

SHOP STEWARDS TRAINING: WHOSE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

AYANTUNJI O. I. *

AYANTUNJI**

Abstract

One of the most controversial areas of industrial relations training is the training of shop stewards. Shop stewards are the grassroots leaders of trade unions. They exist to promote, protect and improve the economic, the social and the political interests of their members both in the workplace and in society. Shop stewards roles are bedeviled with many challenges which include their level of formal education. Training the shop stewards itself is a challenge. One of the challenges is whose roles responsibilities should the training of the shop stewards be most especially between the management and the unions – two sides that are critically involved in the training of shop stewards. This paper is an attempt to convince that shop stewards' training is not even the responsibility of anyone of the two sides – management and unions – but the responsibility of all who are concerned in workers education since shop stewards training is not only a part but a critical part of workers education.

Key words: Education, Training, Workers Education, Shop Stewards, Shop Stewards Courses

* Ph.D., Department Of Industrial Relations and Public Administration, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria

** M. M. Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Introduction

There are three major levels in the structure of a national trade union. These are:

- I. the national level,
- II. the international level, and,
- III. the local or shop floor level.

At the local or shop floor level lie a category of the trade union leaders called shop stewards. According to Strauss(1962) shop stewards are the non – coms who hold their organizations together, process the bulk of grievances and dictate the tones of the day-today relations. Lawrence (1981) identifies the following as some of the functions performed by shop stewards towards their members:

- i) agents of the national union at the grassroot,
- ii) representatives of the workers on the job;
- iii) collectors of union dues, levies and other subscriptions
- iv) interpreters of union rules and regulations at the shop floor, and
- v) carrier of information from the National to the grassroot members and among the grassroot members themselves.

They also perform the following other functions towards the management of their organizations

- i. advisers to the management on such issues as recruitment,
- ii. representative of management in helping to communicate effectively and without bias the correct stand of management on issues such as stipulations in a collective agreement, company rules and industrial laws;
- iii. early warning birds and thermometers for measuring employee temperament and state of mind on various industrial relations matters.
- iv. Shock absorbers in the industrial relations machineries as shop stewards sometimes have to accompany the Personnel Manager to trouble spots to give workers the confidence that the Personnel Manager is not trying to deceive them in his address, and
- v. Members of investigation panels and committees and shop stewards have been found to find their members guilty

It is unfortunate, however, that notwithstanding the onerous roles performed by the shop stewards the level of formal education of many of the shop stewards are not much to write home

about. For instance in a survey conducted by these writers in 2012 it was revealed that out of total of one thousand and two hundred shop stewards selected among ten randomly selected industrial unions in Oyo and Osun States, Nigeria, one hundred and sixty six (166) of the shop stewards representing about fourteen (13.8) per cent have below the secondary school education and its equivalent while seven hundred and twenty-three (723) representing about sixty (60.25) per cent have within the secondary school education and its equivalents. One hundred and twenty-nine (129) representing about eleven (10.75) percent have above secondary school education. In a similar survey reported in Ayantunji (1997) among nine hundred and fifty shop stewards selected among ten randomly selected Industrial Unions in Oyo State, Nigeria, one hundred and forty-six (146) representing about fifteen (15.36) per cent have below secondary schooling education and is equivalents while four hundred and seventy-two (472) representing about fifty (49.68) per cent have within the secondary schooling education and its equivalents. The remaining three hundred and thirty-two (332) representing about thirty five (34.93) have about the secondary schooling education and its equivalent. No doubt this represents a prime educational need for the shop stewards and a prime challenge for educational providers to rise up to these challenges. It is unfortunate; however, that there are some other challenges facing the training of shop stewards. One of these is the question of who should be responsible for the training of shop stewards. There are lists of possible providers of education for shop stewards but as Pocock (1969) observed an attempt by one party may be met by a wall of hostility for instance, one of the parties that should be involved in the training of shop stewards are the trade unions themselves but as Pocock (op cit) elucidates any attempts by the trade unions to provide education would be met by a wall of hostility by the management who believe that allowing trade unions to train shop stewards is bad policy as it would be considered as helping to produce stewards who will be greater threat to industrial peace while union too will not allow management to train shop stewards because it would be considered as making the shop stewards to be less militant and have management bias. In this paper some attempts are made to identify potential providers of shop stewards courses that will be devoid of much controversy so that shop stewards training will assume its rightful place in workers educational provisions and industrial relations in particular.

