

## **Standardising the Structure of the Traditional Apprenticeship System in Nigeria to Improve the Employment Condition of the Youths**

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### **Abstract**

21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria is characterized by massive unemployment, youth restiveness among others. The rate of unemployed graduates in the country has necessitated reinventing the traditional apprenticeship system to create employment for the youths. The apprenticeship system has proved to be an alternative means of providing not just employment but creating entrepreneurs. The apprenticeship system as practiced in the traditional Nigerian society is devoid of any structured system which makes it a somewhat loosely organized system where the master is free to run his program as he deems fit, and the apprentice can drop out of the scheme anytime without any repercussion. It is this loose structure that made the apprenticeship scheme unattractive to youths, and hence a sharp decline in the number of youths going in to learn one trade or the other. The objective of this paper is to appraise the existing traditional apprenticeship scheme in the country, and to make a case for the restructuring of the system to create employment for the youths. The paper finds that the unstructured system of apprenticeship in the country is responsible for the sharp decline in the number of people going into an apprenticeship. The paper will apply a doctrinal approach. The paper concludes by making a case for the restructuring and standardization of the apprenticeship system as a way of curbing unemployment in the country.

**Keywords:** Standardising, Structure, Apprenticeship, Employment, Youth

### **1. Introduction**

The transfer of skills from one generation to the other is a respectable age-long tradition prevalent in most parts of the country. In Nigeria and indeed all over Africa, apprenticeship has been an age-long method of training young people in trade and craft, agriculture, business, and catering.<sup>1</sup> Remarkably, the apprenticeship system was a phenomenon that was broadly guarded by customs, lineage, and rituals, especially in Igbo land. Every male born into a family was expected to learn his matrilineal craft, and it was easy to identify a young male child as a member of a lineage if he is found to be proficient in the lineage craft.<sup>2</sup> The Nigeria-Biafra War led to an increased number of apprentices in the country. Children between 8 – 20 years were

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<sup>1</sup> Mirian N Alike and Ifeoma Orjiako-Umunze, 'Socio-economic Philosophy of Contemporary Igbo Apprenticeship System' <[www.nigerianjournalsonline.com](http://www.nigerianjournalsonline.com)> accessed 10 March 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

sent to learn one trade or the other by their parents who were left with nothing after the war. This was how Igbo settlers after the war rebuilt Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, and most parts of Lagos.<sup>3</sup>

It is unarguable that the Nigerian economy today is characterized by heavy reliance on oil, a weak production base, poor architecture, extraordinary level of youth unemployment, and high dependence on imported goods and services. The high incidence of youth unemployment portends great danger for Nigeria, especially in terms of heightened poverty and increased insecurity. As Ejo-Orusa<sup>4</sup> rightly observed, the young unemployed are already posing serious security challenges to Nigeria as armed robbers, kidnappers, Niger Delta militants, Fulani Herdsmen, and deadly Boko Haram terrorists. Given the extremely weak industrial sector that cannot create employment opportunities for the growing army of unemployed youths and young graduates, self-employment is an option of necessity for Nigeria, and expectedly, apprenticeship has become an objective that is widely canvassed by Nigeria's policymakers and economic managers.<sup>5</sup> Instead of encouraging unskilled and indecent jobs, the government could do more by strengthening the informal sector through an organized apprenticeship system that would fascinate job hunters, undergraduates, and even graduates of tertiary institutions.

The apprenticeship system has a lot of advantages which include but are not limited to skill acquisition and high youth employment. Each country fashions its apprenticeship scheme based on its divergent culture, commercial certainty, and the magnitude of its economic growth, socio-economic organizations, and legal regime. The apprenticeship system plays a vital role in the manpower development of a nation but the government has an important role to play in making that power supply is steady, provision of soft loan for masters and those who have concluded training, and retraining of masters to expand the scope and training capacity of the system.<sup>6</sup>

The traditional apprenticeship system is a peculiar template established by the Igbos in Eastern Nigeria but is now practiced in all parts of the country. Although the system is rather informal and given little or no attention by the government, it has nevertheless made and is still making significant contributions in entrepreneurship promotion and the development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), wealth and job creation, poverty alleviation, and economic growth and development of the country.<sup>7</sup> There is therefore an urgent need to

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Ejo-Orusa and Destiny Lloyd, 'Reinventing the "Nwa – boi" Apprenticeship System: A Platform for Entrepreneurship Promotion in Nigeria' (2019) 8(9) *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences* 98 – 130.

