

An Assessment of the Apprenticeship System as a Means of Acquiring Sewing Skills in Ghana

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the current state of the apprenticeship system in acquiring sewing skills in Ghana. The study area was Kaneshie Market in Accra. The proportional random sampling technique was used to select forty (40) master-craftsmen and fifty-four (54) apprentices respectively. A structured interview questionnaire was used to interview the respondents. The Microsoft excel software was employed to analyze the data and the results represented in frequency, percentage distribution tables, bar and pie charts. It was revealed in the study that not many people would like to go into sewing apprenticeship in recent years. The result showed that, majority of the apprentices dropped out in the first year of apprenticeship compared to the second and third years and there were no clear cut methods of training apprentices. It is suggested that the government should provide support to members of the National Tailors and Dressmakers Association to upgrade their skills in collaboration with the technical institutes and be assisted to develop a common curriculum and teaching methods for members to adopt in training apprentices.

Keywords: assessment, apprenticeship, sewing skills

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1. Introduction

Garment manufacture plays a major role in Ghana's development. Biney-Aidoo (2006) indicated that, garment manufacture is generally considered to be one of the "starter industries" for a country's industrial developments. It is a labour intensive and systematic form of manufacture which does not depend on heavily sophisticated technical skills. Imirhe (2004) observed that, in Ghana, garment production is a popular small-scale occupation for both men and women and there has been a long and sustained condition of apprenticeship in garment making. Apprenticeship is a contractual agreement undertaken by the master-craftsmen and the apprentice, through which the apprentice is trained for a prescribed job process through practical experience, under the supervision of the master-craftsman for a period of time. It is a form of workplace learning, which enables the apprentice to have on-the-job training (Uwameiye & Iyamu, 2010). The apprenticeship system of training dressmakers and tailors has been in place for a period of time and remains a form of training for the youth to equip them with remarkable skills in order to reduce unemployment. Apprenticeship in sewing has been the practice by master-craftsmen who have the knowledge and skills in making clothes, and hand down what they have mastered from generation to generation to ensure continuity (Larbi 2009). Larbi (2009) continued that, it is imperative that in the absence of academic certificates and other paper qualifications, the youth be equipped with strong vocational or technical skills as a means of livelihood. Biney-Aidoo (2006) indicated that a lot of women with sewing skills have benefited from sewing apprenticeship because they mostly work at home and also have time to take care of their families without any hindrances. Gondwe & Walenkamp (2011) revealed that available statistics from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2008a), provided the distribution of apprentices above 15 years old in various industrial sectors of the Ghanaian economy. This statistics revealed that the textile, apparel and furnishing sector had the highest percentage (36%, 78% of which are female) followed by the building sector (15.2%, < 1% of which are female) and so on (see appendix A). Viglo (2005) pointed out that the informal training sector plays a vital role in the national economy by promoting technical and vocational skills through traditional apprenticeship training schemes. The President's Committee on the Review of Education Reforms in Ghana (Republic of Ghana, 2002) stated that Junior Secondary School (JSS) graduates, who are unable to continue their education, should be given the opportunity to undertake apprenticeship in the formal or informal sector. This in the long run creates employment for the youth and contributes to the nation's GDP. Velde et al (1999) stated that, the nature of roadside indigenous apprenticeship is unorganized and unstructured.