Also in a survey reported in Fasoyin (1984) among six hundred shop stewards selected among six randomly selected industrial unions in Lagos State, Nigeria one hundred and sixty-five (165) representing twenty-seven (27) percent have within the primary school learning certificate education and to equivalents while three hundred and thirty-one (331) representing about fifty-five (55) per cent have the secondary school leaving certificate education and its equivalents. Eighty-seven (87) representing about fifteen (14.5) percent have above the secondary school leaving certificate education and its equivalents². In a similar survey reported in Ayantunji (1997) out of a total of nine hundred and fifty shop stewards selected among ten randomly selected Industrial Unions in Oyo State, Nigeria one hundred and forty-six (146) representing about fifteen (15.36) per cent have within the primary school leaving certificate education and its equivalents or below while four hundred and seventy-two (47.2) representing about fifty (49.68) per cent have within the secondary school leaving certificate education and its equivalents. Two hundred and sixty (260) representing about twenty-seven (27.36) per cent have the ordinary National Diploma (ND) and its equivalent certificate education. The remaining seventy-two (72) representing about eight (7.57) per cent have up to the University Bachelors degree and its equivalent education. As agreed to by Sawbridge and Keithley (1976) the above situations represent a prime educational needs for shop stewards and a prime challenge to educational providers to rise up to the challenge and provide appropriate education for the shop stewards to enable them perform their duties not only effectively but as well efficiently. There are some challenges facing the training of the shop stewards. These include:

- i) lack of agreement on the objectives of shop stewards training most especially between the two major sides involved in the training of the shop stewards, and
- ii) lack of agreement on the quantity and quality of the education required by the shop stewards.

In the present paper, the focus is on the roles and responsibilities of providing the training for the shop stewards. Whose roles and responsibilities is it?

Workers Education

The two words that make up the concept of workers education, namely, “workers” and “education” belong to that category of words described by philosophers as systematically ambiguous. According to Akinpelu(1987) a word may be described as systematically ambiguous when it is elastic in usage or is capable of multiple meaning and when such word persists in its

ambiguity in whatever context and situation it may be found. The two words “worker” and “education” behave exactly in these manners and therefore are dubbed systematically ambiguous. This is not to deny the two words of meaning. For the purposes in this paper, therefore, the term worker would mean those that Akinpelu (2002) refer to as the “unserved”, the “dregs”, “the scum of the society”, “the toiling masses”, “the wretched of the earth”, “the oppressed”, “the under nourished”, “those sunk in the culture of silence and lacking the bread of the spirit”, and those that ‘labour and are heavy laden’. For education, it will mean “all planned and systematic processes of human improvement or development and the processes through which these processes are promoted (Akinpelu, 1987). On the concept of workers education, the warnings of the International Labour Organization (1976) will be yield, namely, that:

generalizations about workers education do not have much value-even within one country since no two adult groups and no two tutors are ever quite alike, every class meeting differs from the last and presents a new set of problems and every educational.

For the purposes in this paper the term workers education will be defined as “workers education is that sector of adult education which caters for adults in their capacity as workers and especially as members of workers organizations.

Providers of Workers Education

Hopkins (op cit) provided a list of possible providers of workers education thus:

- i. Government extra-governmental agencies,
- ii. Trade unions and their organizations,
- iii. Individual workers,
- iv. Employers and their organizations,
- v. Philanthropists,
- vi. Educational institutions such as universities and colleges,

The list seems inexhaustive. It was noted by Hopkins (op cit) among other authors that workers would naturally want to have control over the training of their members to ensure control over the content and orientation of the training.

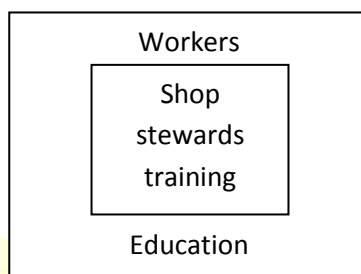
Figure 1: Theoretical spectrum of education provision for workers.

Workers Education				“Education of Workers”
Run by	Run by	Run by	Run by	Run by
Trade Unions themselves alone*	Labour movement organization T.U.’s partners	Public Workers’ Educational association T.U.’s involved	Government &/or Employers &/or Colleges/ Universities T.U.’s involved	Governments &/or Employers &/or Colleges/ Universities WITHOUT T.U. control or influence
MAX.----- →T.U. CONTROL	Influence- →	Decrease-→	Nil	NIL
Trade Union base	T.U. base	T.U. base	T.U. base	No T.U. base

Source: Hopkins P. G. H (1985) Workers Education and International Perspective. Open University press.

The Relationship between workers education and shop stewards training

Hopkins (1985) pointed out that shop stewards are “priority targets” in workers education and they belong to the primary group of recipients of workers education of shop stewards are, therefore, priority targets of workers education shop stewards training is not only a part but a priority part in workers education. It therefore follows that all the providers of workers education are potential providers of shop stewards training. The main issue still is that workers and their organizations would very much wish to have control over the training of their members but this can never be at the exclusion of their providers most especially management and government who are key stakeholders and direct consumers of stewards services .

