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## **Traditional Apprenticeship, Normative Expectations and Sustainability of Masonry Vocation in Ibadan, Nigeria**

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# **Traditional Apprenticeship, Normative Expectations and Sustainability of Masonry Vocation in Ibadan, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

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The purpose of this article is to examine whether the normative expectations among masons has positive or negative influence on young people's interest in masonry. The norms and values a vocation's practitioners operate with may affect the appeal of the vocation to new and potential apprentices. Yet, whether or not a vocation continues to survive depend on how successful its norms and values order expectations of different categories of people in its fold. Data were derived from interviews and focused discussions among 30 masons and 16 apprentices. The results show that normative relations between masons and apprentices increase apprentices' anxiety. There are indications that apprentices find challenging some of the conventions that dictate the process of training. Whereas master masons feel less concern about traditional expectations on apprentices, many apprentices believe that some aspects of informal apprenticeship training process emphasize disturbing social and economic interaction with attendant disinterestedness among apprentices.

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**Keywords:** normative expectations, traditional apprenticeship, masonry, Nigeria

# **Aprendizaje Tradicional, Expectativas Normativas y Sostenibilidad de la Vocación de Albañilería en Ibadan, Nigeria**

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## **Resumen**

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El propósito de este artículo es examinar si las expectativas normativas entre los albañiles tienen una influencia positiva o negativa sobre el interés de los jóvenes en la albañilería. Las normas y valores con que operan las vocaciones pueden afectar el atractivo de la vocación a los aprendices nuevos y potenciales. Sin embargo, el hecho de que una vocación siga sobreviviendo dependerá de cuán exitosas sean sus normas y valores que ordenen las expectativas de diferentes categorías de personas en este ámbito. Los datos se obtuvieron a partir de entrevistas y discusiones focalizadas en 30 albañiles y 16 aprendices. Los resultados muestran que las relaciones normativas entre albañiles y aprendices aumentan la ansiedad de los aprendices. Hay indicios de que los aprendices encuentran difícil algunas de las convenciones que dictan el proceso de entrenamiento. Mientras que los maestros se sienten menos preocupados por las expectativas tradicionales de los aprendices, muchos aprendices creen que algunos aspectos del proceso informal de aprendizaje enfatizan la perturbadora interacción social y económica con el desinterés entre los aprendices.

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**Palabras clave:** expectativas normativas, aprendizaje tradicional, albañilería, Nigeria

Over the past decades, much scholarly attention has been directed at investigating the roles apprenticeship training plays in supplying occupational skill/training (Wallis, 2008; Parker, 2006; Lehmann, 2005; Breslau, 2003; Kempner, Castrol and Bas, 1993), in heralding youth employment (Sonnenberg, 2012; Epstein, 2008; Valenchik, 1995), alleviating poverty (Igwe and Oragwu, 2014; Hanson, 2005; Sooth and Satchell, 1994) and as a component of development agenda (Steedman, Gospel and Ryan, 2008; Meagher, 2007) in much of West African countries. At the same time, many anthropologists focusing on structure of traditional apprenticeship have described it as learning system that compels immersion in learning environment that, in addition to facilitating technical know-how, structures the practitioners' hard-earned acquisition of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that denote membership and status in a trade (Marchand, 2008; Simpson, 2006). However, it has been acknowledged that commonsense understanding of apprenticeship and a good deal of academic research on the subject take for granted that the apprenticeship relation serves to pass on technical knowledge on the one hand and cultural values on the other (Argenti, 2002). This may be a consequence of lack of appreciation of how practitioners' normative expectations shape apprenticeship engagement. Indeed, the habitual work practices as shaped by structure of apprenticeship are less easy to link to the final product of apprenticeship than the technical knowledge. But, as Simpson (2006, p.153) argues, apprenticeship involves disciplined bodies and minds and inculcating a set of patterns of capital and creates a dependent constituency for the master. This is as the social and collective nature of apprenticeship learning system is "inevitably riddled with all the inequalities and contradictions of societies and their collective endeavour".

In view of the strategic importance of apprentice training to manpower development of developing nations (Obidi, 1995) and an increasing emphasis on developing Africa's informal economy to which traditional apprenticeship learning-style is vital, the influence of practitioner normative expectations on apprentices engagement is gaining importance, but little researched. Although structure of apprenticeship have drawn scholarly attention especially among ethnologists (Simpson, 2006), anthropologists (Argenti, 2002) and sociologists (Wang, 2015; Lancy, 2012), until very recently there have been few studies that examined whether the normative

expectations among practitioners of apprenticeship has any positive or negative influence on young people's interest in apprenticeship.

