

CHALLENGES HINDERING ACQUISITION OF SKILLS BY APPRENTICESHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL TRAINED FASHION DESIGNERS: TOWARDS UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CURBING UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

OLAOYE, S.F AND EZEUGUINE, J.A (PhD)

Department of Home-Economics Education
Federal College of Education Technical Akoka, Lagos
Correspondence: +2349126897831 & +2348066391172

Abstract

The study explored the levels of competency and the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion designers trained through apprenticeship and educational institution system towards unlocking opportunities for curbing unemployment issues in Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design in which structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from participants. The population comprised all male and female undergraduate students of Home-Economics in two tertiary institutions in Lagos state as at 2022/2023 academic session and apprentices learning fashion design in four apprentice centers within Akoka, Lagos. The sample for the study comprised of 20 apprentices (purposely selected) and 40 Home-Economics students selected through a simple random sampling technique. Hence, a total of 60 participants represented the study sample. Structured questionnaire based on the specific objectives of the study was the only instrument for data collection for the study. The questionnaire was tagged "Level of Competency between apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers" (LCBAITFD). All the questionnaire items were structured on a four point Likert scale options of strongly agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The reliability of the instrument was determined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Statistics to obtain a value of 0.76. The data collected was analyzed using frequency distribution, simple percentage, mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD). The study found that employment opportunities can be unlocked in both system of training if the right resources and approaches are used. Among the recommendations given are that Nigerian graduates should be equipped with thinking, innovative and creative skills with which they can effectively navigate and cope with the present economic challenges in Nigeria.

Keywords: Skills Acquisition, Challenges, Apprenticeship, Educational Institution, Fashion Designers.

Introduction

The continuous and unabated problem of unemployment is among the myriad of social problems facing Nigeria today with far-reaching consequences on the economy and national security. As Nigeria economy now battles with the fallout of the present fuel price deregulation, there is an urgent need to navigate the challenges and unlock opportunities especially among thousands of graduates produced yearly by Nigerian tertiary institutions. In order to achieve this noble option, Nigerian graduates must be equipped with thinking, innovative and creative skills with which they can effectively navigate and cope with the present economic challenges. According to Nordin and Malik (2015) critical thinking and creativity complement each other as both are needed to survive and to prosper especially in the post –fuel price deregulation era.

In Nigeria today, employers of labour have consistently maintained that majority of the graduates graduating from Nigerian tertiary institutions and who are seeking employment in different professional fields are though academically and professionally qualified (graduating with good academic grades), they are nevertheless mostly not suitable for the employment. This is because these graduates lack the requisite skills and competencies needed in the job. This lack of skills often creates a gap in their efficiency and service delivery. Mbanefo and Eboka (2018) argued that the high rate of graduate's unemployment today in Nigeria is not only as a result of unavailability of jobs but essentially due to lack of candidates with employable skills.

There are two possible learning avenues for an individual to become a professional fashion designer. These are institutional based learning and apprenticeship based learning. While institutional based learning is training giving in academic institutions like University, Polytechnic and Colleges of education under a well defined and regulated curriculum for a designed period of time and which usually culminate in certification after passing a prescribed achievement tests (theory and practical), the apprenticeship based training is usually done with on-the-job training under a trained and certified trainer. According to Adrienne & Sharon (2023) apprenticeship is a system for training or a programme in which an individual is paid to learn skills and real-life work experiences from an expert professional or craftsman with the promise of employment in the specific industry the individual has trained. The bone of contention that informed this study is whether individuals or group of professional fashion designers trained in educational institutions are better than those trained under the apprenticeship system or vice versa as a number of baseless or unfounded theories have continued to be subject of debate as to which of these practitioners are more creative, innovative and professional in their work.

