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Trends in human capacity development in the gold jewellery industry of Ghana: A case study of the asantes

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A B S T R A C T

The consumption demand for gold jewellery in Ghana is fast evolving, and there is therefore a growing demand for new designs and higher value addition. These changing customer requirements are increasingly creating a need for a more highly skilled workforce. This paper provides an overview of the trend in human capacity development in the gold jewellery industry over the past 50 years. Field studies were undertaken with a population sample of 150 jewellers. Data collection was concentrated in six towns within the Ashanti region, where gold jewellery industries are highly concentrated. Results obtained indicated that all the craftsmen involved in the gold jewellery industry were Ghanaians who were full time practitioners, with a sizeable number (28%) of them being females, majority of whom are graduates from tertiary institutions. This trend is contrary to what was obtained before independence and an important cultural change which is of great significance to national building. The apprenticeship system of capacity development continues to provide effective-informal training of craftsmen for the jewellery trade. The formal system of training was introduced into tertiary education in the 1960s, alongside the apprentice system. This arrangement has improved the human capacity development of the industry.

Introduction

Ghana is endowed with significant mineral wealth. Minerals such as gold, manganese, diamond, bauxite, limestone, silica and salt are being exploited in commercial quantities, with gold representing, by far, the most important mineral mined (World Gold Council, 2011). Before Ghana gained independence in 1957, the country was known as Gold Coast for its abundance of gold reserves. Vestiges of alluvial gold extraction activities have been found that date as far back as the sixth century. As early as the seventh century AD, Arab traders were attracted to ancient Ghana because of the large gold deposits (Ayensu, 1997). The rich gold deposits were largely

responsible for the wealth and political strength of ancient Ghana Empire and cultures. European colonial exploration of gold in ancient Ghana was therefore at its peak by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Ayensu, 1997).

The Gold Coast was not just a prime source of gold but of gold work by the Asantes, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Their 'jewellery' however, was not created for the adornment of women but to designate the rank of the ruling class. Gold was treated with great respect in Asante - and this bright, untarnishable metal was believed to have a life of its own, with spiritual powers. Ceremonies and rituals were associated with opening a new mine, and with making a rich find (Meyerowitz, 1949).

The Ghanaian tradition in gold jewellery making dates back to the 5th century B.C., when craftsmen from ancient Ghana Empire developed a vibrant goldsmith and jewellery making industry (Ayensu, 1997). Jewellery making skills were passed done through generations to the craftsmen of present day Ghana previously known as Gold Coast. Today, this tradition is evident in the local jewellery industry of over one thousand indigenous artisans (GIPC, 2000). There are also several medium sized companies employing between five and twelve bench jewellers that can be located in certain towns across the country.

Notwithstanding, there is evidence that the level of output of finish products are low, and the general quality of some made-in-Ghana gold jewellery is poor. These observations are partly attributed to the fact that many practitioners in the industry lack the requisite technical skills and are unable to keep abreast with modern trends. Others also cannot work out the required alloy components accurately and are therefore unable to correctly prepare the various gold alloys and their solders. However the opportunities of the jewellery industry to recapture the local market share and access global markets exist in Ghana. This coupled with the need to strive towards developing competitive edges in all aspects of technological, bench and design skill, will require a strong workforce. It is then that the jewellery industry can think about competing against the rest of the world. This paper aims at assessing the human capacity development trends of the gold jewellery industry in Ghana over the past 50 years.

