

An Assessment of the Evanesce of Artisans in the Informal Sector in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper reviewed the observed disappearing world of artisans such as bricklayers, plumbers, electricians and the rest of them in Nigeria. Data was collected through in-depth interview and secondary sources to examine the reasons and implications of such trend. The results show that lack of interest get rich quick syndrome, declined value system 'japa' syndrome are some of the reasons, the implication of which is the domination of such sector by foreigners who know the importance and relevance of the sector to individuals and the nation at large. The paper concluded, among others, that the youths, most especially and importantly, need to be encouraged to embrace this all important area of economic development as it will reduce the rate of unemployment in the country.

Keywords

Artisans; Informal sector;
Economy; Unemployment; Youths



I. Introduction

The informal sector, and its players, in any economy, is primed to be the highest employers of labour but same sector is experiencing acute shortage of manpower supply which could be detrimental to the whole gamut of the nation economy. This is given the important role they play as the backbones of the economy by serving as the oil which lubricates the various sectors (Osadola et al., 2022). However, majority of the trade skills such as plumbing, vulcanizing, electrical-electronics, welding, building construction, tilling, interior décor, and their likes in the same category are depleted and constantly nose-diving in having Nigerians as participants. Instead, these trade skills are dominated by foreigners from neighboring African countries due to the lack of interest by Nigerians (Yusuf, 2021).

It is obvious that those who are skilled in arts and crafts are in short supply and the gaps are glaring in the economy of the country most especially in the informal sector. According to Awosika (2016) a lot of jobs that are being created in the Nigeria's construction and buildings industry were, due to the dearth of indigenous skilled workers being taken up by foreigners. Despite the fact that the sector is considered as one of the most active within the economy it has only been able to attract workers from the west coast of Africa, particularly from Togo and Republic of Benin (Adefolaju et al., 2020). In essence it is not as if the jobs are not there but the willingness to be engaged by the indigenes has not been there.

In the beginning there were vocational centres across Nigeria which served as training ground for people to develop their skills to the level of being productive and beneficial to the society. However, due to lack of interest on the part of government at all levels it has become a thing of the past. The 6-3-3-4 educational system which was

introduced to produce skilled artisans in the different professions did not fare better as it was destroyed through political unwillingness and practices (Adegoke et al., 2022). It would have reduced unemployment to very large extent if the younger ones engaged in skilled activities, but they have been allowed to waste their talents. The military government during the administration of Ibrahim Babangida established the National Directorate of Employment to provide for the informal sector of the economy (Adeleye & Osadola, 2022). According to Musa (2019) many younger Nigerians benefitted from the programme but poor governance and lack of concern for creativity and manpower development led to the abandonment of the programme. Today, the directorate exists in all the states of the federation, but their impact has only been in office locations.

This paper sought to examine the reasons for the dearth of artisans as well as the implications in the nation economy.

Artisans are qualified and highly skilled set of people who work, in most cases, with their hands. They are considered, to a very large extent, to be thoughtful, deliberate and precise in their trade, with eye for managing details as they always following through because of their experiences through which they have encountered a lot. They are known to be collaborative as they cooperate with themselves, those in the same profession, and others in other different arts (Odedokun, 2021). Those in this category, artisans, are builders, carpenters, technicians, welders, plumbers, electricians, tillers and lots more. This set of workers is different from factory workers. An artisans made items with their bare hands from natural materials, with every item being uniquely its own.

Globally, artisans are necessary for economic growth as they are needed to successfully implement strategic infrastructure projects which include but not limited to construction of roads, bridges, flyovers, power stations, airports, seaports, schools, health facilities and their likes including other social and economic infrastructure (Asiyanbi, 2021). It is obvious that this group of people are needed either they practice their trade on their own or they seek employments in companies. Starting from road side tyre menders to plumbers and tillers who are working for themselves to those engaged by companies, their imports cannot be wished away. The artisan could spend an entire day or more constructing one item (Odedokun, 1999). Factory workers on the other hand use machines to make a specific part of an item that is interchangeable, and then an assembly line is created to assemble the item as a whole. Therefore, for economic growth, services of these people are expectedly young, cannot be pushed aside. In essence the need to produce them locally to avoid importation cannot be overemphasized, more so, to avoid capital flight (Soetan & Osadola, 2019).