In Nigeria, while older practitioners are retiring, fewer young people are picking interest in joining the vocations involving apprenticeship scheme. Few studies such as those conducted by Raheem (2011), Adesina (2008) and Agbola (2005) have tried to explain this phenomenon by suggesting that contemporary Nigerian youth “feel too egoistic” to subject themselves to the seemingly “dirty and energy sapping vocations”. Others have identified the economic factor that led many a Nigerian into commercial motorcycling and taxi driving as a potent influence in accounting for this phenomenon (Lekan and Munta, 2008). Thus, while the decline in the numbers of Nigerian youth in apprenticeship training has been a major concern to many scholars (Olaoye, 2007; Agbola, 2005) few studies have linked social practices, practitioners' expectations and its implication. In this context, the aim of our article is to re-examine the phenomenon of Nigerian youth disinterestedness in traditional apprenticeship in the context of pattern of social relations subsisting among practitioners. We explored the processes of traditional apprenticeship training as practiced among and experienced by the Nigerian masons and apprentices respectively. Specific norms and values that influence expectations and pattern of relations between masons and their apprentices are identified and analysed to show possible influence of normative expectations and apprentices' on willingness to join. Accordingly, the core questions that guided this study can be stated thus: is the pattern of relations between expert masons and their apprentices a result of the practitioners' expectations and social practices by the expert craftsmen? And in what ways has the practitioners' expectations helped in encouraging apprentices and potential apprentices towards joining masonry and learning the skills?

### **Normative Expectation and Apprenticeship Training**

Generally, both formal and informal apprenticeship training systems have particularly gained scholarly recognition with regard to vocational learning and skills acquisition (Halpern, 2006; Overwien, 2000). Each one is with clear and distinct normative tendencies. Across most of the industrialised societies apprenticeship schemes are formalized. In much of the Western

Europe apprenticeships are paid jobs with features that include “on- and off-the-job learning” that ends with nationally recognised qualifications (Lanning, 2011). There are formal statutory frames of references which spell out pattern of relations amongst actors involved in apprenticeship. For example, the operations of the German apprenticeships are driven in large part by the 1969 Vocational Training Act which specified the regulations under which training in different occupations is conducted and over seen by the Federal institute of Vocational Training (Bynner, 2011) with a focus on content and standard of training (Bynner, 2011; Steedman, 2011). The active involvement of Western governments in apprenticeship governance with regards to policies formulation and content regulations is with a multiple focus on the outcome and benefits of apprenticeship for apprentices, employers and their economies (Byner, 2011; Hayes, 2011; Doel, 2011).

In contrast to the formal apprenticeship training, traditional apprenticeship lack formal governance structure that involves government agencies. In Nigeria, as in many other Sub-Saharan countries, traditional apprenticeship largely emerged out of family apprenticeship system of the pre-colonial era. This was largely unstructured lineage occupational oriented training scheme developed to transmit dominant lineage occupations to the next generation. It is a process of learning whereby knowledge of survival within an environment was transferred through the family (Olutayo, 2010) and it basically involved the household head (‘the expert’) showing his children (‘apprentices’) how to grow crops, do a task, craft basket, weave clothes and so on (Collins, Brown and Holum, 1991). The twin factors of simple tools fashioned to explore nature and low level understanding of the environments was responsible for institutionalization and transition of survival skills around the family unit. To a large extent, labour mobilisation for economic purpose was domiciled in the family. So it is unsurprising that acquisition of the essential skills required to participate in the lineage trade was through the family. An essential feature of family apprenticeship is that learning took the form of observations and direct participation with little or no theoretical frameworks.

Historically, Traditional apprenticeship has been important system of learning in much of developing societies. It has served as important source of training to the young people of Africa given its momentous contributions to human and non-human agencies over several decades. In light of this,

literature are wont to present traditional apprenticeship training in positive light showing how it could help solve some of the present economic and social problems – including labour supply and skills development problems – in countries where it is still largely practiced (Neil, 2010; Palmer, 2009; Breyer, 2006; and Johnson and Ferej, 1997). Unlike in Western nations where there are marked cross-national differences in “integration of young people into the labour market” (Wolbers, 2007, p.189), in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa this is remarkably similar. A major factor underlying this similarity is the structural similarities of many African economies. For instance, (1) substantial proportion of small and medium scale businesses are in the informal economy; (2) although unemployment rates differ from one country to another, all sub-Saharan African countries are bedevilled with large army of unemployed youths; and (3) over 80% of skills transfer and labour supply into the African informal economies are through traditional apprenticeship training (Palmer, 2009).

However, with all the potential and actual benefits of this system of learning, it is still largely outside the purview of formal training and educational policies of many African countries. Indeed, there are few exceptions in the likes of Ghana, Senegal, South Africa and Mali where there appear to be indications of governments’ efforts to formalise this mode of learning by attempting to accommodate it within the national educational policies of their countries (Sonnenberg, 2012; Palmer, 2009). Yet, in many other African countries traditional apprenticeship is left in the hands of unaccredited and unsupervised practitioners (ILO, 2008). In Nigeria, for instance, just as it is with the broader informal economy of the country, traditional apprenticeship enjoys little or no government attention and patronage. It is, as it has being over the years “self-regulating, self-financing” (Johanson and Adams, 2004) and largely structured around “kinship, friendship and philanthropy” (Johnson and Ferej, 1997). There have been few structural supports for training, financing, curriculum development, certifications and accreditation of trainers, in-takes and graduates of traditional apprenticeship training.

The implications of the present circumstance of traditional apprenticeship in the country are numerous but one is essential to this article. This relates to the social process and the attendant social relations among actors involved in the training as informed by the normative practices. The lack of

standardisation by government appears to make various tradesmen and artisanal associations to develop their own guiding principles, norms and cultures to suit the peculiarities of different vocations and practitioners (Jawando, Samuel and Odunaike, 2012). In the absence of formal rules and regulations apprentices are not often aware of the does and don'ts expected of them. In this circumstance, the social context of learning and the structure of relations embedded therein are based on experiential reality. Because, hand books that explain behaviours and actions expected of an apprentice are mostly unavailable, learning experiences are unstructured; with circumstantial experiences guiding immediate and future actions and behaviour of apprentices.