<sup>5</sup> C Sutter, GD Bruton, and J Chen, 'Entrepreneurship as a Solution to Extreme Poverty: A Review and Future Research Direction' (2019) 34(1) *Journal of Business Venturing* 197 – 214.

<sup>6</sup> JO Jawando, Samuel Oluranti and B Odunaike 'Apprenticeship Culture among Traditional Tailors in Atiba Local Government Area in Oyo State, South Western Nigeria' *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* (2012) 3(3) 179.

<sup>7</sup> DL Mpi, 'Encouraging Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) for Economic Growth and Development in Nigeria and other Developing Economies: The Role of 'the Igbo Apprenticeship System' (2019) 6(1) *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management* 535 – 543.

restructure the traditional apprenticeship system because of its enormous potential of boosting the economy and creating employment opportunities for the rapidly increasing army of youths and young graduates.

## **2. The Concept of Apprenticeship System**

An apprenticeship system may be considered as a system of learning whereby an individual learns a professional skill practically through a structured programme of on-the-job training.<sup>8</sup> It usually involves acquiring knowledge, mechanical skills, and the development of an attitude or discipline for a particular job.<sup>9</sup> According to Craig and Bittel,<sup>10</sup> apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related technical instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a skilled occupation, craft, or trade.

The apprenticeship system is a training and skill development initiative practiced all over the world and it has long been used to prepare workers to gain occupational skills in many countries.<sup>11</sup> The system varies from country to country and sometimes from one region to the other even within the same country.<sup>12</sup> However, the common feature is that the system focuses on developing a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession with on-the-job training which is sometimes accompanied by study.<sup>13</sup> In some countries, the apprentice gets some certification or license to practice a particular trade or profession at the end of the training period.<sup>14</sup>

The apprenticeship system is a tool for the replication of the workforce and also to keep in existence generational and traditional businesses that ordinarily would have been jettisoned to modernization and civilization.<sup>15</sup> The apprenticeship system has been an integral part of the traditional educational system which has existed before the coming of the British colonial masters.<sup>16</sup> The whole idea of an apprenticeship scheme is the enrolment of young people in learning a craft or trade under the tutelage of a master for a specific period, after consultation and agreement between the parents or guardian of the apprentice and the master.<sup>17</sup> The graduation of the apprentice is subject to a minimum period of learning as well as the master's

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<sup>8</sup> BS Akande, 'Apprenticeship Training in Nigeria: A Neglected Variable in Nation' <<https://www.globalacademicgroup.com/journals/nact/Akande%20777777.pdf>> accessed 06 April 2022.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> R.I Craig and LR Bittel, *Training and Development Handbook* (McGraw Hill Inc.1967).

<sup>11</sup> RI Lerman, 'Can the United States Expand Apprenticeship? Lessons from Experience' (2012) IZA Policy Paper No. 46 <<https://ftp.iza.org/pp46.pdf>> accessed 06 April 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ejo-Orusa and Destiny Lloyd (n 4).

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu, 'Apprenticeship System among "Elewe-omo" in Ojo Area of Lagos, Nigeria' (2015) 10 *Global Journal of Applied, Management and Social Sciences* 81 – 90.

<sup>16</sup> GO Akanbi, 'Incorporating Traditional Vocational Education System: Problem and Prospects', (2012) 2(8) *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 179 – 187.