However, it has been observed that there is the dearth of this set of people to the extent that many of them are not found in some localities nationwide. Whoever needs such services would have to source for them from other locations where they could be found. Also, it has been discovered that a lot of Nigerians are not ready to learn any of these trade skills anymore due to many reasons.

II. Research Method

This study was carried out in Ibadan the capital of Oyo State and headquarters of the former Western Region of Nigeria. The city alone has eleven (11) local governments out of the thirty-three local governments in Oyo State. They consist of five urban local

governments in the city and six semi-urban local governments in the less-city. It is extremely difficult if not impossible for a stranger to distinguish or identify the boarder or the boundaries of the eleven local governments, as they have flown into each other. Ibadan is the third-largest city by population, in Nigeria, behind Lagos and Kano. It was the largest and most populated city in the country and the second most populous in Africa behind Cairo at the time of Nigeria's independence in 1960. Currently it is ranked as the second fastest growing city on the African continent (United Nations, 2022), also ranked third in West Africa in tech startups index (Adefolaju & Adeyemi, 2017).

There are many economic activities in Ibadan as almost all the streets and suburb are always busy with commercial activities (Odedokun, 2023). This is without prejudice to the fact that the city started as a rural community and developed to its present status. The commercial activities in the city include agriculture, trade, handicrafts, manufacturing, public service employment, factory work, service sector and lots more. It is the fourth largest state economy in Nigeria and the second large non-oil state economy in Nigeria after Lagos (Oluwole, 2022) Ibadan city is home to many industries such as Agro allied, textile, food processing, healthcare, cosmetic, tobacco processing and cigarette manufacturing, leatherworks and furniture making and lots more.

For the purpose of this study two local governments each from the urban and semi urban categories of the eleven local governments were visited to get respondents who participated in the in depth interview sessions. Ibadan North-East and Ibadan South-West were selected to represent the urban local governments while Akinyele and Egbeda local governments were chosen to represent the local government in the semi-urban zone. The participants were visited in their different locations and workshops such as mechanic workshops building sites, branch offices etc. The exercise was carried out between October 1st – 15th, 2023 excluding Sunday as most of them do not operate on Sundays.

III. Review of Literature

This section of the study takes stock of the reasons for the disappearing of apprentices which has invariably led to the observed dearth of artisans in the informal sector. The responses are from the in-depth interview conducted with artisans based on their experience on the field.

One of the respondents, a male motor mechanic has this to say on the issue

“It is quite disturbing that there is shortage of hands in almost all these areas as there seems to be a zero level of recruitment. Worse still is the way the few available hands are being recruited to practice and deplore their skills for the benefit of foreign countries”

(IDI/Male/ Motor Mechanic/2023)

Another respondent was of the view that the situation was not new when he said:

“Your observation is no longer new, it is what everybody know but there seems to be nothing anybody can do about it, except government is serious to encourage and motivate the younger ones in various ways”

(IDI/ Male/ Tyre mender/2023)

Also, a tiller confirmed the glaring gap as it seemed there is absolutely no interest towards apprenticeship. He said

“Well it is obvious that there is a gap and lack of interest by the youths in learning skills for them to be self employed. Even those who are not educated are not willing to learn trades, or any form of crafts because of the getrich quick scheme of the country which has entered their psyche” (IDI/Male/Tiller, 2023)

Additionally, a CEO noted that the youths were not willing to subject themselves to what it takes to learn skills for self-fulfillment. According to him:

“Our youths are not ready to subject themselves to learning and training. They are not patient any more to learn trade, especially technical skills. Meanwhile, to be proficient in the technical work, one needs to sacrifice years of experience as there are lines to count on years of experience from the masters, from the trainers. In such area apprenticeship is very important”. (IDI/Male/Chief Executive of an Engineering Company, 2023).