Methodology

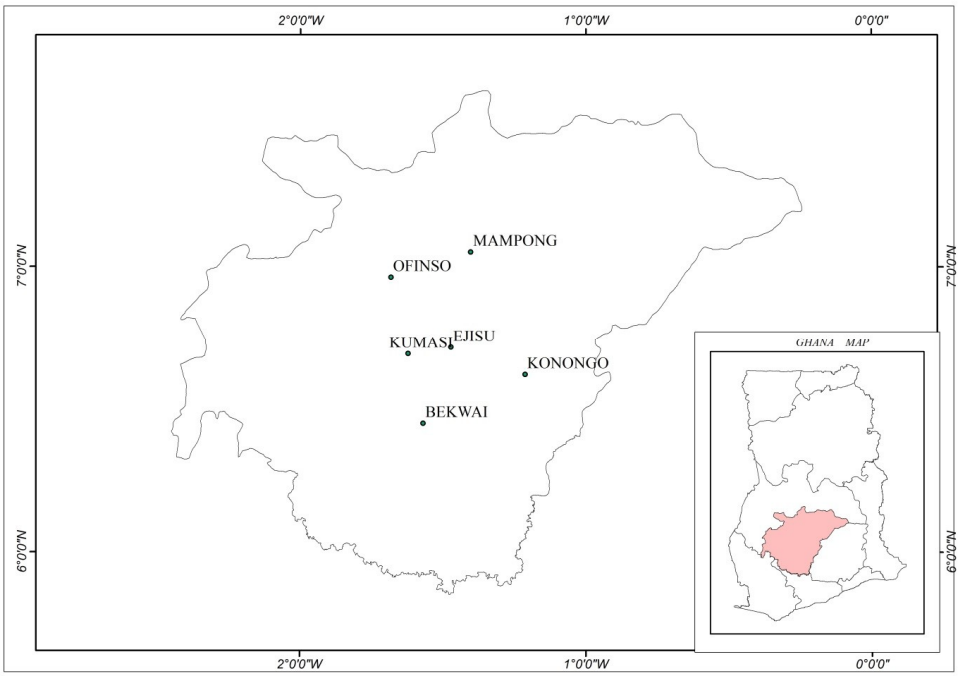
The study area

The study was concentrated in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, mainly Kumasi, Ejisu, Konongo, Bekwai, Offinso, and Mampong (Fig 1) however, a large majority of data was concentrated in Kumasi, the capital city of the region where majority of jewellers are found.

Data collection

Questionnaire and personal interviews were used to solicit information from respondents. The questionnaires were designed in open and close ended patterns and pilot tested on 50 respondents which yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.83. This coefficient signified high internal consistency and reliability (Pallant, 2001). The data collection exercise was done between May and July 2014. Ten (10) enumerators were appointed, trained for the exercise and provided with the questionnaires. The questionnaires were orally administered to respondents using the local language where necessary to ensure more accurate information gathering. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) computer package was used for data analysis.

Fig.1 Location map of Ashanti region showing the study sites



Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency and percentage were used to analyse the facts sought from questionnaire.

Result and Discussion

Human capacity development is fundamental to the growth of every industry in order to provide skills into the industry and bring new enthusiasm in an ever changing environment. Results obtained in this study showed that all the craftsmen interviewed were Ghanaians and full time practitioners who were in active practice. Twenty per cent (20%) of them were below 40 years of age. The majority (75%) were between the ages of 40 and 50years. The remaining 5% were 60 years and above. Most of" them work in groups of between three and six. All the craftsmen interviewed had some level of education, spanning from basic education (5%), secondary (18%) and tertiary which comprise graduates from technical colleges, polytechnics, diploma awarding institutions and the universities (78%). Seventy two per cent (72%) of the craftsmen were males and 28% female. This observation is contrary to what Garrard (1980), recounts that females were not allow to touch object of the goldsmith let alone be recruited to join the trade in Asante.

Garrard (1980), recounts in terms of myths and beliefs that surrounded the goldsmith profession and for which reason the trade was strictly a male profession.

So sacred was the trade that it was a taboo for women to go near working areas of the craftsmen. Presence of women in the jewellery trade has demystified the myth surrounding the trade. The trend in this regard as obtained from this study showed that a sizable number of females are now into the profession, majority of who are graduates from the Faculty of Art, KNUST, Kumasi.

The involvement of women in the trade is one important cultural change which is of

great significance to national building. The researcher finds this development very encouraging and argues that women ought to be allowed by culture and tradition to exercise whatever legitimate skills God has given them. After all creativity and industry is not gender determined. The evidence that female goldsmiths are equal to the task just as their male counterparts in terms of the quality of their output is there for all to see. This could be seen in the output of quite a number of female jewellers / goldsmith in the industry such as Arnies Jewellery, Cindy Jewellery and May-Gash Jewellery. The continued practice of women goldsmiths without any consequent adverse ramifications to themselves or their community physically or spiritually, seems to counteract the old belief that characterized the trade as a male occupation. This trend of development is in the right direction since it has also opened employment avenue and trade opportunities for females' thus solving some of the unemployment problems in the country.

Historical beginnings of human capacity development in the jewellery industry in Asante had it that through trade and in matters of technology the Mande of Cote D'Ivoire had a considerable influence on the Akan goldsmith, and as the industry grew craftsmen saw the need to train more people to boost up production and the growing demand in the industry.

Close family members particularly sons and nephews were admitted into the trade and trained as apprentices. The young apprentices admitted into the trade did not pay fees. It was purely a family business and outsiders were not considered. Over the years, that is after independence the industry expanded and there was the need to take on non-family members as apprentices to boost up production.