Learning fashion design either under institutional based training or apprenticeship based training can have both positive and negative sides. Some of the problems and shortfalls of the apprenticeship system that tend to hinder its effective skill acquisition were highlighted by Adekola (2013); Achugo & Chigbo (2014) and Azmanirah, Nurfirdawati, Marina & Jamil (2014) to include: limited learning content and poor integration of theory, shortage of capable teachers, poor public conception of the apprenticeship system, lack of established curriculum, master crafts persons lack pedagogical skills, lack of necessary policy framework etc. On the other hand, incessant industrial actions against government policies by the academic unions, poor integration of technologies into practical teaching and learning, high level of corruption on the part of institutional management that have caused diversion of funds meant for purchase of equipment into personal use, and over indulgence on theoretical aspect of learning at the expense of practical learning have consistently jeopardized learning process in educational institutions.

Youth and graduates unemployment in Nigeria have become a social canker and a national embarrassment to an extent that many graduates have been described as unemployable because they lack prerequisite skills that can propel them through in the labour market after graduating from school. To buttress this fact, Oparada (2023) noted that Nigeria ranks 4th among world's top 10 countries with highest youth unemployment. Similarly, most of the trained apprentices in different trade have all failed in their profession as necessary competencies and skills were lacking. Similarly, Adio-Adepoju (2024) described the rise of joblessness among recent graduates as a pandemic that is visible throughout the country.

Nigeria government have continued to enact policies which seek to eradicate the problem of unemployment and lack of skills acquisition through vocational and apprenticeship programmes but lack of continuity and sustainability of these programmes form the main challenges that threw them overboard. Learning fashion designing in educational institutions have been bedeviled by a number of problems ranging from lack of qualified teachers/trainers, poor and under-equipped clothing laboratories, poor funding of vocational education and endemic corruption on the part of the institutions management.

This study therefore aims to assess the challenges hindering acquisition of skills by apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers towards unlocking opportunities for curbing unemployment in Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The specific objectives of this study included the following;

1. To identify the competency levels of apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers
2. To determine the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion trainees in educational institutions
3. To determine the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion trainees under apprenticeship system

4. To find out how learning institutions can collaborate effectively with the industry to help bridge graduate unemployment in Nigeria

Research Questions

Based on the above specific objectives of the study, the following research questions helped to guide and provide focus for the study.

1. What is the competency level of apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers?
2. What are the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion trainees in educational institutions?
3. What are the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion trainees under apprenticeship system?
4. How effectively can the learning institutions collaborate with the industry to help bridge graduate unemployment in Nigeria?

Methodology

For the execution of this study, the descriptive survey research design was adopted. This is because the study employed the use of structured questionnaire to elicit responses on the problem of the study from selected study participants (students of clothing and textile in tertiary institution and Artisans learning fashion design under apprenticeship system) and the result obtained were used to generalize the entire study population. The population of this study therefore comprised of all male and female undergraduate students of Home-Economics in two tertiary institutions in Lagos state as at 2022/2023 academic session and apprentices learning fashion design in four apprentice centers within Akoka, Lagos. The sample for the study comprised of 20 apprentices (purposively selected) and 40 Home-Economics students selected through a simple random sampling technique. Hence, a total of 60 participants represented the study sample.

Structured questionnaire based on the specific objectives of the study was the only instrument for data collection for the study. The questionnaire was tagged "Level of Competency between apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers" (LCBAITFD). All the questionnaire items were structured on a four point scale options of strongly agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Three experts in Home-Economics compared the specific objectives of the study with the questionnaire items, made necessary corrections and adjustment which helped to ensure that the instruments had both face and content validity. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, simple percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation were used in data analysis. The cut-off mean was 2.5 (since a four point scale option was used) such that all mean score of 2.5 and above were remarked as agree while all mean score below 2.5 were remarked as disagree. State your method of data analysis.