Likewise, one of the national executive of the Nigerian Association of Engineering Craftsmen has this to say:

“The youths are not serious. Nowadays, if you go out on the streets, you see a lot of them loitering around doing nothing and for those engaged at all, what you find is many of them choose to ride motorcycles popularly called ‘Okada’. They forget that once you learn a trade successfully, you are made for life. We trained some boys here but they only stayed for a while and left unceremoniously.” (IDI/Male/An Executive Officer of National Technical Secretary of the Nigerian Association of Engineering Craftsmen, 2023).

In the same vein, a motor mechanic whose son happened to be the only helping hand corroborated the Okada mentality of the youth against preference for apprenticeship. He said:

“There is no doubting the fact that artisans are disappearing from the radar in Nigeria. How many of our youths are ready to learn tailoring, bricklaying, mechanic and others in that category. That is why the few ones in these professions are overwhelmed. Except my son, an OND graduate, who is assisting me in the workshop there is no apprentice who stayed more than three months. The next thing is that they have become Okada riders. It is a serious problem”. (IDI/Male/Motor Mechanic, 2023).

Additionally, a female engineer has this to say:

“It is worrisome, most especially engineering craftsmanship which is no longer attractive to many of our youths as they take little or no delight in such trades and learning anymore since the preference these days is for the unavailable white collar job. (IDI/Female/Engineer, 2023)

The opinion of a business owner in this regards extends to the dearth of personnel in all trades as he reasoned on the need to go back to the 6-3-3-4 educational system:

“The issue of dearth of manpower is virtually in all trades; plumbing, painting, vulcanizing, motor mechanic, bricklaying and their likes. The problem is in our education system. We as a nation supposed to have followed the 6-3-3-4 educational system religiously. This would have encouraged many of the youths to toe the technical line which is more of crafts and trade”

(IDI/Male /Business Owner, 2023).

Furthermore, a female painter said the get-rich- quick syndrome among the youths as the reason for the dearth of apprentice in the country. He explained that:

“The dearth of apprentices in artisans’ workshops and sites cannot be divorced from the “get-rich-quick” mindset of the younger ones in this country. This is made worse by “yahoo-yahoo” (internet scam), “yahoo plus”, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and other illicit ways of making quick money. They consider it a waste of time being under the tutelage of a master to learn, rather they prefer to subject themselves to tutelage under their likes who had mastered the art and act of these illicit means of making money”.
(IDI/Female/Painter, 2023)

In a different dimension a female road mechanic posited that the fear of aftermath of training and apprenticeship is a stumbling block as many are scared of how and who will establish them afterwards. She said:

“We should be sincere in our assessment of the situation of things. A few of our youths are really embracing the idea of becoming artisans. Even the educated ones among them are not left out. However, in most cases the fear of the unknown after training is a critical factor that should be considered. Most of them have nobody to establish them and that, to a very large extent, discourage them from venturing into apprenticeship” *(IDI/Female/Motor Mechanic, 2023).*

Another respondents was of the view that the flamboyant life of the political class is a contributory factor as it distracts the youths from wanting to learn any meaningful skill aside from politics where they feel there is free money. He was of the view that:

“It is absolutely difficult to attract new entrants into the idea of learning to become artisan if the life of Nigeria politicians is anything to consider. Politics in Nigeria has become business venture in view of the bogus allowances associated with political office holders, even a councilor with SSCE at the local level earn more than a university graduate in the Civil Service” *(IDI/Male/Electrician, 2023).*

On the contrary, a respondent was of the view that it is true that there is no longer interest in becoming artisan which requires submission to learn under a master. However, he observed that same cannot be said of what operates in the rural areas as youths who are rural based still show interest in learning. He goes further:

“I quite agree there is a decrease of people wanting to learn crafts and trades, especially in the urban centres. But there are still a lot of young people taking up these trades in the rural areas. It is more common there. We have a lot of youths who want to do such trade” (IDI/Male/CEO of an Artisan outfit, 2023)

