

CRAFT SKILLS ACQUISITION: CHALLENGES IN CONSTRUCTION

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The younger generation plays an important role in the economic activity and advancement of countries worldwide, and none more so than in the case of developing countries. However, in the current climate, and particularly in Nigeria, there is a great need to attract the youth population into the construction sector in order to promote and maintain appropriate levels of craft skills labor. The research investigates the possible challenges for construction-related skills acquisition in Nigeria, and particularly attention is paid to the apathy of the younger generation in entering the industry. Data collected from a survey of stakeholders established the main factors for the reluctance of youths entering into craft skills education and training. The data were further analyzed and compared with older respondents to establish differences between the groupings and identify areas that need to be addressed. Findings from the research also highlighted perceived barriers to entry, in addition to establishing recommendations and required actions.

Keywords: Youth population, Labor, Vocational education, Training.

1 INTRODUCTION

The younger generation plays a unique role in the economic activities and development of nations across the globe especially in the developing countries (Bello *et al.* 2007). However, from the development scene in many countries in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, much effort is still required in securing and sustaining the interests of the youth population in craft skills acquisition (Joel-Osebor 2004). With an estimated population of over 150 million people, Nigeria is the most populated black African nation with the youth constituting over a half of the total population. In spite of this human resources availability to the nation, not much has been achieved in the area of channelling the available resource to contribute to national economic growth and development. Unemployment among the youth has increased at an alarming rate. This is because the youth population either seek white-collar jobs, for which few are available, or venture into other 'quick' money spinning non-skilled ventures like the commercial motorcycle transportation business (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi 2010; Salami 2011; Awe 2012).

2 RELATED LITERATURE

A good number of researchers have attempted probing into various factors affecting construction related skills acquisition in Nigerian. The major factors have been

identified in related literature and include: poor image of construction site craft workers, and a lack of encouragement and motivation from the political classes. Additionally, there has been too much emphasis on secular/general education, poor job security and site workers' safety, and a lack of a clear-cut career path for craftspeople to follow. Other observed relevant challenges of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVE) include:

- Socio-economic context which culminates in lack of peace due to political instabilities and continued economic decline; decline in enrolments in education and training, abandonment of schooling all-together in some instances.
- Low Status Syndrome - TVE suffering from a lower status compared to general education; a legacy left by the colonial masters whereby the colonized people were expected to be workers while general academic education was reserved for the masters who mainly occupied white-collar jobs.
- Teacher Education is another salient challenge - the capacity of the technological manpower in any nation can only be measured against the teachers available; there is presently an acute shortage of experienced and practical oriented technical teachers in Nigeria.
- The problem of cooperation with enterprises is a crucial factor. TVE programs must be of good quality and relevance, and they must reflect and inculcate real situations in the world of work. For this to be attainable, it is inevitable that cooperation with existing enterprises, which have the latest technologies and production processes, must be maintained. The present situation in Nigeria indicates that the industrial sector and enterprises show little or no interest in manpower training and development, which need to be adequately tackled.
- Favouritism and nepotism - this has been the bane on the implementation of many laudable policies over time in many African setting to which Nigeria belongs. Many of the past policies fail during implementation because those in government will choose people, not based on merit, but on quota, religious or tribal politicking.
- Corruption and Greed. Monies earmarked for implementation of policy programmes are most of the time viewed as a share of national funds for the privileged few, and upon whose shoulders the mantle of implementation falls. As a result of selfish considerations, the monies meant to be spent for public good end-up in private pockets.
- Insincerity and hidden Agenda - policy makers are sometimes insincere both in the formulation and implementation of policies. The insincerity and hidden agenda may manifest itself in the siting of an institution at a location that is awkward and incongruous with the overall objective of the proposal.
- Absence of Health and Safety Training - the Curriculum of Technical Education in Nigeria seems to lay more emphasis on caring for tools and equipment than the health and safety issues for the operatives. This act of

omission might be among the hidden reasons why most youths do not show interest in attending vocational institutes to acquire employable skills.

All the above-mentioned problems, though socio-cultural in nature, have a bearing on the success or failure of implementation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Nigeria. They consequently have implications for attracting new entrants, especially the youth population, into acquiring skills for construction crafts. Previous researchers focus only on problems affecting construction craftsmanship, but the consequences of these problems as it affects the interests of the youth population in acquiring skills in construction trades need investigation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was collected using the survey approach. 18 items with Likert's scaled questionnaires were administered on a representative sample of 500 randomly selected stakeholders across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. 282 responses (representing 56.4% response) were recorded. The data were analyzed with SPSS using percentages, measure of central tendencies, ranking, cross tabulation, chi-square and Cramer's V post test statistics.