<sup>17</sup> G Adekola and S Ezekiel, 'Traditional Apprenticeship in the Old Africa and its Relevance to Contemporary Work Practices in Modern Nigerian Communities' (2013) 3(4) *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioral Science* 101 – 134.

approval.<sup>18</sup> Apprenticeship also incorporates a system of guidance and counseling as most apprentices are required to live with their masters to acquire the necessary attitude, diplomacy, and decorum required for the job. It is the combination of these dispositions that makes graduates of apprenticeship training entrepreneurs instead of job seekers.<sup>19</sup>

Apprenticeship has not suffered a reduced level of significance in contemporary Nigeria as it forms the basis of vocational training in the country.<sup>20</sup> The recent turnout of graduates and consequent high rate of unemployment made apprenticeship a mitigator of unemployment since the informal sector is the main source of employment for youths irrespective of their academic qualifications.<sup>21</sup> In recognition of the importance of apprenticeship to the economy, the government is making several efforts to incorporate vocational training in the formal education sector and there have also been calls to provide a generally binding framework for the apprenticeship system in the country.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Historical Background of the Traditional Apprenticeship System

As already noted, apprenticeship is the mechanism of learning and skill development through enrolment with a master or an accomplished business person. The traditional apprenticeship system has varied forms but are now being supplanted by some other forms of professional training which take lesser time to complete. Apprenticeship existed in the form of a quite well-developed and organised informal education system in the traditional crafts. It was not difficult to introduce, adapt and incorporate the new occupations into the existing apprenticeship system.<sup>23</sup> This system has its roots in traditional African society when blacksmiths, carvers, farmers, native doctors (traditional healers), and others with specific skills, took members of the younger generation (usually close relatives) into their households to give them specialized training for years.<sup>24</sup> This was indeed the principal form of education and avenue for going into any occupation or profession before the advent of the colonial administration which introduced western education to Nigeria.<sup>25</sup> The advent of western education saw the traditional apprenticeship system become the standard for young people who had no opportunity of attending formal education. The bar was later raised to include those who had primary school education and secondary education but could not proceed further. However, in the last thirty years, due to the high number of young people graduating from the increasing number of tertiary

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu (n 15).

<sup>20</sup> GO Akanbi (n 16).

<sup>21</sup> K Sonnenberg, 'Traditional Apprenticeship in Ghana and Senegal: Skills Development for Youth for the Informal Sector' (2012) 15(2) *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* 93 – 105.

<sup>22</sup> OA Olutoya, 'The Igbo Entrepreneur in the Political Economy of Nigeria' (1999) 20(3) *African Study Monographs* 147 – 174.

<sup>23</sup> T Agboola and OO Olaoye, 'Labour Supply and Manpower Development Strategies in the Nigerian Building Industry' (2008) A Paper Presented at the First Department Staff/Students Seminar, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Ibadan.

<sup>24</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu (n 15).

<sup>25</sup> R.M Olulu and S.A.F Udeora, 'Contract of Apprenticeship and Employment Generation in Nigeria' *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, Vol. 11(3) (2018) pp.335-344.

institutions every year without the availability of employment opportunities, the system has become a veritable platform for the unemployed including young graduates to explore in pursuit of self-employment opportunities.<sup>26</sup> What makes the apprenticeship system different, unique, and vibrant is that at the end of the training, the apprentice is supported to start his or her own business or workshop.<sup>27</sup> The system is therefore an important first stage of the entrepreneurship process, by far the most entrenched and vibrant entrepreneurship promotion vehicle in Nigeria, a major contributor to the growth and development of micro, small, and medium scale enterprises, and a big driver for wealth creation, employment generation, and poverty reduction and thus economic growth and development.<sup>28</sup>