Before independence the apprenticeship system followed a procedure which started with a form of initiation. This begins with the father or guardian of the apprentice who went to see the master craftsman with the hope of becoming an apprentice. A token fee in the form of hen, a bottle of gin and an unspecified amount of money is paid to the master. The initiation begins when master craftsman slaughter a hen and drops the blood unto the apprentice; some of the blood is also dropped onto the anvil and the hearth. The gin is also poured into a crucible and libation poured as he drops the gin into the fire or hearth. Incantations are made to remind the inductee things to know as he begins to learn the trade. He is made to understand that he is coming to work with nobles, kings and the higher class in the society. He should therefore know how to keep secrets. People do business to profit not to make loses, so whatever he sees or witness should remain in his head. He must be truthful, obedient and respectable. As these words are pronounced by the master craftsman, drops of the gin is poured into the fire as he recite the incantation and ends by saying that if the inductee fails to adhere to the rules and regulation governing the trade, may he know no peace as the flame of the fire consumes him.

The second phase of the initiation begin with the learner seated to the anvil, he is given gold, silver, copper or brass and taught how to hammer the material on the anvil. At this stage, libation is poured again and blessings are pronounced onto the inductee as he begin to learn the trade and be fruitful, whatever he touches be it copper, silver or gold be turned into gold. The master then sprinkle some gin from his mouth unto the apprentice face and end this phase.

The next part of acceptance of apprenticeship is merry-making. The apprentice is given some money to prepare sumptuous meal with the hen and all apprentices are invited to partake of it. Apprentices lived with their masters and their families; they serve them in their homes as they learn the trade. Training periods depend on the apprentice themselves, how fast they can learn, how humble they can also be to allow the masters to teach them more techniques. But in all, learners could take five to seven years before they become masters themselves. After learning the trade most apprentices continue to stay with their masters and work on their own, others leave to settle on their own and take on other apprentices.

Around the middle of the 1960, another dimension of human capacity building was introduced into the trade. With the introduction of the Metal Product Design Department of the then Kumasi College of Technology formal trainees into the industry was established. Ever since, there has been an upward increase of people in the jewellery industry. Every year, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology turn out a number of students who graduate from the Metal Product Design Section where jewellery is taught as a programme. This numbers keep increasing with each passing year. The previously male dominated trade is now open to every one of both sexes. A few second cycle institutions such as La-bone Senior High, Achimota Senior High, Mawuli Senior High, and Prempeh Senior High study jewellery as a taught subject and at the tertiary level, other than KNUST where jewellery has existed for a period of over 40 years as a programme of course of study, Cape Coast University and the Wa Polytechnic have also introduced jewellery as a course to their existing programmes. The Weija School of Technology has also produced many jewellers within the few years that it was established. One can therefore infer from the on-going analysis that the human capacity building is growing.

It was observed during the survey that the apprenticeship system continues to provide effective-informal training of craftsmen for the jewellery trade. About 60 % of the craftsmen visited had an average of two apprentices while the rest had between 3 and 6 apprentices each who worked with the master craftsman. To be enrolled as an apprentice these days is simple and the trend cuts across all the section of craftsmen interviewed. The parents or guardians of the prospective apprentice would agree with a master craftsman the conditions for an apprenticeship which would bind the minor for a period of time usually, 2–3 years. They would pay a premium to the craftsman and the contract would be recorded or agreed upon. The premium varied from place to place but basically consisted of a drink in the form of money.

Most of their training is done while working for the master craftsman who helps the apprentices learn their trade, in exchange for their continuing labour for an agreed period of time after they become skilful. A master craftsman was entitled to employ as many young people as he can afford. The apprentice serves as an inexpensive form of labour in exchange for providing food, and informal training in the craft. Most of the apprentices were males (96%), but female apprentices were also found (4%). Eighty eight per cent (88%) of the apprentices interviewed aspired to becoming master craftsmen themselves on completion of their contract, while the remaining (12%) were not certain to acquiring their own workshop. Alongside the informal apprentices' form of training is the formal training system that

was introduced into tertiary education in the 1960s.

Discussions to solicit the views of the master craftsmen revealed a mismatch between the training provided by the institutions and the needs of jewellery manufacturers when they employ graduates. Although students continue to graduate every year from the KNUST and other tertiary institutions after completing jewellery courses, a lack of the skills required by jewellery manufacturers was cited by the fabricating sector as a major concern. In parallel, was the manufacturers' contention that existing training programmes are turning out graduates insufficiently schooled to be able to take their place at a jewellery bench without considerable additional training and tuition. The training institutions counter that jewellery manufacturers have unrealistically high expectations of graduates. They suggested that the real reason behind the reluctance on the part of jewellery manufacturers to acknowledge the training courses was a financial one in that, by not acknowledging the qualifications, the jewellers were not obliged to pay graduates appropriate salaries. While many jewellery manufacturers denied this, others noted that there was an element of truth in the concern raised. The institutions also argue that the manufacturers fail to consider the structure of the jewellery course content which is not structured to address industry requirements. There is the need for these differences to be ironed out so as to create the required environment for the industry to flourish.

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