4 RESULTS

The analyses of the data for the study are depicted in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows the analysis of the submission of survey participants on reasons why most Nigerian youths are not showing interest in acquiring construction related skills. Top of the list of apparent reasons why the youth populations are not considering acquisition of skills was due to *lack of adequate guidance and counseling as to the importance and relevance of skills* as a career with 89.0% supporting the point. Second in the rank was the *lack of adequate forum for mobilizing youth for skills acquisition* with 82.0% agreement. 79.0% of the survey participants ranked third and viewed; *poor rate of pay for construction site workers* as one of the major reasons why Nigerian youths are indifferent towards acquiring construction related skills. The analysis depicted in Table 1 assists immensely in achieving the study objective of unraveling the reasons for youths' apathy to construction craft skills acquisition in Nigeria. The data collected and analyzed in Table 1 was cross-tabulated against the age groups in order to appreciate the emphasis the younger generation placed on some of the highly rated propositions. This also highlights why the youth generations seem not to show interest in acquiring construction related skills, and determines if there is any significant difference between the perception of the younger and older respondents on selected variables in the scale. The output of the cross-tabulation and Chi-square test result is presented in Table 2.

The age-groupings were re-coded as indicated (Table 2) for the purpose of the cross-tabulation. For the purpose of this study, 15-30 years group is regarded as the younger generation, 31-45 years as middle aged group, 46-60 years group as aged and 61-65 and above as senior citizen respondents.

As shown in Table 2, the problem of *lack of adequate guidance and counseling for youth to take to skills acquisition* ranked first in table 1. This was viewed as the most

Table 1. Reasons Nigerian youths are not interested in acquiring construction craft skills.

Propositions	%					Mean	Overall Rank	Cramer's V
	SA	A	DN	D	SD			
1. Hazardous nature of construction site works	21.0	30.0	12.0	22.0	15.0	3.2103	17	0.229
2. Poor rate of pay for site worker	34.0	45.0	9.0	10.0	2.0	4.0517	3	0.238
3. Lack of recognition for Artisans	30.0	34.0	11.0	16.0	9.0	3.8118	10	0.232
4. Lack of respect/dignity for Artisans	31.0	35.0	14.0	15.0	5.0	3.9037	8	0.218
5. Government do not encourage skills acquisition	31.0	41.0	8.0	14.0	6.0	3.9779	5	0.221
6. No clear-cut career path for craftsmen	28.0	42.0	9.0	16.0	5.0	3.9366	6	0.153
7. The youth lack adequate guidance and counseling to take to skills acquisition	38.0	51.0	5.0	4.0	2.0	4.1889	1	0.224
8. There is no adequate forum for mobilizing youth for skills acquisition	37.0	45.0	8.0	7.0	3.0	4.1185	2	0.171
9. Construction site work is viewed by the youth as too difficult a task	27.0	32.0	14.0	18.0	9.0	3.6679	14	0.192
10. Construction site work is viewed by the youth as too degrading	27.0	35.0	9.0	21.0	8.0	3.7222	11	0.193
11. The youth generation are lazy and hence unwilling to acquire skills	26.0	30.0	14.0	22.0	8.0	3.4519	16	0.191
12. Too much emphasis on general/secular education	38.0	27.0	11.0	17.0	7.0	3.8852	9	0.221
13. It is too expensive to receive vocational training	13.0	32.0	14.0	30.0	11.0	3.0967	18	0.221
14. The get rich quick orientation in the nation	40.0	33.0	14.0	10.0	3.0	4.0111	4	0.185
15. Lack of adequate provision for protection and safety of site workers	27.0	34.0	16.0	19.0	4.0	3.6753	12	0.182
16. Lack of encouragement or incentive from political leaders	37.0	23.0	10.0	21.0	9.0	3.6692	13	0.239
17. Absence of health and safety training from the vocational education curriculum	24.0	34.0	18.0	17.0	7.0	3.6236	15	0.156
18. Lack of job security in the construction industry	30.0	38.0	11.0	14.0	7.0	3.9041	7	0.211

Table 2. Cross-tabulation age group and reasons youth do not show interest in acquiring skills.