It has to be noted that although the apprenticeship system has a long history, it grew in intensity after the Nigeria Civil War when many parents who were left with nothing were compelled to send their children away to learn one trade or the other. According to Alake,<sup>29</sup> the civil war dislocated the Igbos from other parts of Nigeria to their Eastern Nigeria ancestral homeland which incidentally was the epicentre of the war. At the end of the war in 1970, most of them had lost their investments and businesses. Not only were they not able to continue their pre-war position at the forefront of education, public administration, the military, industry, or commerce, they found themselves outside the mainstream of all the economic sectors of the Nigerian economy and society.<sup>30</sup> Again the lack of capital and complete exclusion from the financial sector made the Igbos to be unable to benefit from the indigenization policies of the 1970s that saw the transfer of ownership of many foreign- owned businesses to Nigerians. Being excluded from most of the sectors of the economy and financially handicapped, petty trading became one of the few options open to them to make a living and it became a survival strategy for the Igbo people.<sup>31</sup> They initiated an unwritten rule of zero tolerance for youth and adult idleness and interestingly many of them flourished over time.<sup>32</sup> For those Ibos who were able to proceed with their lives as traders and craftspersons, they admitted apprentices at a higher level than before the Nigerian Civil War. The system was mutually beneficial to the business person and the apprentice.<sup>33</sup> To business people, the motivation was a rational economic decision to use cheap labour for the augmentation of limited resources, while to the young people whose parents did not have the resources to send them to school, apprenticeship offered them sustenance, the opportunity to acquire new usable skills and the hope of becoming self-

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<sup>26</sup> B.A Odunaike and S.A Idowu (n 15).

<sup>27</sup> G Adekola & S Ezekiel, 'Training Apprenticeship in the old Africa and its relevance to the Contemporary Work Practice in Modern Nigerian Communities' (2013) 3(4) *British Journal of Education, Society and Behavioral Science* 101 – 134.

<sup>28</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu (n 15).

<sup>29</sup> M Alake, 'The Igbo Apprenticeship System that Builds Wealth and Started the Incubation System' *Pulse* (Lagos, July 31 2018) <<https://www.pulse.ng/gist/pop-culture/imu-ahia-the-igbo-apprenticeship-system-that-builds-wealth-and-started-the-incubation/q50ps44>> accessed 14 March 2021.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

employed while reducing the financial burden on their families.<sup>34</sup> This system has become an integral and important part of the Nigerian culture and has been adapted and customized by Nigerians to tackle economic drawbacks as they arise. The system is also vigorous and dynamic. For example, as new technologies diffuse into the economy and as entrepreneurs discover new lucrative businesses, they birth apprentices who eventually become full-fledged entrepreneurs.<sup>35</sup> These new entrepreneurs tend to infuse competition and stimulate creativity even if it is merely through a differentiation strategy.<sup>36</sup> Today, there are many variants of this system or model, but they all involve an apprentice working with an experienced individual on some agreed terms to learn skills that will help them build their own business.<sup>37</sup>

#### **4. Types and Scope of Apprenticeship Systems**

There are two major types of apprenticeship system. They are learning a craft or skill and learning a trade. Learning a craft or skill involves the apprentice being handed over to a professional craftsman or master for mentorship and training over an agreed period. This type of apprenticeship is usually for 3 – 5 years depending on how fast the apprentice can learn the craft or skill. In learning a trade on the other hand, an apprentice is handed over to a successful businessman for mentorship and training. The time frame for this type of apprenticeship is between 3-7 years which is also dependent on how fast the apprentice learns the trade.<sup>38</sup> In either of these two cases, these apprentices are often not paid, they are provided accommodation, transportation costs (where necessary), feeding, and clothing.<sup>39</sup> During this period of training also, the apprentice develops entrepreneurship skills and learns all the intricacies involved in the business such as supply chain management, quality control, marketing and dealing with customers, forecasting, human relations, bookkeeping and accounting, negotiation skills, inventory control, and opportunity analysis.<sup>40</sup> There is usually no established curriculum, formal learning procedure, or pedagogies, and so the apprentice learns from or through observation, imitation, and in some cases, trial and error. Usually, the apprentice learns on the job by direct instruction and is punished for making mistakes.<sup>41</sup>

In all forms of apprenticeship schemes, the master is more often than not, not paid materially for the training and mentorship of the apprentice. Because there is no material payment of any sort, it is expected that the apprentice will serve the master in whatever capacity the master wills (including domestic chores) while undergoing the apprenticeship. According to Olulu and Udeorah,<sup>42</sup> payment is usually accompanied by some drinks meant for the

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> G Adekola and S Ezekiel (n 27).