Results

The data analysis yielded significant results, which are presented in this section to address the research questions

Research Question 1

What is the Competency Level of Apprenticeship and Institutional Trained Fashion Designers?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation showing the Response of Trainees on Level of Competency of Apprenticeship and Institutional Trained Fashion Designers

S/N	What is the competency level of apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers?	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Trainees under the apprenticeship system are better equipped with practical skills than those institutionally trained	60	2.60	1.20	Agree
2	The critical thinking skills required in fashion designing is grossly lacking in trainee under the apprenticeship when compared to those trained in educational institutions	60	3.95	.0.20	Agree
3	Fashion designer trained in educational institutions is better equipped with financial management skills than those trained under apprenticeship.	60	2.42	.1.28	Disagree
4	Apprenticeship training programme of artisans promote job satisfaction better than institutional training programme	60	2,51	0.70	Agree
5	Teamwork skills is better promoted under apprenticeship training than in institutional training	60	2.40	1.36	Disagree
6	Fashion designers trained in educational institutions usually have better command of English language which is essential communication skills needed to promote business.	60	2.58	0.68	Agree
7	Educational institution have better organized curriculum of learning which allow trainee to learn systematically and in order	60	3.50	0.60	Agree
8	In apprentice3ship system, learning is often not organized which makes learners to learn in a disorganized manner.	60	3.68	0.47	Agree

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

The data presented in Table 1 shows the perceptions of the fashion trainees on the level of competency of apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers. The respondents rated item 1, 2, 4, 7 and 8 as agree with a mean rating of 2.60, 3.95, 2.51, 2.58, 3.50 and 3.68 respectively implying that institutionally trained fashion designers have better competency skill than their counterparts trained under the apprenticeship system. Meanwhile, the respondents showed disagreement to questionnaire items 3 and 5 with mean ratings of 2.42 and 2.40 respectively.

Research Question 2

What are the Challenges Preventing Acquisition of Skills by Fashion Trainees in Educational Institutions?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation showing Responses of Fashion Trainees on Challenges Preventing Acquisition of Skills in Educational Institutions

S/N	What are the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion Trainees in educational institutions?	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Incessant industrial actions against government policies by the academic unions often jeopardized learning process in educational institutions	60	3.50	0.60	Agree
2	Poor integration of technologies into practical teaching and learning	60	2.77	1.37	Agree
3	Most of the academic institutions are poorly equipped with tools and equipment for learning basic design skills	60	3.69	0.47	Agree
4	High level of corruption on the part of institutional management that have caused diversion of funds for purchase of equipment into for personal use	60	2.60	1.29	Agree
5	Over indulgence on theoretical aspect of learning at the expense of practical learning	60	3.54	0.58	Agree
6	Most of the lecturers and facilitators lack the technical ability to improvise equipment for learning where they are not available	60	2.83	0.35	Agree
7	Lack of enough and modern textbooks on fashion and design that can make learning easier	60	2.51	0.60	Agree
8	In most of the educational institutions, curriculum of learning are often rushed and in most cases not effectively covered before examinations	60	3.70	0.46	Agree

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Data analysis in Table 2 showed that the respondents generally obliged to the entire questionnaire item with mean ratings greater than 2.50 in all the items. The implication of this is that although fashion trainees in educational institutions are said to have better competency skills, the process of skills acquisition is often hindered by many drawbacks such as poor integration of technologies into practical teaching/learning and the incessant industrial actions against government policies by the academic unions

Research Question 3

What are the Challenges Preventing Acquisition of Skills by Fashion Trainees under Apprenticeship System?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation in Responses of Trainees on challenges preventing Acquisition of Skills under Apprenticeship system

S/N	What are the challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion trainees under apprenticeship system?	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Curriculum of learning is not organized and patterned in a logical sequence	60	3.55	0.58	Agree
2	Trainee often waste quality time in serving their master in non-related shores in traditional apprenticeships	60	3.59	0.54	Agree
3	Learning are not often properly monitored to an extent that trainee can easily drop out	60	3.60	0.41	Agree