Uwameiye & Iyamu (2010) and the African Union (2007) indicated that traditional apprenticeship offers the largest opportunity for the acquisition of employable skills in the informal sector in West Africa, while in Ghana, the informal sector accounts for more than ninety percent (90%) of all skills training. Uwamieya and Iyamu (2010) again revealed that roadside apprenticeship provides opportunity for training adolescents who drop out of schools. This helps keep the youth busy and hence prevent them from engaging in social vices such as drug abuse and robbery. On the other hand, majority of those who end up acquiring sewing skills through apprenticeship are not able to set up their own shops and function effectively (Tatum, 2003). These may be due to reasons like the lack of initial capital, incompetence, and lack of entrepreneurial skills. Most of them end up street hawking, dealing in second hand clothes, selling plantain chips and so on for fast cash to earn a living. Presently in Ghana, young people no longer show much interest in acquiring sewing skills in apprenticeship. Rather, they prefer going through formal training to obtain academic certificates and other paper qualifications. Most of the youth who show interest and enter into non-formal apprenticeship training, drop-out and do not complete the training. Furthermore, the attitude of some of the apprentices toward work prevents master-craftsmen from teaching them certain vital skills. Most of them go into apprenticeship by chance or are forced there by their parents or guardians without having any interest. Therefore, they do not pay much attention to the master-craftsmen and may graduate without being equipped with the necessary skills. The question that arises is whether the apprenticeship system is still effective in imparting the appropriate sewing skills to trainees as it used to be. It is against this background that this study sought to critically examine the current situation of the apprenticeship system as a method of acquiring skills in sewing.

2. Research Methodology

The research approach for this study was mainly qualitative and evaluative. This was considered appropriate to generate a holistic picture and depth of understanding rather than a numeric analysis of data. The population of the study was the dressmakers (master-craftsmen) who work on the second floor of a market complex in Kaneshie, a suburb in the Western part of the Greater-Accra Region of Ghana. The population is made up of total of about one hundred and eighty (180) master-craftsmen. A purposive random sampling method was employed to select a sample size of forty (40) master-craftsmen who had at least two apprentices each to obtain an apprentice respondent of 80. The first forty master-craftsmen who met this criteria were selected. However, the target of interviewing two apprentices per master-craftsman could not be achieved due to the declining numbers of apprentices in recent years. A total of fifty-four (54) apprentices in all were therefore used as the sample size. The data was gathered using interview questionnaire so that the questions could be asked during work since the respondents were very busy people. A focus group discussion was also conducted using a total of twenty (20) master-craftsmen of a garment and textile cluster group in Nungua, another suburb in the Eastern part of the Greater-Accra Region of Ghana. This method afforded respondents the opportunity to freely express themselves on issues relevant to the research. It also permitted further probing for detailed information. The questionnaire was serially coded to ensure easy identification. Data entry, analysis and processing were done by the application of the Microsoft Excel Programme. The data was presented using percentage distribution tables, pie and bar charts. The results the focus group discussions were laced with responses from respondents in the write up.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Table 1: Percentage distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Master- craftsmen (%)	Apprentices (%)
15 – 20	0	31
21 – 25	0	54
26 – 30	15	15
31 – 35	30	0
36 – 40	32.5	0
41 and above	22.5	0
Total	100	100

Table 1 show that the master-craftsmen were between the age range of 26 and 40 years. Thirty-two point five

32.5% were within the ages of 36 to 40 years, 30% were in the range of 31 to 35 years, while 15% and 22.5% were obtained for the age groups of 26 to 30 and 41 years and above respectively. No respondent happened to fall within the age groups of 15 to 20 and 21 to 25. The majority of the master-craftsmen were more than 30 years old. They mentioned that they are not able to establish immediately after graduating as apprentices and so continued to work for some more years with their masters in order to perfect their skills and acquire resources to establish themselves and recruit more apprentices.

The apprentices were generally between 15 to 30 years. The majority (54%) were aged between 21 to 25 years followed by those between 15 to 20 years who formed 31%, while 8% were in the age range of 26 to 30 years old. The age range of 21 to 25 years recorded the highest number of apprentices. Further investigations revealed that young people between ages 15 to 20 years are those who might have just come out of school, but are undecided on the type of trade to engage in. They therefore stay at home or go into other businesses like buying and selling (street hawking), before finally deciding on sewing apprenticeship. This, it was revealed was not the case twenty years ago when almost all apprentices were between 15 to 20 years. The statistics also shows that the age range of 26 to 30 recorded 15% while the ranges of 31 to 35, 36 to 40 and 41 years and above each recorded no apprentices. It was revealed that, those in these age groups feel reluctant to go into apprenticeship because most of them consider themselves to be too old for sewing apprenticeship or are in serious marital relationships and taking care of their families.