Even enforcements of rules and regulations are carried out informally through reciprocity, social sanctions and economic compulsion (ILO, 2010). Although, local customs and traditions often play key roles in social processes of traditional apprenticeship, rules of engagement between apprentices and expert craftspeople may not be explicit. In particular, agreements and conditions under which participants (apprentices and expert craftsmen) relate more often than not depend on the whims of the experts. Thus, as with any unregulated systems, traditional apprenticeship system with its peculiar normative scheme may inadvertently encourage arbitrary use of power by one group (experts) over another (apprentices). The question is whether this may play any negative or positive roles in encouraging youth participation in traditional apprenticeship training?

Our article attempt to offer an explanation to this question by examining the norms, values and customs expert masons hold dear in the process of training. This is in an attempt to explain the roles of normative expectations in attracting or distracting young people to serve as apprentices in this vocation. This is considered important because of the view that sustainability of any vocation relies primarily on continued recruitment and successful socialisation of new members into its normative system. As Devine, Britton, Mellor and Halfpenny (2000) observed it is the duty of those with “authorised knowledge” to protect the skills and identity of a vocation through careful control of recruitment and trainings of new entrants as well as the conducts and standard of works of the practitioners. By extension, new entrants must also have proper induction or socialization into the normative schema of a group.



As far as this article is concern, note that the institution of apprenticeship is structured to inculcate much wider socialisation contents that are far beyond skills and trade qualifications. Apprenticeship training expresses the skills, qualifications and substantive regulatory elements a given vocation happens to embrace (Korpi et al., 2003); in turn apprenticeship scheme is one of the main training systems through which vocational knowledge as well as social and behavioural expectations are inculcated in apprentices. Whether or not a vocational trade develops and maintains sustained vocational identity and work ethics depend to a large extent on the quality of its normative schema and how successful its values are absorbed by the new entrants. As Noordergraaf (2011) wrote: “development of regulatory framework allows professional communities to preserve professional identities and integrity” even as regulation of professional behaviours is essential part of the equation. Apart from the skills acquisition content, apprenticeship training include cultural framework by which apprentices become inducted or socialised into knowing and accepting the ‘normal’ ways of conduct of a group (Lancy, 2012).

## **Methods**

The study was carried out in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo state. Ibadan was used because of its metropolitan nature. The city has eleven local government areas with five of these known as Ibadan metropolitan/city. The remaining six local government areas are generally referred to as Ibadan less city/rural areas. The large urban stature of Ibadan presupposes continuous construction of various types of buildings which means the city will always require a retinue of skilled artisans like masons. The actual research was conducted in three randomly selected local government areas out of the possible six.

## **The Fieldwork**

Fieldwork was carried out between January and April 2014. Data for the paper was collected through qualitative research method. The main target audiences were expert masons and apprentice masons. A total of forty six masons (30 experts and 16 apprentices) were purposively selected and

interviewed. Apart from the in-depth interviews, focused discussions (comprising of average of eight participants) were also organised for different groups of expert masons.

The participants were gathered for the study through visits to on-going construction sites in the three selected local government areas. Initial contacts were made with expert masons to invite them for and to allow their apprentices to participate in the study. The purpose and aim of the study were explained to the expert masons. Where the authors met more than one expert on site, they asked for the lead mason and usually they were directed to the masons that invited other (masons) to participate in the construction process. Often expert masons made themselves available for interviews in the evening after the day's job; none accepted to be interviewed during work hours. We guessed this was to guard against interference with work targets. Nevertheless, we were allowed to stay as long as we wished to observe work process, learning method and pattern of interactions among them. In most cases, the authors were invited into the participants' compound in the evening for the interviews, but 2 or 3 interviews were conducted on site after the day's work. All interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours.

As indicated above 46 masons accepted to be interviewed and took part in the study: 30 interviews took place with expert masons and 16 with apprentice masons. A 12 item interview guide was prepared and utilised to elicit responses from the interviewees and discussants. During the interview and discussion sessions, we asked expert masons to describe the process of becoming and engaging apprentices, the daily routine/schedule expected of an apprentice, the norms and practices that guide engagement of new apprentices as well as socio-economic relationship with their apprentices. We also asked the masons to describe how apprentices acquire requisite knowledge of masonry. Aside the expert masons, we interviewed apprentice masons. The authors asked the apprentice masons to reflect on their apprenticeship experience, how they learn and from whom they learn. We asked questions concerning their relationship with the experts and their households, the rules that guide interactions with other apprentices and how all of these shape or affect what and how they learn.

The interviews were conducted in Pidgin English (corrupt version of English language popular with semi-literate people in Nigeria) because many of the interviewees have limited command of English language. Data

transcription and translation were conducted by the authors. During the process of data collection, we used digital recording gadget to record all interview and group discussion sessions. Everything we heard and observed on field was recorded in either digital table recorder or by taking notes. The combination of these two avails us with the opportunity to relate one set of data to another. Data analysis was done manually. Transcribed scripts were read many times; and the authors coded data in themes for analysis.