Figure 2: The Relationship between workers education and shop stewards training**Beneficiaries of shop stewards training**

The distinctions between the terms education, training and development have been the subject of debates for quite long including Ayantunji (1997). In Ayantunji (1998) it was concluded that distinctions between the three terms ranges between general to specific in general education for knowledge and training and development to be able to perform some specific tasks. In general the terms have been used more interchangeably than distinctively. In this paper they will be used more interchangeably than distinctively except specifically differentiated. Education is a public good, an investment in which consumption cannot be restricted. In this regard the beneficiaries of the training of the shop stewards cannot be restricted. It will include all those consume or benefits from the services of shop stewards either directly or indirectly, immediate or distant. These will include:

- i) the employers
- ii) the unions at the national regional, local, international or supra-national/international
- iii) the religious groups and organizations'
- iv) governments – local, regional, national, international
- v) individuals
- vi) the general public, among others.

All these benefits from the services of shop stewards either directly or indirectly, immediately or at a distance.

Financing shop stewards training

There are many ways to contribute to the training of shop stewards. These include the provision of funds in form of money or other monetary documents such as shares and

debentures; materials such learning aids like televisions and other electronic learning devices, designing of training programmes valuable for the shop stewards. In all these regards beneficiaries and non-direct beneficiaries like the public and philanthropists can and do contribute to the training of shop stewards. The question, however, is often asked: who should control the training of the shop stewards – the government, the union, the management, the shop stewards himself/herself or who? This may be the subject of another discussion but views having always been expressed in favour of the shop stewards themselves or the unions generally.

Conclusions

From the foregoing it has been established that shop stewards training is not only a part but a priority part of workers education. A list of possible providers of workers education were identified who are also potential providers of shop stewards training because as it has been established shop stewards training is not only a part but a priority part of workers education. Although it was stated that ideally workers and their organizations would wish to have control over the education of their members including shop stewards, the resources at the disposals of the workers and their organization can never be sufficient to finance the education of shop stewards. This is apart from the fact that all the other stakeholders in the services of shop stewards would wish to have input in the training of the shop stewards to influence the orientation of the training programmes. It is therefore easy to conclude that shop stewards' training is the responsibility of all the stakeholders in the services of shop stewards.

REFERENCES

- Adekanmbi, G. (1994). Setting up a Distance Teaching Institution” in M. Omolewa and G. Adekanmbi (eds.), University Initiatives in Adult Education. Ibadan University Press, Ibadan.
- Akinpelu, J. A. (1987) Relevance in Education. Ibadan University Press. Ibadan.
- Akinpelu J. A. (2002) Philosophy of Adult education. Ibadan University Press. Ibadan.
- Ayantunji, I. O. (1997) A Modular approach towards effective training of the local officers of the Industrial Unions in Oyo state, Nigeria. (an unpublished PhD thesis submitted in the Department of Adult Education, university of Ibadan, Nigeria)
- Balogun, T. A. (1987) Media and Methods in workers Education in Oboyo, D. and Omole M. (eds), Readings in Industrial Relations in Nigeria. Malthouse, Lagos.
- Bilal A Asad A. and Zia, U.R. (2010) Leaders Influence on Training Effectiveness. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series oeconomica*, 12, 2.
- Fasoyin Tayo . (1984) International Dynamics in Nigeria Trade Unions in Nigeria journal of Industrial Education and Labour Relations. Vol. 1, no. 1.
- Flippo, E.B. (1976) Principles of Personnel Management. Mc Craw- Hill. New York.
- Hopkins, P. G. H. (1985) Workers Education: An International Perspective. Open University Press. Keynes.
- International Labour Organization (1976 a) Workers Education and Its Techniques. International Labour Office. Geneva.
- International Labour Organization (1976 b) How to Improve Workers Education. International Labour Office. Geneva.
- International Labour Organization (1989) Current Approaches to Collective Bargaining. International Labour Office. Geneva.
- International Labour Organization .1990: Labour Education. International Labour Office. Geneva.
- International Labour Organization (1991) Human Resources Development: Vocational Guidance and Training. Paid Educational Leave. International Labour Office. Geneva.
- Ki-zerbo, J. (1990): Educate or Perish. UNESCO – UNICEF. Abidjan.
- Lawrence, G. K. (1981) Shop Stewards in Nigerias Industries in *Permon*, vol.8, No 3.
- Pocock, P. (1969) Shaping Shop Stewards in Personnel Management vol. no. 8

- Oludotun, J. S. O. (1993): Disseminating Curriculum Innovations in Nigeria in Ivowi U. M. O. (ed.) curriculum Development in Nigeria. Sam Bookman. Ibadan.
- Salamon, M. (1992) Industrial Relations Theory and Practice. Prentice – Hall. New York.
- Saprin M.B (n.d) <http://www.the> Relationship Among Trainees characteristics, Training Design and Work Environment with Training Transfer. Retrieved 21 – 03 - 2011.
- Sawbridge, David Keithley. G (1976) Industrial Relations Training for Shop Stewards. Training without Objectives in Management Decision. Vol. 1 NO 3.
- Strauss .G. (1962) The Shifting Power Balance in the Plant in Industrial Relations vol. 1 No 3.
- Trade Union Congress. (1966) Trade Unionism. Congress House. London