3.2 Gender of Respondents

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of respondents' Gender

Gender	Master-craftsmen (%)	Apprentices (%)
Male	32.5	29.6
Female	67.5	70.4
Total	100	100

Majority of both master-craftsmen and apprentices were females and formed 67.5% and 70.4% of the respondents respectively, as shown in table 2. The males were 32.5% and 29.6% respectively. This is in agreement with studies by Fianu and Acquah-Harrison (1999) who stated that garment production has historically been a significant area of women's work throughout the world and especially in Ghana. Most girls are trained in the skills of needlework and handicrafts within the home or within the educational system.

3.3 Educational Level of Respondents

Table 3: Percentage distribution of Respondents by Level of Education

Level	Master-craftsmen(%)	Apprentices (%)
Tertiary	27.5	0.0
2 nd Cycle	32.5	15.4
1 st Cycle	40	84.6
Total	100	100

Table 3 indicates that, the majority of the master-craftsmen attended first cycle schools representing 40% of the population. This is followed by 32.5% who attended Second Cycle Schools and 27.5% had had tertiary education. From the results, it is obvious that some level of education is important for any category of teaching. All the master-craftsmen in the study attained some level of formal education.

In the case of the apprentices, the majority (84.6%) went to school only up to the basic education level. This confirms Uwamieya and Iyamu's (2010) assertion that apprenticeship provides opportunity for training adolescents who dropped out of schools and those who cannot afford the secondary school fees. Those who attended second cycle schools were 15.4% and none of them had tertiary education. The master-craftsmen indicated that, they expect their apprentices to have at least some form of basic formal education to make work simple and easier. It was also revealed that people with education up to the second cycle level prefer to be enrolled in the Polytechnics, Universities and Fashion schools to acquire the sewing skills.

3.4 Minimum Academic Requirement for Admission into Apprenticeship

The minimum academic qualification required for apprenticeship by the master-craftsmen is presented in figure1. Most of the respondents (70%) require the apprentices they train to have obtained a minimum education of Junior High School level, 25% required the apprentices to have obtained at least primary school education while only 5% would admit apprentices with no formal education. None of the respondents considered secondary education as a minimum requirement.

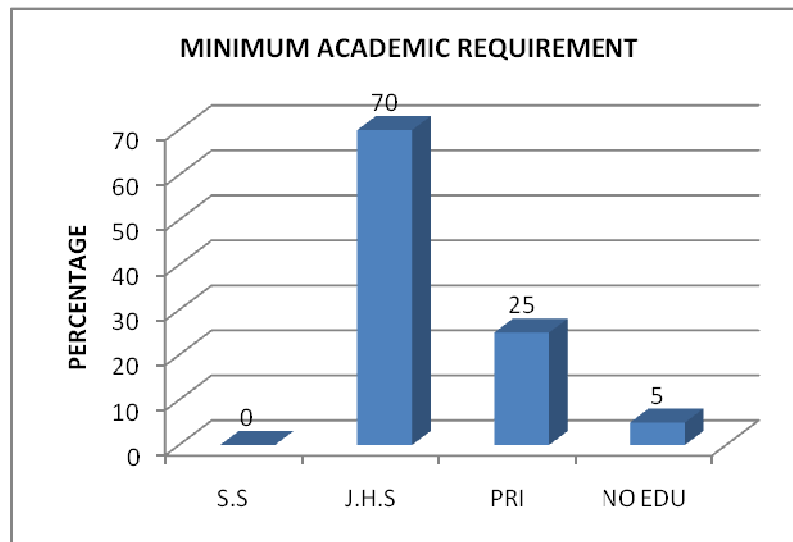


Figure 1: Minimum Academic Requirement by Master-Craftsmen

As depicted in Figure 1, majority of the master-craftsmen expect the apprentices they wish to train to have had some form of formal education. The apprentices should be able to do simple arithmetic such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Only two of the respondents would engage apprentices with no formal education and considered the interest shown by the prospective apprentices and talent as the key factors for recruitment into apprenticeship training.