A building contractor shared his experience of inconsistency and lack of perseverance on the part of his apprentices over the last fifteen years. He said:

“There is indeed short supply of artisans in most of the crafts and trades, including tiling, I have an average of 40 artisans in the last fifteen years but only five of them carried out their training successfully and have since set up shops on their own. Many others absconded due to laziness of initiative just as a sizeable others went to take up other menial jobs that guarantee daily earning. The training takes an average of three years and most of those who come to learn these days don't take it seriously as one would have expected” (IDI/Male/A building Contractor, 2023)

This is in line with the experience of the chairman of mechanic of tricycle, generator and motorcycle association who had few willing hands ready to learn. In his words:

“I set up shop about twenty years ago but it is surprising that I have only been able to have fewer apprentices who stay the entire twenty-four months to learn the skills” (IDI/Male/Unit Chairman of Mechanic of Tricycle, Generator and Motorcycle Association, 2023).

Another respondent showed his fear in the following words:

“It is disturbing. Most of the few hands with me are not willing to learn the trade anymore, thus fueling fears that the manpower needs of these may face serious gap in the not too distant future. (IDI/Male/Motor Mechanic, 2023)

This is in tandem with the view of another respondents:

“It is quite disheartening to note that you don't find a lot of Nigerians who are willing to learn any of these trade skills anymore because of their rich-quick tendencies” (IDI/Male/Chairman and Chief Executive of Indigenous Oxygen Gas, 2023)

A female hairdresser was of the opinion that things are not as they used to be. She said:

“Most of the youths these days don't want to learn this trade again as such we are experiencing acute shortage of

practitioners in those fields unlike what it was in the past”.
(IDI/Female/Hairdresser, 2023)

On the implications of this development, some of the respondents were unanimous that the dearth of apprentices in the various field has led to unimaginable pressure on the few available professionals to the extent that they couldn't cope with the demands and pressure of the available works, one of the reasons it seems they are not reliable as demands are more than supply.

A motor mechanic expressed his frustration as the absence of adequate artisans has put pressure on the available few hands. He view on the implication:

“The death of apprentice has really dealt with artisans in various way. It puts pressure on us as we have more than enough in our hand and you can't divide yourself into many parts”(IDI/Female/Motor Mechanic, 2023)

Another of the respondents said:

“It is quite frustrating as one a time is tagged a liar whenever you promise your customers and because of the demands from other customers you are unable to meet up. You know if you have additional hands like those one have trained they could handle such works” (IDI/Male/Painter, 2023).

Likewise, a professional mechanic revealed his disappointment as he had no one to assist him and thus many unsatisfied customers. According to him:

“You see many vehicles in my shop. It is not that I don't know what to do or what is wrong with them but you can see I am the only one. No helping hand, no apprentice, some even interpret it to mean that one is not good enough hence the many vehicles, but that's not the case” (IDI/Male / Motor Mechanic, 2023)

Additionally, a respondent shared his opinion on the implication of the disappearing position of artisans

“As a plumber I hardly rest as customers and referrals are always on my neck from and outside my base, even to the detriment of my health at times. However, there is a limit to one's strength. All of these are pointers to the shortage of hand in the field. (IDI/Male/Plumber, 2023)

A tiller also revealed how he tried to encouraged the youths to motivate them learning the skill as he had more than enough jobs at each point in time even outside his domain. He said:

“I am a tiller, we even have to pay the younger ones to attract and motivate them to be interested in the job. I have more than enough work out each point in time far and beyond my expectations, and capacity, even to the fattest part of the country, and I am always under pressure to satisfy my

customers and those they introduce to me. All of them want timely completion of their work”. (IDI/Male/Tiller, 2023)

Additionally, another respondent was of the view that the implication of the dearth of artisan was the pressure it puts on the few ones who are made to tell lies all in the name of satisfying customers. He said:

“Some of the artisans instead of coming out clean to say the truth concerning the time it will take to complete a particular job they prefer telling lies and collecting more jobs even when they know they won’t be able to meet up. But since there are no available hands to complement the available ones the customers have no option and this usually generate uproars when the jobs are not completed to time”.