### **Findings and Discussions**

From the interviews and focused discussions conducted among expert masons the following normative and customary expectations regarding apprenticeship and apprentice relations were identified. The normative traditions particularly focus on the social context within which apprentices/learners experiences are informed by context of learning shaped largely by masons' expectations and practices.

#### **Normality of Indenture System and Learning**

Apprenticeship system among masons is built upon an indenture system characterised by written and financial agreements. This is an important formality and ritual upon which intending learners enters into a non-primary socio-economic relation with expert masons. The indenture system forms the legal basis for the relationship of training in which social and working conditions are regulated (Berneri, 2000). All of our participants are of the opinion that under no circumstance do learning/knowledge transfer (or apprentice-expert relation) between an apprentice and expert mason occur without first agreeing on at least two issues: the number of years an apprentice will be under the guidance and tutorship of the expert; and two financial obligations (the initial amount of money an apprentice or his/her parents pays to be accepted by the expert).

I learnt building from my master for seven straight years. However, we are now in modern time no child is ready to learn or subject himself for that long anymore; the longest is three years. And this has to be agreed upon by the master and the apprentices or their representatives. Apart from this an apprentice or his/her parent has to

pay certain amount of money called agreement fee before s/he can be allowed to learn the trade. (In-depth Interview with Expert Masons).

As far as masons practitioners' engagement is concerned, this practice is taken for granted. In fact, the symbolism of this practice was passionately emphasised in a group discussion among expert masons:

There are laws and traditions guiding the ways we deal or relates with our apprentices. Firstly there is an agreement between him and his master on how much he has to pay to learn the work and how many years he is going to stay with him. All of these have to be discussed and agreed with the apprentices or their parents (Focused discussion with Expert Masons).

Therefore, in practitioners' views, apprentice-expert relation is underlined by bonding system. This is what creates the context upon which learning commences; and apprentices become member of the expert's work group. The bond binding the apprentice is expressed both in writing and symbols. The value of the bond expresses pattern of relations in masonry. Indeed, the indenture system requires the two parties to be thorough; to spell out the details of interaction; and thus convey 'what is in it' message for both parties. That means that in this system both parties relate base on what the immediate gains and costs are (ILO, 2011).

However, the value of the 'goods' (the skill/knowledge) is predetermined through the agreed fees and years of learning even as one of the parties (the apprentice or parent) sometimes has little or no inclination of what he is buying. Yet he has to come under an abiding agreement. The formality of the agreement is therefore a token action underlining the power of master masons over apprentices. This tokenism is well expressed in the sanctity of the agreement which may become obvious and come handy especially during a time of disagreement between the expert and the apprentice. One master mason, who indicated to have trained over twenty masons, explains the sanctity of the agreement:

The rule (of building association) states that once an apprentice is attached with a master mason, whatever rancor that may ensue between the two of them, no other registered mason may take on such

apprentice. The guild will rather look for ways to settle such matter than allow someone else to take him over (In-depth Interview with Expert Mason).

This is a ‘marriage’ of permanency. Masonry indenture system compels the social agents (expert and apprentice) to stay together once they come together. No opting out option. Though it recognises human nature that discord may occur, it only recommends that settlement has to be reached. Insofar as no new expert mason will accept the apprentice having being bonded in an earlier agreement, the junior partner (in the agreement) appears powerless. Meanwhile, the more senior partner (the mason) has all the powers. In fact, he has a twin source of power. One, he has the backing of his colleagues in the building trade guild whose rule book bars any other registered mason from accepting the apprentice. And he also has under his control the resource (building knowledge) for which the apprentice strives to gain. This practitioner normative system not only leads to other normative expectations, but it is the main causal factor to explain the subsisting structure of apprenticeship/learning among masons.

Indeed, learning does not occur outside the indenture system. Apprentices are allowed into the expert’s family of learning only after agreed payment has been paid. Sometimes the amount agreed is allowed to be spread over a year or two. But most times upfront payment is demanded by the expert masons. This payment offers learners the opportunity to observe building process, ask questions on grey areas and formally be accepted into the building gang under the leadership of an expert. Building gang is described by the respondents as a group of expert masons, journeymen and apprentices that work together as a work team. What differentiate one building gang from the others is not so much clear. But one thing that is learnt by the authors is that ‘gang’ members treat themselves as a family but has a loose rule of entry and exit.

There is a little or no rivalry noticed among building gangs except with regards to acceptance of a learner from other experts. An apprentice or learner who signs an agreement of indenture with a member of a gang automatically gains membership. He/she has both the opportunity to learn from other building experts in the gang as well as be used as a labour on a job by them. By and large, learning takes many forms. But essentially senior apprentices are customarily empowered to teach new apprentices some of

the skills they have acquired over the years. New entrants are encouraged to get close to their seniors, ‘respect’ them and learn as much as they could from them. In fact it is a rule of thumb for a new apprentice to be friendly to senior apprentices:

Although an apprentice has to be curious enough to ask question about whatever process (segment of masonry) that is not clear to him, he must show enough respect to those who would show him (In-depth Interview with a Expert Mason).