4	People undergoing apprenticeship are seen as "never do well" people and they are not given deserved respect as their counterparts in the formal school system	60	2.62	1.26	Agree
5	Financial problem, in most cases, made it difficult to sponsor apprenticeship training for the agreed period of training.	60	3.57	0.51	Agree
6	Limited learning content and poor integration of theory is a major problem of apprenticeship system	60	2.88	0.31	Agree
7	Apprenticeship system in Nigeria and most African countries lack necessary policy framework to regulate the activities of stakeholders	60	2.51	0.60	Agree
8	It is generally believed that the apprenticeship system is meant for those who cannot cope with formal education, either due to their mental deficiencies or their parents' inability to afford the cost of formal education.	60	3.77	0.39	Agree

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

The data analysis in Table 3 showed what the respondents generally perceived as challenges preventing acquisition of skills by fashion trainees under apprenticeship system. All the mean score of above 2.50 indicated that the respondents agreed to all the questionnaire items.

Research Question 4

How effectively can the Learning Institutions collaborate with the Industry to help Bridge Graduate unemployment in Nigeria?

Table 8: Mean and Standard Deviation in Responses on how Learning Institutions can collaborate with the Industry to help Bridge Graduate Unemployment

S/N	How effectively can the learning institutions collaborate with the industry to help bridge graduate unemployment?	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Adoption of integrated curriculum i.e. the curriculum of teaching should be such that industrial experience is well blended into it	60	2.66	1.19	Agree
2	Centre for learning specific skills should be established as a unit across all tertiary institutions in Nigeria and students should be made to offer at least a skill oriented course as prerequisite for graduation	60	3.98	0.17	Agree
3	SIWES programme should be re-packaged such that the Vocational and Technical institution's supervisors have direct partnership with the industry based supervisors in the overall interest of the learners	60	3.99	0.17	Agree
4	Regular industrial visit (field trip) should be organized for students to visit relevant industries where they can be exposed to industrial reality in their field of study	60	3.89	0.26	Agree
5	Seminars and workshops should be regularly organized for students on how to transform theoretical knowledge to industrial reality	60	3.88	1.26	Agree
6	The educational institutions should have direct link and collaborative synergy with employers in related Home-Economics fields	60	2.54	0.69	Agree

7	More hours should be allocated for practical aspects of learning than for just theoretical aspects	60	3.78	0.39	Agree
8	The industry should help the training institutions with training facilities which will ensure adequate practical training so that students can conform with the modern trends in the industry	60	2.53	0.69	Agree

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

The data presented in Table 4 shows the responses of the respondents on what they believe can be done to effectively bridge graduates unemployment in Nigeria. The respondents rated item 1 to 8 as agreed with a mean rating ranging from 2.54 to 3.99. Hence, the mean score shows that the fashion trainees agreed to all the suggested strategies for improving unemployment situation in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings on the competency level of apprenticeship and institutional trained fashion designers showed the general perceptions of the fashion trainees on the fact that the critical thinking skills required in fashion designing is grossly lacking in trainee under the apprenticeship system when compared to those trained in educational institutions and that apprenticeship training programme of artisans promote job satisfaction better than institutional training programme. Educational institutions are also said to be better organized in terms of curriculum of learning which allow trainee to learn systematically and in order. These findings corroborates that of Elazier (2019) who believed that the competency skills of fashion trainee under the apprenticeship system are limited because of lack of standard curriculum of learning

The findings of research question two indicated that the respondents obliged to incessant industrial actions against government policies by the academic unions which often jeopardized learning process in educational institutions plus the fact that poor integration of technologies into practical teaching and learning do not allow trainees to learn innovatively and creatively in line with the trending digital age. More so, the respondents believe that high level of corruption on the part of institutional management that have caused diversion of funds for purchase of equipment into for personal use have limited effective skills acquisitions which are needed to navigate successfully in this era of economic difficulties in Nigeria. These findings were found to be in line with the assertions of Mieschbuehler and Hooky (2016) who both agreed that formal apprenticeship programmes offered a number of opportunities to learners but is generally hindered by many challenges relating to poor government policies and lack of support for educational system.

