pay to employ an unskilled worker.

Overall, employers benefit from apprentices in diverse ways such that microbusinesses may do well engaging apprentices.

Empirical Review

David, Sarah, Sarah, and Gari (2000) conducted a study on Barriers of Modern Apprenticeships and National Traineeships by SMES and Specific Sectors, it was noted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) make a major contribution to the economy accounting for the majority of small businesses having around three in five workers as apprentices. The way SMEs develop staff to meet their business needs is critical for both individual company performance and national prosperity. Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and National Traineeships (NTs) were introduced by Government in the 1990s to help equip young people up to the age of 25 with relevant skills and provide employers with a consistent framework for training. This report summarizes the findings of a study which examined the barriers of MAs and NTs by SMEs in eight framework sectors with relatively low participation and which investigated what action might be taken to encourage employers to train more young people through these initiatives. The conclusion was that the barriers which restrained take-up and use of MAs and NTs were related more to the business culture of SMEs and particular sectors than to their views of the value of the initiatives, and driven by short-term business imperatives, and operating within slim profit margins, SMEs tended to provide in-house training for immediate requirements which often made them unresponsive to adopting external training initiatives of continuity.

Hazril and Abdullah (2013) carried out a study on competency level of employability skills among the apprentices of the national dual training system: a comparative analysis of industry perception by company status. This study examined the competency level of employability skills among the apprentices of the National Dual Training System (NDTS) according to the perception of the employers in the industry. The study sample comprised of 56 industrial employers who had given apprentices practical/hands-on training in 2012. Respondents were the industrial bosses in various sectors and different types of companies which were directly involved in training the NDTS apprentices in that particular year. 63 per cents of the respondents were from small and medium-sized industries (SME), 23 per cents were Multi-National Companies (MNC) and 14 per cents were Government-Linked Companies (GLC). The data was obtained via survey and interviews. The result showed that overall competency level of employability skills of the apprentices' was shown to be at a moderate level. The

study's findings for the differences of the type of company suggested that the mean score for the employability skill competency among the apprentices in the MNC companies is significantly higher ($M= 4.0$, $SD= 0.125$) than the GLC companies ($M= 3.50$, $SD=0.227$) and the SME companies ($M= 3.14$, $SD= 0.361$). The one-way ANOVA test demonstrated a significant difference according to the types of companies which train the apprentices in 2012, $F(2,53) = 45.6$, $p<0.05$. As there is a significant difference following the type of companies, the test of *Post Hoc Scheffe* was not conducted to evaluate the source of differences in further detail.

Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory by Bandura posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1963) in (www.en.m.wikipedia.com/social_learning_theory). To Bandura (1963) in addition to the observation of behaviour, learning also occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as vicarious reinforcement. The theory expands on traditional behavioural theories, in which behaviour is governed solely by reinforcements, by placing emphasis on the important roles of various internal processes in the learning individual. Social Learning theory in line with apprentice practices, where the apprentice is not paid but works, proposes that rewards aren't the sole force behind creating motivation. Thoughts, beliefs, morals, and feedback all help to motivate us. According to the theory, three other ways in which apprentices learn are vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Modelling, or the scenario in which we see someone's behaviours and adopt them as our own, aide the learning process as well as mental states and the cognitive process.

METHODOLOGY

The research design was the exploratory survey research design aimed at clarifying new insights to the study of apprenticeship as it benefits the organisation. Basically, the study establishes the nexus between apprenticeship activities and apprentices' service quality, age, educational qualification and firm expansion and as well organizational sustainability. With a population of 52,291 sourced from the estimates of the 2010 National MSMEs Collaborative Survey, National Bureau of Statistics and SMEDAN, a sample size of 301 firms were chosen based on Taro Yamene (1963) formula. A structured questionnaire with a reliability value at .87 using Cronbach's alpha on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. The analytical tool adopted was the Pearson's product moment correlation, and p-value.

Source: SPSS version 20 Output

Note: All results are significant at an alpha level of 0.01

Apprentice Activities and Level of Service Quality (LSQ)

The correlation result in table 1 shows a significant relationship ($p=0.000$) between Apprentices activities and the level of service quality. There also exist a positive but weak correlation between the two variables ($r=38.2\%$), this may imply that although there exists a direct relationship between the variables, other factors (e.g experience and risk aversiveness) may hinder an apprentice from rendering effective service delivery.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis of Apprenticeship Orientation

	AppActv	ServQual	FirmExpSustain	Age	Edu.Qual
Correlation					
AppActv Significance (2-tailed)					
Df					
Correlation	.382				
ServQual Significance (2-tailed)	.000				
Df	301				
Correlation	.880	-.078			
FirmExp Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.001			
Df	301	301			
Correlation	.480	.889	.776		
Sustain Significance (2-tailed)	.001	.007	.660		
Df	301	301	301		
Correlation	-.550	-.063	.746	.589	
Age Significance (2-tailed)	.002	.005	.000	.091	
Df	301	301	301	301	
Correlation	.101	-.043	.092	.665	.868
Edu.Qual Significance (2-tailed)	.112	.498	.147	.876	.090
Df	301	301	301	301	301

Apprentice Activities and Level of Firm Expansion (LFE)

The result in table 1 also shows a significant relationship ($p=0.000$) between the Apprentice activities and the level of firm expansion. Also, there exist a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r=88\%$), this may imply that increased number of apprentice or increased apprentices activities would mean a need for more space and additional service range.

Apprentice Activities and Level of Firm Sustainability (LFS)

$P=0.001$: Significant Relationship; $r = 48\%$: Weak Positive Correlation. Implication: having many apprenticeship will help the sustenance of microbusinesses though at a minimal rate.

Apprentice Activities and Age of Apprentice (AoA)

$P = 0.002$: Significant relationship; $r = -55\%$: Fairly strong negative relationship. Implication: The higher the age, the drop in apprentice activities. Younger apprentices do better.

Apprentice activities and Educational Qualification of Apprentice (EQA)

$P = 0.112$: No significant relationship. Educational qualification has nothing to do with apprentice activities. Implication: The educated sees no need of undertaking an apprenticeship activities

CONCLUSION

Apprentice activities have contributed in the performance and sustenance of microbusinesses in Ebonyi state Nigeria. Majority of the businesses are micro in terms of size, structure, capital outlay, mode of operations, annual turnover and kind and number of workers. Microbusinesses engage apprentices in an unregulated and unorganized manner. From the result of the analysis the engagement of apprentices contributes to the sustenance of microbusinesses at minimal rates. This could be attributed to the fact that apprentices do not have sufficient knowledge to

deal with issues appropriately. The idea of at what age is best for apprentice engagement shows that younger apprentices do better. The older the apprentices the less committed and obedient to instructions and the like. Educational qualification, is observed to have no relationship with apprenticeship activities. This affirms the fact that Nigerian education system is devoid of technical skills- a knowledge without experience based education. However, in most cases apprentices contribute positively to the service qualities of microbusiness operations and even encourage firm expansion.

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