A male engineer mentioned the risk associated with the love members have for the job which has adverse effect on their health in view of the inadequate hands:

“Our members find it difficult to rest as expected due to pressure from customers, greed in some cases and the die-hard love they have for the job. These are some of the reasons they slump or faint on duty because the body will definitely ask for rest”. (IDI/Male/Engineer, 2023)

The implication pointed out by another of the respondents has to do with the cost associated with the situation. According to him:

“The implication for local business in terms of cost is huge. To run an average oxygen gas plant one needs at least two-three expatriate at a cost of between three to five million per head annually. Yet, Nigerians are not interested”. (IDI/Male/Chairman and Chief Executive of Indigenous Oxygen Gas, 2023)

According to Musa (2019) the collapse of artisanship has worsened the rate of unemployment as well as killing the dreams and aspirations of many young people who are endowed with creative skills. He goes further to say that the small and medium enterprise sector has been assisted to collapse and millions of able bodied young men or women who could have utilized their skills in artisanship are wasting away. He attributed the scenario to the lack of interest by those in position of authority in Nigeria.

IV. Results and Discussion

The dynamic nature of life and the need for continuity for sustainable development and better living calls for handing-over of batons by the old generation to the next generation. The essence of which is to make sure there is no gap towards ensuring the succeeding generation get things right and even better (Osadola & Gbadeyan, 2023). However, the signs are not encouraging with little or no fresh recruits taking up apprenticeship for the different crafts and trade, the bulk of which supplies manpower for the informal sector player such as battery charger, tillers, bricklayers, painters, and the rest of them. This development has led to the domination of this all important aspect of the informal actor by foreigners from other countries who are really making a fortune from the gap created by Nigerians (Oyewale & Osadola, 2018).

It is observed that Nigeria youths are distracted by a whole lot of things, most especially the social media. This to a very large extent has made the youths to lose concentration due to many distractions, most of who live on the fast lane. They opt for vocations that can guarantee them quick money, such as acting, music which invariably expose them to unhealthy rivalries unlike skill associated with being an artisan (Gbadeyan et al., 2016). The gaps created by Nigeria youths are being filled by foreigners from neighbouring countries like Togo, Ghana, into areas otherwise dominated by the locals, who know and understand the imports of such opportunities (Oyewale & Osadola, 2018). In Nigeria one now finds a lot of them offering electrical engineering-related services unlike before. This according to Ihinoseh (2021) is due to a number of factors such as commitment, honesty and professionalism displayed by the foreigner. He goes further to say that sometimes one finds that a local artisan may want to cut corners to the detriment of the service procurer, but a foreigner wont do that because of what may be at stake for him. This is an indictment on Nigerians especially the youths, and it calls for sober reflection and internal regeneration. It is a thing of concern which requires immediate attention (Ochu et al., 2023).

Omole (2021) claimed that he spent an average of five million naira (#5million) to retain an expatriate in his firm as an indigenous player in the nation's oxygen gas subsector. According to him the non availability of technical knowledge of locals, the oxygen gas producers require at least two to three expatriate workers to boost their operations. He considered it disheartening that a lot of Nigerians are not ready and willing to learn any of the trade skills anymore as a result of their rich-quick tendencies. This position is in tandem with Aderotimi (2021) who observes that Nigeria is witnessing the proliferation of foreigners in crafts and trades and shocking to note that youths from Togo, Ghana to mention just a few coming to take over most of the local jobs for the simple reason that unlike in the past youths are not interested in crafts and trades.