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> RM Olulu and SAF Udeora (n 25).

entertainment of witnesses who are usually relatives, fellow tradesmen, or craftsmen within the environment in which the trade or craft is to be learned. It is to be noted that whether payment is made or not, the requirement for the provision of drinks for the entertainment of witnesses is a mandatory requirement in apprenticeship schemes. It is a kind of rite and induction process for the apprentice.

The apprenticeship system has helped many young people, particularly those from poor homes who could not afford formal education to acquire useful skills to become self-employed, self-reliant, to create wealth, and to contribute meaningfully to society.<sup>43</sup> There can be no doubt that the apprenticeship system has a wealth redistribution mechanism that ensures that wealth is spread from the rich (the entrepreneurs) to the poor (the apprentices and their families).

## **5. Challenges Facing the Traditional Apprenticeship System**

A lot of challenges are facing the traditional apprenticeship system. Most of these challenges are due to the fact that apprenticeship contracts are made under customary laws and practices which are outside the statutory law regulating labour and allied matters. Majority of these problems make it difficult for the master craftsmen and the apprentice to practice effectively in a favourable milieu. These challenges are as follows:

### **5.1.1 Behavioural Problem**

One of the major challenges facing the apprenticeship system is that the scheme is generally believed to be meant for those who are a misfit for the formal education system or those whose education cannot be sponsored by their parents. This particular problem makes it difficult to attract young graduates and youths of school age into the system.<sup>44</sup>

### **5.1.2 Unavailable Structured Curriculum**

Another problem facing the apprenticeship system is the lack of a structured curriculum for training. Learning is monotonous and the apprentice is only exposed to the available job type in the workshop. In practice, learning is not structured, and does not follow any specific design or pattern, neither does it move from simple to complex. Apart from the fact that there are no course contents for the training, topics under the schemes are haphazardly learned without any specific mode of assessment. The attitude of the masters is nothing to write home about and in most cases constitutes a hindrance to the practice of apprenticeship. This is caused by the fact that they are not trained in the act of teaching.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu (n 15).

<sup>44</sup> K Sonnenberg (n 21).

<sup>45</sup> SAB Onasanya, 'Effective Personnel Management and Industrial Relations' (2005) Centre for Management Development, Lagos.

### **5.1.3 Absence of Written Contract**

One of the biggest challenges facing the apprenticeship system in Nigeria is that there is no documented evidence of a contractual relationship between the master and the apprentice. This lack of a contractual document evidencing the rights and liabilities of the parties to the scheme often leads to the existence of an arrangement that is devoid of any intention to be legally bound.

### **5.1.4 Inadequate Legal Regime to Guide the System**

This is probably the most difficult challenge of the apprenticeship system. Although the contract of apprenticeship in Nigeria is regulated by the Labour Act 2004, experience has shown that the system is a far cry from what is obtainable in other countries in terms of mode of operation, regulation, rewards, structure, and implementation. As far as the apprenticeship system is concerned in Nigeria, it is generally believed that the extant law which has numerous rules and regulations on the apprenticeship scheme is grossly inadequate, and does not inspire the growth of skills and handiwork among the youths and young graduates. Further, no programme has been put in place to promote the awareness of the Labour Act to the populace, masters, and the apprentices, neither are there mechanisms to sanction those whose actions contravene the letters of the Act.<sup>46</sup> The provisions of the Labour Act with regard to the control of apprenticeship schemes have been criticized as merely good objectives and as such, the laid down rules and regulations are neither adhered to nor implemented. Therefore, order and formalization which the Labour Act was trying to create have turned out to be mere pretense and Nigeria still operates an unorganized, unregulated, and broadly informal apprenticeship system without a defined vocational profile or framework.<sup>47</sup> Most of the businesses that take in apprentices are part of the informal economy and this makes it difficult to bring them under the ambit of the laws governing apprenticeship schemes in Nigeria, for government to introduce new initiatives, and for them to raise capital.<sup>48</sup>

### **5.1.5 Lack of Education during the Training Period**

Apprenticeship in Nigeria is oftentimes misunderstood as a programme for young people who have no opportunity of going to school or those who can only grasp practical skills and not theory.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore instructive to note that most of the apprentices start the programme with very limited education and very often they complete their training without formal education and as illiterates.<sup>50</sup> The inability to read and write, coupled with technological illiteracy is unacceptable in the technology-driven world of the 21st century, and this is what makes it very

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<sup>46</sup> RM Olulu and SAF Udeora (n 25).