“Those who will show him” how to acquire the much sorted skills are no others than the senior apprentices he/she met on the job. Another expert explains thus:

If you are interested in this job you will run a lot of errand for your seniors. He (the new apprentice) must show enough humility and respect to the senior apprentices for him to acquire the skill/knowledge in this vocation or else he learns nothing for the three years or more he will stay with his master. The apprentice will be asked to do different odd tasks, such as buying and serving food, carrying tools and other building implements on his head to and from the work sites and sometimes doing some laundry works for the senior (In-depth Interview with a Expert Mason).

Although, the apprentice signed a pact with an expert mason referred to as *oga* (master) in local parlance, s/he is likely to have little time and temperament of teaching the little details of masonry to an apprentice. That is not the job of the master it is for those (the senior apprentices) “who came on the job before the new apprentice”. So at the height of the summit is the expert mason. Below him are the more senior apprentices, and then at the lowest rung of the strata are the newest apprentices. This structure is maintained and underlies every aspect of relations among different personalities occupying each stratum. Being the newest means the weakest and so he is entrusted in the care of the senior apprentice, for perhaps, ‘proper’ socialisation or induction.

This practice, as it were, places high value on senior apprentices. As it appears, this is based on the assumption that the earlier you join the system

the more skilful and knowledgeable you have to be on the job. Whether this assumption is true or not was not tested by us. However, what is clear, as shown above, is that it is the practice (and normative) within the apprenticeship structure for a new apprentice to defer to the senior apprentices to learn and earn the skills sorted. The newest apprentice has to be “humble and respect” those who will show him the “rudiment” of the job. The apprentice may not have the opportunity to learn directly from the expert mason. He is therefore expected to conform to the will of his more senior colleagues in the system.

Therefore, while it may not be part of terms of agreement, practitioners of masonry demands that apprentices pay their dues by being allotted the oddest task which may be out of the purview of actual segment of masonry knowledge. This is the norm or custom irrespective of the ages of the senior and the junior apprentice. Though in everyday context one may argue that what qualifies as humbleness and respectfulness may be contentious and dependent on several situational factors and also on who is asking who (for example in terms of seniority by age), among this work group this is clear and less vague. The newest apprentice must submit himself in total submission to those who by accident of time came on the job before him (regardless of age or background). He must accept to go on errands for the ‘seniors’ and he must accept to do the oddest tasks in the division of labour. By implications any attempt to reject some kind of ‘demeaning’ task may be construed as disrespectful or being immodest thus running the risk of learning “nothing for the three years” of his apprenticeship. Consequently, apprenticeship scope of learning for duration of apprenticeship is conditioned as much to his/her aptitude and interest in masonry as it is with his/her ability to develop and maintain ‘positive’ relationships with all members within the building gang to which his/her *oga* (master) belongs.

### **Deference, Contractual Opportunity and Expert-Learners’ Relationship**

It is also expected for all apprentices to hold the experts in high esteem and honour. In the context of apprenticeship relation among this group, expression of *fear* by apprentices for the senior members of building gangs is considered normal. Many expert masons address the issue of deference to the master with words such as “apprentices should not stand shoulder to

shoulder with the senior apprentices much less the experts”. Apprentices’ behaviour or actions are expected to perpetually reflect highest veneration for expert masons. To understand the importance of this within the ambit of apprentice-expert relations we asked respondents to describe how an apprentice mason is expected to relate with his/her *oga* (master/expert). Generally, respondents point out that the social relation between master and apprentice mason is governed by the “fear” of expert masons. An expert mason put this in context:

In this job you are expected to have utmost fear for the experts. The heart of any apprentice must be filled with such fear of superiority of the experts. An expert mason is like a semi-god to an apprentice. This is because an apprentice is nothing in the sight of his master while he is still learning (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

An apprentice corroborates the above assertions:

If the expert mason even offended us we could not blame him for any wrong doing. This is because masters and parents have enormous power over a child’s life. The master even has bigger power over you because master teaches or shows you the path to economic success (In-depth Interview with an Apprentice).

An expert’s power over the apprentices is justified from the standpoint of economic. It flows directly from the knowledge he holds. Since the expert holds or owns a means of survival which is valuable to the apprentices he appears to have (or have been accorded) some kind of power over those who needs or sought after his knowledge. Hence, the social context of learning among masons impose on apprentices condition of total submission and expression of veneration of the expert masons under which he/she intends to acquire knowledge. Thus, it appears what apprentices come to acquire is not only building skills but also the culture of engagement and the normality of fear in the context of learning.

This is better reflected in the fact that irrespective of the skill level of an apprentice, s/he is barred from independently seeking, obtaining and execution of building contract. This general tendency is embedded in the structure of informal apprenticeship learning scheme is also to consolidate



the class positions between the master and the apprentices. This becomes expressible in form of appropriation and monopolisation of economic opportunities which leaves little room for competition between the two groups. Among the respondents this assumption is given vent to in the light of the general rules of masonry as operative within the entire structure of mason body (the association/guild). For example, it is emphasised, generally, that an apprentice should not deem it appropriate to obtain a building contract while on training. This is because, as an interviewee explains it:

Building rules does not allow an apprentice who is still under his master to do that (accept a building contract without notifying the master). The reason is that until an apprentice is given a certificate that he is competent, he cannot negotiate for building contract. Should one of his relatives ask him to help build his/her house he (the apprentice) has to ask his master to obtain the contract; an apprentice cannot obtain a contract until certified competent even if he has the skill (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