3.5 A Comparison of Apprentices Trained by master-craftsmen for a Period of Ten Years

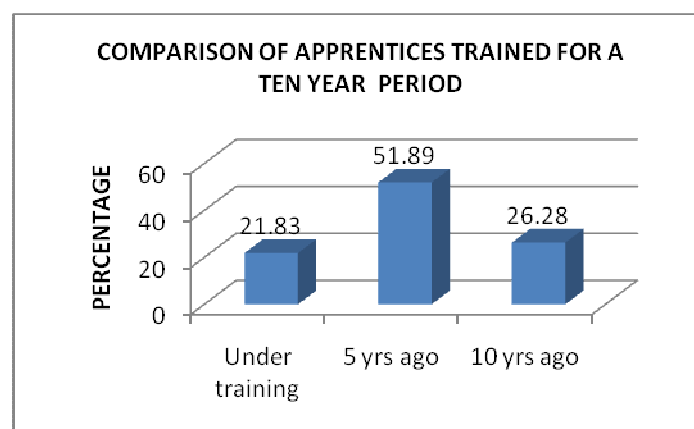


Figure 2: Comparison of Apprentices Trained For a Period of Ten Years

The highest percentage of apprentices trained by the master-craftsmen was obtained about five years ago and represents 51.89%. This is followed by 26.28% who graduated about ten years ago. Currently the number under training represents 21.83%. Figure 2 is a graph showing the percentage distribution of the number of apprentices trained over a period of ten years. It shows that not many people are currently interested in sewing

apprenticeship compared to 5 years and 10 years ago. Further investigations revealed that this is due to the fact that most parents would like to send their children to acquire sewing skills in the formal educational institutions. Again, the youth are currently more interested in trades with shorter training (apprenticeship) periods like hairdressing, manicure and pedicure. The ‘get-rich syndrome’ amongst the youth in the country these days is also driving most of them from apprenticeship training.

3.6 Number of Years in Apprenticeship

Table 4: Number of years spent in apprenticeship training

Number Of Years	Percentage (%)
One	48.15
Two	31.48
Three	20.37
Total	100.00

The above results show that 48.15% of the apprentices were trained for one year, 31.48% were trained for two years and only 20.37% were trained for the mandatory three years of apprenticeship. It is apparent from the above that, the numbers of the apprentices recruited for training reduced over the period of the apprenticeship training. The master-craftsmen were in agreement that most of the apprentices dropped out in the first year of apprenticeship compared to the second and third years. Further inquiries revealed that this is due to poverty and inability to fulfill the apprenticeship fees. Some apprentices find the length of the apprenticeship to be too long, some lack discipline and are unable to obey instructions from seniors and others get involved in social vices such as drunkenness and pregnancy. The most predominant challenge contributing to drop-out of apprentices in the second year of skill training is pregnancy. Also, in some cases the harsh treatment meted out by some master-craftsmen on apprentices scare them away from the trade. None of the apprentices dropped-out in the third year of apprenticeship. It is obvious that, at this stage they would have acquired adequate skills, and are eager to serve and be appreciated by their masters in order to learn more techniques in the trade and later become masters themselves.

3.7 Period of Payment of Contract Fees

Table 5: Period of Payment of Contract Fees

Payment Option	Percentage (%)
Full payment before starting	30.0
Within first 3 months	15.0
Within first 6 months	27.5
Up to 1 year	27.5
Total	100.0

The period and mode of payment of the contract fees differ from one master-craftsman to another. Majority (30%) of the respondents demand full payments before the apprentices are allowed to start the training. They believe that the instant payment of full fees would ensure that parents or guardians would take greater interest and monitor their wards’ training and that the apprentices would take their apprenticeship training seriously. The rest of the respondents would accept fees to be paid by installments within first 3 months (15%), within first 6 months (27.5%) and up to one year (27.5%), However, the master-craftsman fear that, the apprentices might quit after acquiring some skills. Fianu and Acquaaah-Harrison (1999) observed that, the disadvantage in paying in installments was that the apprentices might quit after they had acquired enough skills to sew independently before the training period is ended. It was revealed that, some of the apprentices who drop out before the completion of the apprenticeship start sewing for relatives and friends and later become masters of their own. This sometimes accounts for the poor quality of workmanship by some seamstresses (master-craftsman).