<sup>47</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu (n 15).

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> RM Olulu and SAF Udeora (n 25).

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

difficult for many entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and to become major players nationally and internationally.<sup>51</sup>

### **5.1.6 Child Labour**

Despite the fact that statutory laws in Nigeria prohibit child labour, in most cases, the apprenticeship system is seen as a practice for the poor and the less privileged who cannot afford formal education. Hence, underage children whose parents cannot afford formal education are sent or given out as apprentices to either learn a trade or craft in order to fend for themselves even against the laws of Nigeria. The situation is worsened by the fact that apprenticeship schemes are not monitored by any governmental agency.

### **5.1.7 Abuse of Apprentices**

The traditional apprenticeship system in Nigeria involves hardship, discipline, and loyalty especially on the part of the apprentice.<sup>52</sup> This is the case especially where no payment of any kind is made by the apprentice. The apprentice is therefore expected to serve the Master in different capacities in domestic duties as a ‘houseboy’. These apprentices who are expected to perform their duties at their places of training are used as domestic and house helps. This two-fold responsibility can be very exacting on the apprentices and undeniably is form of abuse.

### **5.1.8 Non-Settlement of Apprentices**

The apprenticeship system in its present form is tainted with dishonesty on the part of the master and the apprentice. It has been observed that, in some cases, towards the termination of the agreed apprenticeship period, Masters frivolously accuse the apprentices of crimes and send them away just to avoid their contractual obligations, and thus deprive them of their ‘settlement’ entitlements. Similarly, due to fears of being sent away empty-handed, and sometimes due to intrinsic deceit, apprentices also run away with their Master’s money or properties. It has been contended that this type of mistrust is an obstacle to the future and survival of the system.<sup>53</sup>

## **6. Standardising the Traditional Apprenticeship System to Create Employment for the Youths**

A fallout of the challenges facing the traditional apprenticeship system is the need to restructure the system to improve the employment conditions of the youths, especially at this age when employment is not guaranteed after tertiary education. Unlike the apprenticeship systems in other parts of the world that prepare people for employment and the professions, the apprenticeship system in Nigeria is unique in the sense that people are prepared to become entrepreneurs.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the starting point for transforming the apprenticeship system is the

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> G Adekola and S Ezekiel (n 27).

<sup>53</sup> RM Olulu and SAF Udeora (n 25).

<sup>54</sup> BA Odunaike and SA Idowu (n 15).

realignment, refocusing, reframing, and reinvention of the dimensions of the entrepreneurship ecosystem to ensure that weaknesses are turned into strengths and threats to opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

Although the apprenticeship system is now practiced all over Nigeria, South Eastern Nigeria is unarguably its birthplace. Notwithstanding the fact that the apprenticeship system has promoted the entrepreneurial spirit of Nigerians, a lot can still be realised if the States and other stakeholders play the leading role in promoting the system. Some of the steps that can be taken include:

**Legislation:** It is essential for government to pass legislation that will regularize the apprenticeship system. Such legislation should in addition to taking a cue from the Nigerian Labour Act, be extensively designed to address the shortcomings ingrained in the current law. For instance, the minimum age and qualification for an apprentice should be specified by the system. The age could be pegged at 16 years, and a secondary school certificate could be made to be a minimum entry-level qualification for intending apprentices. Rules and educational strategy could play a significant role in amalgamating elements of the system, and there is need to establish an agency to monitor, regulate and administer certification for the apprenticeship system. Also, to deter parties from contravening the law, there should be a penalty, and the penalty should be pitched at a level where it can serve as a deterrent to the parties involved.