Research question three examined the challenges of skills acquisition under the apprenticeship system of training. On this, the respondents generally agreed that the curriculum of learning under apprenticeship is not organized and patterned in a logical sequence and that people undergoing apprenticeship are seen as "*never do well*" people and they are not given deserved respect as their counterparts in the formal school system. The respondents also agreed that apprenticeship system in Nigeria and most African countries lack necessary policy framework to regulate the activities of stakeholders. These findings corroborate the assertion of Sonnenberg (2012) who agreed that poor public conception of the apprenticeship system and lack of established curriculum are major problems confronting apprenticeship system of training.

Lastly, the findings in research question 4 summarize the perceptions of the respondents on how best the learning institutions can collaborate with the industry to help bridge graduate unemployment in Nigeria. The respondents agreed that adoption of integrated curriculum i.e. the curriculum of teaching should be such that industrial experience is well blended into it and that SIWES programme should be re-packaged such that the Vocational and Technical institution's supervisors have direct partnership with the industry-based supervisors in the overall interest of the learners. Among other strategies for improved graduate employment in Nigeria are that centre for learning specific skills should be established as a unit across all tertiary institutions in Nigeria and students should be made to offer at least a skill-oriented course as prerequisite for graduation and that regular

industrial visit (field trip) should be organized for students to visit relevant industries where they can be exposed to industrial reality in their field of study. This finding is in line with the assertion of Soares (2016) who stated that effective collaboration that are geared towards developing alternative education programmes for students to gain valuable work experience with industries is very important for meeting manpower needs in industries. Scott (2014) similarly agreed that collaborative partnership, integrated curriculum, comprehensive career guidance and work-based learning are the key elements of smooth transition of school classroom theories to work practice in different Vocational and Technical occupation

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant challenges hindering apprenticeship and institutionally trained fashion designers in Nigeria, including the fact that the curriculum of learning under apprenticeship system is not organized and patterned in a logical sequence, people undergoing apprenticeship are seen as "*never do well*" people and they are not given deserved respect as their counterparts in the formal school system and that incessant industrial actions against government policies by the academic unions often jeopardized learning process in educational institutions. Addressing these challenges is crucial to unlocking opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to the reduction of unemployment in Nigeria. Policy interventions and stakeholders' collaboration are essential to bridge the skill gap and foster sustainable growth in the fashion industry. More so that Nigeria economy now battles with the fallout of the present fuel price deregulation, there is an urgent need to navigate the challenges and unlock opportunities especially among thousands of graduates produced yearly by Nigerian tertiary institutions. In order to achieve this noble option, Nigerian graduates must be equipped with thinking, innovative and creative skills with which they can effectively navigate and cope with the present economic challenges. Fashion is one of dynamic global industries that plays important role on economic, political, cultural and social lives of people and only well trained and skilled fashion designers can succeed in the current depressed Nigeria economy.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following in order to mitigate the challenges hindering acquisition of skills by apprenticeship and institutionally trained fashion designers in Nigeria.

1. Centre for learning specific skills should be established as a unit across all tertiary institutions in Nigeria and students should be made to offer at least a skill oriented course as prerequisite for graduation
2. SIWES programme should be re-packaged for better integration of theoretical learning with industrial experience towards productive labour force.
3. Nigerian graduates must be equipped with thinking, innovative and creative skills which they can use to effectively navigate and cope with the present economic challenges.
4. In the present technological era, skills acquisition for prospective Nigeria labour force should be ICT driven as proficiency in ICT skills at any level opens doors to tech-oriented job opportunities.
5. Nigeria government should encourage public-private partnerships to promote skill development and job creation
6. Stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of curriculum should consider reviewing and updating the curriculum to reflect industry needs and global best practices
7. Home Economics teachers should regularly organize fashion shows, exhibitions and competitions to showcase students' work and encourage them to do more
8. Home-Economics teachers should be encouraged to attend conferences, seminars and workshops on fashion education to help improve their pedagogical skills of imparting knowledge to their students.

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