Variable	Age Range (yrs)	%					% total agreed (SA+A)	Chi-Squared Test	Cramer's V
		SA	A	DN	D	SD			
Lack of adequate guidance and counseling for youth to take to skill acquisition	15-30	33.0	56.0	7.0	4.0	0	89.0	0.031	0.224
	31-45	42.0	48.0	6.0	3.0	1.0	90.0		
	46-60	36.0	51.0	2.0	5.0	6.0	87.0		
	61-65	1	0	0	0	0	100.0		
There is no adequate forum for mobilizing youth for skills acquisition	15-30	33.0	54.0	6.0	5.0	2.0	87.0	0.702	0.171
	31-45	46.0	39.0	9.0	5.0	1.0	85.0		
	46-60	37.0	42.0	9.0	10.0	2.0	79.0		
	61-65	0	1	0	0	0	100.0		
Poor rate of pay for site workers	15-30	28.0	50.0	12.0	9.0	1.0	78.0	0.006	0.238
	31-45	41.0	47.0	3.0	9.0	0	88.0		
	46-60	42.0	35.0	2.0	16.0	5.0	77.0		
	61-65	1	0	0	0	0	100.0		
The get rich quick orientation in the nation	15-30	34.0	38.0	16.0	11.0	1.0	72.0	0.433	0.185
	31-45	49.0	26.0	10.0	13.0	2.0	75.0		
	46-60	42.0	37.0	16.0	3.0	2.0	79.0		
	61-65	0	0	1	0	0	100.0		
Government do not encourage skills acquisition	15-30	31.0	47.0	9.0	13.0	0	78.0	0.035	0.221
	31-45	38.0	44.0	5.0	11.0	2.0	82.0		
	46-60	47.0	26.0	4.0	11.0	12.0	73.0		
	61-65	1	0	0	0	0	100.0		

striking reason why Nigerian youths are not showing interest in acquiring construction related skills, i.e. 89.0% of the younger generation, 90.0% of the middle aged, 87.0% of the aged respondents, and the only senior citizen that participated in the survey. A Chi-square test for independence with (Pearson Chi-square) indicated minor difference between age group and choice of the particular variable: Chi-square (36, N = 267) = p = 0.030 < 0.05; Cramer's V value of 0.22 signifies that the strength of association between age and choice of variable is weak and that age did not seriously influence the perception of respondents on choice of the variable. As earlier stated, the value of

Cramer's V varies between 0 and 1, a value close to 0 shows little association between variables; close to 1; it indicates a strong association. The second variable in the ranking (Table 1) was the *inadequate forum for mobilizing youth for skills acquisition*. In Table 2, 87.0% of the younger generation group and 85.0% of the middle aged agreed to the same reason for the low interest of Nigerian youth in acquiring construction related skills. 79.0% of the aged agreed along with the only senior citizen that participated in the survey opined the same; *Poor rate of pay for site workers* ranked third in Table 1, while Table 2 indicated that 78.0% younger generation, 88.0% middle aged and 77.0% aged agreed on the same factor. Chi-square (36, N = 267) = $p = 0.01$ indicating some degree of difference in choice of the various age groups; $V = 0.24$ however indicates a weak association between age and choice of variable. The *get rich quick orientation* ranked fourth in Table 1 and in Table 2 had percentage agreements of (72.0 younger generation, 75.0 middle aged and 79.0 aged; Chi-square (36, N = 267) = $p = 0.44$ and $v = 0.19$: indicating no association between age and choice of variable). *Government does not encourage skills acquisition* ranked fifth in Table 1 and had percentage agreements of (77.0 of younger generation group, 82.0 of the middle aged and 73.0 of the aged; Chi-square test $p = 0.04$ and $v = 0.22$: indicating some degree, but weak strength of association between age and variable choice.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The lack of interest in acquisition of construction related crafts skills among the Nigerian youths is evidently a contributory factor to crafts skills shortages being experienced in the nation's construction sector. In order to address the present situation and sustain interests in opting for careers in construction crafts, the research findings recommend that the construction industry should collaborate with government to put machinery in place that would ensure that guidance and counseling are provided at junior and senior secondary levels to sensitize youths on the economic and professional benefits of crafts skills acquisition. Support from the various tiers of government should embark on enlightenment campaign to educate the populace on the need to change the negative views about craft occupations in the construction industry. The construction related professional bodies should clearly demarcate routes for professional career progression for crafts careerists and ensure that such arrangements are well implemented. Existing policies on construction workers health and safety should be adequately implemented and craftsmen wages reviewed.

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