When a newly freed apprentice mason was asked directly if he did accepted a building contract while learning he seemed to express a shock at such thought (his askance changed slightly) and he said this:

No. I never did that for the four years it took me to learn this work. In fact, there was no chance for us to even attempt that because during this period we had to follow our master everyday to work sites except on Sundays which was the only day of rest for us. So all the job I did during my learning period was done under my master. However, he must always ensure that he gives us food and pocket money even when he starves his family he must give us some money because he understands that we are like his tools (In-depth Interview with a newly freed apprentice mason)

We asked the same question during an interview with a master mason:

No he cannot have such benefit while still an apprentice. For as long as he is yet to be free from the agreement signed with his master he cannot do this. If he did so and the association gets wind of it he will

be severely punished. What the apprentice can do is to direct the contract to his master (In-depth Interview with a Expert Mason)

This general submission further clarifies the pattern of social relations between master mason and an apprentice under the process of apprenticeship. As it were, an apprentice will not be allowed to flex financial independence while under indenture. He is under an agreement which requires him to be humble and respectful to his master and the more senior colleagues as dictated by masonry tradition. To learn, he/she has to be submissive. For one, subordination of apprentices' labour under the masters' economic opportunity is important to ensure continuous maintenance of specific pattern of relation between the master and apprentices. There is little doubt that economic independence punctures docility and raises self esteems. Hence he should have the privilege of his daily feeding money and no extra. This point is further explained by a senior apprentice:

Although, we cannot attempt to do a job behind our master, if we are asked we have to refer such job to our master. When he is paid he still will not offer us anything except our regular daily feed money (In-depth Interview with a senior apprentice mason)

As it stands, because the apprentices are, as described above by an interviewee, like tools of business for the master, he has the right to take them to building site, to utilise their labour in execution of building jobs at hand with no expectation of being paid any part of the contractual money. This tends to allow master masons to exploit apprentice labour to the fullest. Therefore, it seems that there is an underneath concern (that of lost of this resource) if apprentices are freed to obtain independent building contracts. Beyond this, this sentiment tends to serve as measure to avoid insubordination from the part of the apprentices. A master mason offers an example of a possible scenario of how an apprentice and his master could come under collision:

It is not right for a child under apprenticeship to start executing building jobs on his own. What happens if the situation arises where both master and an apprentice chase after the same job? What do you think will happen if a boy you are suppose to be training is not going

to allow you take a job? We have to avoid such situations at all cost. And this is not only with the builders, you can check all other vocations it is the same (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

Indeed, such situation (where master and apprentices compete for the same building contract) may create unwholesome scenario. If apprentices are expected to fear and defer to their master's will at all time, no apprentice could be allowed to compete for building contracts. Consequently, we suspect that the building association's book rules against allowing apprentices from obtaining a job while under training not just because of the suspicion of competence of the apprentices – since same apprentices are allowed to train the more junior apprentices under them – but because of the implications that such situations have for the entire structure of learning and the general character of social relations that may emerge between apprentices and masters. That means, apprentices are kept under control through financial dependence on either their parents or the master. This will help keep their heads down, humble and focus on the training rather than on financial gains or 'premature' economic independence.

### **Normative expectations and Youth Disinterestedness in Informal Apprenticeship**

Below is the thought of one expert mason on the problem faced in attracting apprentices into masonry profession:

You know we have problem of apprentices now. There is no child ready to learn anymore. We have investigated and found that today's kids are not ready to learn except that the masters embrace them and draw them with cash (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

Most experts interviewed expressed sadness about this situation and show great concern about the prospect and future of masonry in Nigeria. The experts are pessimistic about Nigerian youth's willingness to subject themselves to a period of apprenticeship as they feel that few if any young person presently want to learn through traditional apprenticeship. This they believed is making it extremely difficult for them (practitioners) to attract youth into the vocation. Indeed, our visitations and observations to informal

construction sites confirm that many experts masons are currently with very few (two at most) or no apprentices currently undergoing training and acquiring masonry skills. This is a situation that all the expert masons interviewed believed does not stand the masonry in a good stead:

Today our youths no longer appreciate our kind of work. Building work is no longer attractive to the younger generation. The way things are today if it is continued this work may cease to exist. (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

The above thought is by no means uncommon among the respondents. For many expert masons who acquired masonry skills through the traditional apprenticeship method they believed the system had function well for years, until a point when many young people began to resist the idea of domination and exploitation of their labour. Though they did not say or acknowledged it, the pattern of power relations embedded in structure and process of traditional apprenticeship system appears to dissuade some young person who may be willing to learn masonry. The low interest in the trade is however widely acknowledged as a problem. But when asked why or what may be responsible for the low interests of youths in the masonry, virtually all of them (master masons) replied thus:

Many youth of today are indiscipline. They are rude and cannot take orders from those above them. This I think is one major problem; because in my opinion many of them are scared of being disciplined. The rules scare many people away from learning (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

In their socio-economic circumstances (*Olutayo, 1994*) and the ensuing power positions of the master masons, their perceptions of the unwillingness of young people to become apprentices is that of being belligerent. Others (expert masons) emphasized the role played by formal education in this matter:

Today's problem in building is caused by education. Because any child with a secondary school leaving certificate feels ashamed to learn this work and many of them have over rated opinions about

themselves and their level of education. They believe with their school certificates they cannot subject themselves to anybody for years. All they are after is money. This is why young people now prefer to do daily labour which will earn them a daily pay under a bricklayer than to come under him as an apprentice (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

The possible influence of practitioners' expectations, practices and social context of learning presently subsisting are little acknowledged. They (expert masons) did not also factor-in the role played by the lack of adequate monetary compensation for the labour input of the apprentices in execution of building jobs; and the issue of structural domination of the apprentices could not have been a problem to them. These issues, however, as we found out are really important aspects of learning raised by many other respondents (especially the apprentices and recently 'freed' apprentices). For example, the opinion of a newly graduate apprentice directs attention to the extent to which these (practitioners' expectations) could be a problem to contemporary youths who may be aspiring to learn masonry:

It is difficult to be an apprentice because you have to subject yourself to domineering tendencies of the masters. And I think this is why many young ones do not wish to be one. For example, in 2009 the year I came under my master three of us joined at the same period. Today (2013) I am the only one who is graduating from him all others left because they could not endure. While I was learning I visited my master's household regularly to engage in some house chores like washing his clothes, sweeping his compound and I was even helping his wife in some aspects of home keeping. I do not see many young people subjecting themselves to doing this anymore (In-depth Interview with an Apprentice Mason)

All masters expect apprentice learners under their tutorship to extend their labour to offer personal services in regular upkeep of their household. Little demarcation exists between the 'official' hours of work, official work/duties of apprentices and the domestic responsibilities of the masters' households. It is 'normal' to serve the master and his household during the apprentice years. Apprentices strive to be in the good book and curry favour of their masters' wives as a good insurance to secure the favour of the

masters. The ‘fear’ of masters extends to the fear of the wife of the master. Belligerent apprentices who stubbornly refused to create time and space to do house chores in the master’s house could find it difficult to achieve adequate learning. Nevertheless, this finding is not peculiar to apprenticeship process of masonry. It is also the case among those in the process of learning tailoring and other vocations (Jawando et al., 2012). As we gathered master may not be very disposed to reveal the “secret” (or details) of the trade to “stubborn” apprentices. Learning is therefore condition on good perception and attitude of the masters towards the learners.

Nevertheless, all the apprentices masons that participated in the interview sections expressed this as a special concern, but observed that it is a situation they cannot do anything about if they have to achieve their aims (that is, acquire masonry knowledge). Though they acknowledged that it is an aspect of the social process of learning or acquisition of building skills they wish this had not been the case. It consume their leisure or free times and they could not do anything about it for the fear of been seen as disrespectful of their masters. Several apprentices we interacted with and interviewed indicated that this aspect of the social practices of traditional apprenticeship system is discouraging to young ones. In the account of one apprentice, who had spent two years on the training, this practice is an abuse of the apprentices’ rights:

In the name of been respectful to the masters, apprentices are inhumanly treated. They are treated as little worse than animals tied to a pole that cannot do anything except what is offered to it by its owner. Apprentices have to treat the master with care and treat the wives with even more care. Sometimes I ask myself ‘do we have any rights under the country’s laws’? (In-depth Interview with an Apprentice Mason)

Apparently the above statement is a contrary view to how masters view the whole issue. While it is believed that youth have become less controllable and are scared of been subjected to normal rules of masonry; the apprentices hold contrary view that masters dominate the apprentices. But what is important, to us, is that like in art of marketing of a products or services, words of mouth is a valueless means by which a product or service attracts potential consumers. If apprentices on the job view their situation in

unsavoury manner, it is likely and natural that they will gist their friends (outside the structure of masonry) about their conditions. In such circumstance, negative perception and attitude towards apprenticeship become further widespread. And the likely result is ‘de-marketing’ of masonry to potential apprentices. In any case, another seeming disturbing point with regards to the issue of unwillingness of youth to embrace apprenticeship was mentioned by yet another apprentice mason:

The reason is a result of modern individualistic orientation of people today. For example while I was learning there was no much heavy dependency on me. But those who are learning this job now are married with children. They have to take good care of their children and wives. How would you ask such individual to work for you and be patient without having to give him enough monetary compensation? (In-depth Interview with a newly ‘Freed’ Mason)

Non-expectation of financial reward after a day’s job has become unacceptable to those who may want to learn masonry. The demographic shift (mentioned in the above statement) show that the needs of those who decide to enter into an indenture with master masons have changed. Marital and fatherly responsibilities make the old custom/practice of labour without adequate compensation unattractive. In fact, in contemporary Nigeria, those who appear interested in embracing the traditional apprenticeship do so for pecuniary advantage. To be sure of this claim we asked master masons to comment on the influence of pecuniary considerations on willingness of young person to become apprentices in building vocation. The following opinion was pervasive in their comments:

Today money rules and unless you are ready to give apprentices enough cash after the day’s job he will not show up the next day. In my opinion the only method to attract them (new apprentices) to learn the vocation is by offering them adequate money for the daily job they do on sites (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