3.8 The Order of the Work Schedule for Apprentice Skill Learning at the Workshop for Three Years

Generally, the apprentices first learnt to make simple hand stitches. These were; hemming, fixing of buttons and making of button holes by hand on completed garments and using hand sewing machines to make straight stitches on the seams of skirts. These simple skills were practiced to perfection within the first three months of

training while observing the master-craftsmen and the senior apprentices to learn more complex skills such as taking body measurements, designing and cutting of blouse designs; and the pressing of garments during construction.

From the fourth month, the apprentices start designing kaba and slit (a traditional skirt and blouse in Ghana) using brown paper or muslin.

By the sixth month, an apprentice must be able to sew a uniform prescribed by the master-craftsman for him or herself to serve as the first skill assessment of the training. Other complex skills were acquired by learning on-the-job as they progressed.

The skill training in the sewing shops has been described as random and informal as they vary from one master-craftsman to another. Fianu and Acquah-Harrison (1999) however observed that, while no formal instructions were given nor any pre-conceived format followed, there was nonetheless an implicit order to the entire apprenticeship experience.

4. Conclusion

Apprenticeship is a form of workplace learning or skills acquisition which enables the apprentice to have an on-the-job training. 'Wayside' sewing apprenticeship has for a long time provided opportunities for young people who dropped out of school or unable to pay high school fees, to acquire sewing skills under the supervision of master-craftsmen. In the training of apprentices, there is no formal curriculum in use. The jobs at hand, the problems arising and faults at the material moment determine the content of training. Teaching in the workshop involved mostly observations and practice by hand and machine sewing (hands-on experience). It is observed that the teaching of theoretical principles is non-existent and the apprentices are not prepared for opportunities to judge situations based on the available theoretical principles. An apprentice receives training depending on the skills of the master-craftsman. The apprentice is thus trained to be like his/her master. The interest of young people in acquiring sewing skills through apprenticeship is declining. It is also revealed that the drop-out rate among apprentices is high in the first and second years of training, which resulted in the termination of the contract agreement. The major reason attributed to this is financial difficulties and lack of interest.

The following recommendations are made in view of the findings of the study

- The results of this research be communicated to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) the Presidents' Special Initiative (PSI) on Textiles and Garments and the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association (GNTDA). This will create awareness on the realities of the problems of apprenticeship.
- The National Tailors and Dressmakers Association should be supported to upgrade their skills in collaboration with the technical institutes like the Polytechnics.
- The tailors and dressmakers associations should be assisted to develop a common curriculum and textbooks to formalize their teaching methods.
- The apprentices should be provided with some grants to assist them in meeting tools and equipment cost and payment of initial contract fees.

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Appendix A: The distribution of apprentices >15 years old in various industrial sectors of the Ghanaian economy (Source: GSS, 2008a).

Main trade*	Apprentices (% of total)
Food and beverages preparation/processing services	3.9% (90.5% of which are female)
Health and related services	0.2% (50% of which are female)
Personal/ grounds services	14.3% (96% of which are female)
Building	15.2% (<1% of which are female)
Automotive engineering	9.0% (2.5% of which are female)
Electrical Engineering	3.9% (4% of which are female)
Mechanical Engineering	4.7% (1.5% of which are female)
Fishing/hunting/forestry	0.6% (20% of which are female)
Textile, apparel and furnishing	36% (78% of which are female)
Other Production Related Trades	1.4% (59% of which are female)
Transportation and material moving trades	9.4% (<1% of which are female)
Visual and performance artists	0.7% (16% of which are female)
Administrative/ support services	0.0
Others	0.7% (8% of which are female)

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