He goes further that the preference for foreigners by Nigerians is because whereas most locals on an average of training for three years at most, foreigners, especially those from India, China, Japan and others can afford to learn a craft for as long as ten years or more (Gbadeyan, 2023). This obviously put them in a better stead to gain better mastery and expertise than others, with lesser years of apprenticeship. Closely associated with this is the problem of quackery since they, the locals, are not ready to commit and dedicate themselves to a long period of training. In addition, there is no doubting, the fact that those with longer years of trainings with humility, dedication and commitment are better equipped and better placed. Yusuf (2021) affirmed that most Nigeria youths are not patient enough to learn trade, especially technical skills. Meanwhile, for one to be proficient in the technical work one needs years of experience as there are lines which requires years experience from the boss.

In addition, it has been established that Nigerian environment has made it possible for foreigners to easily operate. Once they come into the country they set up even better jobs. This can be found among the Indians and Chinese who are known to making good glass installation and better tiling because they use better tools which guarantee them good finishing which is lacking among Nigerians. In other words these foreigners are better equipped aside from the fact that they are more committed, dedicated, professional and honest in dealing with their customers. More often than not one finds that local artisans want to cut corners to the detriment of their clients. This is not common among foreigners who know the implications and import of excellent customer service.

It is quite disturbing to note that the few available hands in the different crafts and trades such as vulcanizes, battery chargers, tillers and their likes are being poached by

foreign countries with mouth-watering offers. One hears and reads from the various media outlets adverts requesting this set of people to export their skills for better living. This, while it is the effect of globalization could be interpreted to be neocolonialism where the best of the hands are, on a daily basis, leaving the shore of Nigeria for foreign lands such as United Arab Emirate, mostly Dubai, Canada, and Britain to mention a few. Adverts are placed on social media and orthodox media to attract artisans who desire better living and greener pastures. For instance Usulor (2023) advertised that skills such as hairdressing, tailoring, wig making, baking are lucrative in Canada, USA and UK and those who are skilled in them are capable of making a lot of money if they venture to migrate to any of these countries as they are in high demand. Also, skills such as driving, professional make-up, phone and laptop repairs, plumbing, electrical works and their likes. In the same vein Enengedi (2023) leading an entrepreneurial organization claimed to be helping everyday skilled Nigerians secure job opportunities in the United Kingdom as the country is currently grappling with severe labour shortages in specified sector. This according to him is prompting employer to actively seek skilled workers from overseas. The implication thereof is that the insufficient skilled hands are further depleted on a daily basis as a result of the 'Japa' syndrome, where professional skilled labourers are leaving the shore of Nigeria in droves for better life.

V. Conclusion

The study has established the undisputable fact that there is a disturbing disappearing world of artisans due to little or near zero recruit taking up apprenticeship for the various crafts and trades. The reasons for this disturbing situation are many but mostly the urge to make quick money vide the fast lane of illegalities such as yahoo (+) activities, cultism and other irresponsible and uncharitable means. Also, lack of perseverance, honesty, dedication and commitment to be humble and surrendering oneself for proper training so as to be fully baked to become a professional (Akan et al., 2022). All of these need to be addressed, with all sincerity of purpose, by the leadership of the country with a definite mandate to the various government agencies under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Productivity. This is in tandem with Odedokun (2021) who observed that lack of strategic social security, provision has really affected all facets of life in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward based on the findings and conclusion of the study.

1. Government should empower more local and young entrepreneurs in the country as the development of people with highly skilled technical manpower, social and business skills as well the equipment to start a business would go a long way in curbing the high rate of unemployment in the country.
2. Members of associations of different trade and craftsmen should constantly challenge their members to be up to date in their training and retraining by adopting innovative and latest technology application in their work. This will make them compete favourably with their counterparts elsewhere.
3. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment should be involved in carrying out training of youths on various trades and crafts such as tailoring, plumbing, catering, electrical and electronics. They should also empower them with starter packs as well as encouraging them by patronage.

4. The youths in particular should develop strong interest in learning and acquiring one or multiple skills which will make them to be independent and become employers of labour.
5. The moribund educational system of 6-3-3-4 in Nigeria should be revisited and technical colleges and schools reactivated and strengthened.

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