The “daily job they do on site” is tough job. From our observation on the construction sites visited, we noticed that the activities involved in building process make it a hard, energy sapping profession. Participant masons and

their apprentices lift heavy loads of sand, cement and blocks from morning till the close of work in the evening. Respondents assured us that the job is not for the fickle hearted or sickly individual. Whatever roles masons or their apprentices are assigned everyone leaves building sites exhausted. That means division of labour between master and apprentice does little to reduce the enormity of work that is daily carried out by either apprentices or their masters. This (labour sapping activities) alone appears discouraging to many in the society as one expert mason offered to explain:

As you would have noticed, house building is a hard job. It is a kind of job that is going into extinction as people have refused to learn it. Today people prefer to go for jobs that are easier to learn and which can provide them with quick money (In-depth Interview with an Expert Mason)

However, many apprentice masons interviewed believed that appropriate monetary compensations for their roles should help as attraction to youth. In other words, lack of adequate financial offering for the “hard jobs” that are executed on building sites (for the master masons) is a disincentive for prospective apprentices. In stifling economy such as Nigeria’s, young individuals require money for survival just as the elderly or the more adult ones. No young person appears willing to accept a condition of agreement which subjects him to serve under a master for three to five years for only “daily feed money”. They would rather serve as freelance labour on a building site or opt for less arduous but more lucrative trade. Therefore, it may not be surprising that most of the master masons interviewed believe some urgent steps should be taken to curb the increasing downward trend of enrolment of apprentices into the profession. One of these steps, as opined by majority of apprentices is adequate remuneration for apprentices.

### **Conclusions**

The study explored the potential role of masonry practitioners’ expectations in influencing apprentices’ engagement and continued interest in masonry vocation. To our knowledge, this is one of the few studies that show the effect of normative expectations on young people’s interest in traditional apprenticeship. Our findings reveal that expert masons and their apprentices



engage one another based on established practices structured by and rooted in age-long masons' customs. Apprentices' behaviors towards the experts/masters and senior apprentices are part of the extra-learning activities expected of an apprentice. As part of practitioners expectations apprentices are expected to perceive and relate with experts base on the ideal of unequal social position between him and his master. Subservience from the part of apprentices towards the experts is the norm. New apprentices are expected to also learn many of the rudiments of the vocation through senior apprentice whom they are expected to defer to at the slightest opportunity. Though, there is an indenture system in place which spell out what is expected between the apprentices and the expert, the apprentices hardly get taught by the expert. Much of what a new apprentice learn come from those before him on the job which suggest he/she is made to go through some sought of initiation into the job by understanding his/her place/role in the entire apprenticeship structure. What many apprentices (new and old) find almost unacceptable is the practice that ensures that they are not allowed to accept or execute building contracts on their own and by themselves. Though, as we found out, the intention for this practice by practitioners seems to be a noble one – to ensure focus on the training by an apprentice and to control and ensure competence – this appears to be the main factor for the seemingly disinterestedness of youth in apprenticeship training. Many (apprentices) view it as a form of appropriation of their labour with little or no commensurate compensation. While many of the apprentices in the study do not share this custom they, nevertheless, participate and offer due deference to the experts and the senior apprentices as expected of them.

The results further reveal that expert masons' expectations of apprentices which are on one hand rooted in the normative traditions and practices and on the other hand as an extension of the general culture of the people (the Yoruba) among whom the study was conducted are becoming counterproductive for continued subsistence of traditional apprenticeship. This is as apprentices are increasingly showing their displeasure towards how they are treated within the structure of apprenticeship. Although, traditional apprenticeship as presently structured offers few opportunities for apprentices to complain, however, apprentices who cannot bear the seemingly hard condition of learning in this system are disengaging from the scheme, leaving the vocation with few hands that may replace older and

retiring masons. This indicates that how apprentices are treated within the social context of learning is important for survival of masonry vocation in particular and the traditional apprentices in general. This point becomes very important when we consider the fact that the Nigerian Federal Government seems to have little interest in how traditional apprenticeship (the main system that produce and reproduce new apprentices for different vocation in the country) is run

Consequently, considering the fact that traditional apprenticeship is very important to masonry vocation, it is advisable for practitioners to reconsider how apprentices experience learning in this system. As it stands today, apprentices do not appreciate nor do they find enjoyable their training experiences as a result of what is expected of them. When training experience is made enjoyable and free of inimical social practices (that make apprentices feel less anxious), then the phenomenon of youth disinterestedness may be reduced, as more apprentices may stay and complete the training rather than the current trend where apprentices opt out as a result of practitioner expectations. Secondly, our study suggested that reward system within traditional apprenticeship scheme needs reshaping to meet modern trends. Lessons can be borrowed from the European system where apprentices are compensated through formalised wage systems. To achieve this, Nigerian government needs to intervene in how the scheme is run; deliberately formalise or standardise the traditional apprenticeship scheme. As it stands presently, apprentices are not awarded formal/government recognised qualification. Although, they receive certificates of completion from their masters after the mandatory three years of training, such certificates are not government recognised which effectively means that they cannot be used to work with the state or obtain government contracts – a big deal in Nigeria. Generally, government involvement in the apprenticeship scheme may go a long way to salvage many vocations (such as masonry) that are gradually going towards extinction as a result of lack of apprentices, by bringing the scheme under the ministry of education or national directorate of employment (NDE) for proper monitoring and policy guidance.

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