**Infrastructure:** Infrastructure is at the bedrock of every enterprise scheme and apprenticeship needs infrastructure to thrive. There is need for the apprenticeship system to be integrated with Enterprise Support Networks. States and local governments should establish entrepreneurship development and skill acquisition centres near city centres to facilitate the learning and acquisition of skills by apprentices.

**Equity and Share Ownership:** Although the common denominator of the apprenticeship system, which is to grow entrepreneurs, is an idea which needs encouragement, there is need for the system to be redesigned so as to infuse lessons derivable from other business climates. For instance, the age-long tradition requiring masters to ‘settle’ their apprentices imposes unquantifiable financial burden on masters who may go through that process consecutively for years, making it difficult for them to sustain their businesses. Moreover, the incessant migration of experienced apprentices each year does not augur well for business networks and good clientele. This invariably accounts for why most of the indigenous businesses perpetually remain small. There is need for the establishment of modalities that will make entrepreneurs retain experienced apprentices as partners on the determination of their training, with an option of share ownership, instead of starting them on a new business.

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<sup>55</sup> Ejo-Orusa and Destiny Lloyd (n 3).

**Raising Funds for Investment:** It is common knowledge that most apprenticeship schemes are hinged on the understanding that the apprentice will be given seed capital with which to start up their business on completion of their training. This expectation is often dashed by the shortage of investment capital, which is not peculiar to Nigeria but prevalent the world over. Even for the willing masters, poor business performance and financial difficulties often make it difficult for them to fulfill their obligations. When such is the case, apprentices will be left with no option than to stay much longer with their masters or the family members will rally round and source for funds with which to start them up in business. If businesses are made to contribute to a fund which they can draw from to grow their businesses and to settle apprentices when they complete their training, these problems will be reduced. Non-interest loans could be given to apprentices to start up their new businesses on completion of their training, and Multinational corporations could also partner with government agencies to raise funds. If this initiative is designed as part of the corporate social responsibility initiative of the multinational corporations, it will encourage more entrepreneurs to take in apprentices and also motivate quality youths and young graduates to join apprenticeship programmes.

**Internship:** Human capital development transcends the acquisition of skills in a formal or informal setting. Lack of exposure and poor understanding of better ways of doing things is one of the biggest problems confronting entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Quality interns should be sent on periodic training to well-established organisations for on-the-job training. This will invariably help the apprentices to become better managers and to run their businesses efficiently and effectively when they become entrepreneurs.

**Establishment of Modern Skills Acquisition Centres:** A corollary to the periodic training and retraining of seasoned apprentices is the establishment of modern skills acquisition centres to facilitate this venture. The emphasis will be a centre that truly reflects the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century youths, the idea being to make the place accessible and capable of meeting all the needs of all manners of apprentices, and also to have the capacity, skills, and funds to establish the apprentices after acquiring the needed skills. If multinational corporations set up or are engaged with entrepreneurship and skills acquisition centres, there will be an influx of youths and young graduates willing to join such schemes because people know that multinationals have the technical capacity to provide them with first-class training and the financial wherewithal to help them establish their new ventures.

## **Conclusion**

High rates of youth and graduate unemployment, extreme poverty, a weak industrial base, youth restiveness, a high level of insecurity and overt emphasis on the oil sector are amongst the various challenges facing Nigeria today. These issues can be tackled through increased rate of new venture creation and greater entrepreneurial spirit. Herein lies the call for the standardisation of the apprenticeship scheme in order to provide employment for the youths. There is need for all the elements that are impacting negatively on entrepreneurship growth,

including innovation and new venture creation, to be realigned, refocused, reframed and reinvented as part of Nigeria's economic development agenda. Secondly, since the apprenticeship system is an innovative entrepreneurship promotion vehicle, all the challenges facing the system should be aggressively tackled to strengthen and integrate it with the national entrepreneurship and innovation system. In this regard, a new legislation should be designed to extensively address the limitations inherent in the current law. Furthermore, there should be establishment of entrepreneurship and skills development centres in all states across Nigeria. These would be readily available to complement the work done by the formal and informal sectors to ensure that education and training are built into the enterprise system not only to promote literacy among apprentices and entrepreneurs, but also to help in the development of technical competence in general.