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Seminar on Furniture and Joinery Industries

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Furniture and Joinery Industries in Nigeria^{1/}

by

C.A. Fasheun-Motesho
Manager
Furniture Industrial Unit
School of Technology
Kwara State College of Technology
Ilorin

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Introduction:

Counter cramps and wedges? Dovetailed key? Single or double hammer - headed tenon? Cross tongue and grooves? Metal connectors or handrail bolt and dowels?

In joining two pieces of wood end to end synthetic resin glue will probably provide the answer for future.

With this conviction, I unfolded the case for the future of the furniture and joinery and other wood work, laying special emphasis on current status of the furniture and joinery industries in Nigeria, the industries' future prospects for development, problems which may require technical assistance by UNIDO and the training likely in future.

Over thirty years ago, it was predicted that the operative skills of the carpenter, joiner, shopfitter, cabinet maker, pattern-maker and ship joiner would eventually merge into that of the machinist. That this was nearer reality than many may realize was evinced by the fact that serious thought was being given to the development of a common course of the training for the wood-worker with production methods and machining as a common ground for the need of the industries.

Industry and market:

During the short time available before writing this paper the Ministries of Trade and Industry of Kwara State, Oyo State, Lagos State and Bendel State were visited to try and obtain production indices for the furniture and joinery industries. Unfortunately figures were not available.

The main purpose of the visits was to obtain a measure of how fast the furniture market has been growing, and to project forward. An indication (though not a quantitative measure) was obtained of the growth in the number of small-scale furniture production enterprises compiled by the Department of Economics, University of Ife, Nigeria. A small-scale industry is defined as one having assets invested in capital equipment, plant and working capital of less

about (N45,000) US\$ 69,200,- and employing less than 50 full time workers.

	Pre 1945	1945-52	1953-60	1961-65	1966-71	1966-72
Oyo State	-	2	12	13	34	
Bendel State	-	-	3	2		23
Lagos State	1	1	9	25		63
Kwara State	-	-	-	1		8

People contacted in the industry felt that the boom in furniture and standard joinery demand would continue as living standards rose.

Visits were made to furniture and joinery firms in Ilorin, Kwara State, Ibadan Oyo State and Lagos in Lagos State to see the range of goods on scale, the quality and design and the prices being asked.

Prices quoted fell in the following ranges:

Dining chairs (without arms)	N 16 to N 60 (US\$ 24 to 92)
Dining table (6/8 persons)	N 90 to N250 (US\$138 to 385)
Cushion back easy chair	N 40 to N100 (US\$ 61 to 154)
3-seater settee matching above	N 90 to N220 (US\$138 to 339)
Upholstered back easy chair	N 25 to N100 (US\$ 38 to 154)
Coffee table	N 40 to N 60 (US\$ 61 to 92)
Occasional table (small)	N 10 to N 20 (US\$ 15 to 31)
Dest with 3 drawers	N 60 to N230 (US\$ 92 to 354)

The cheaper products were badly finished, and the overall standard of workmanship was low. On the other hand the more expensive products, although expensive by European standards, were better designed and well finished. It is my view that it is the better end of the market at which the industrial production of furniture and joinery should be aimed. Apart from the satisfaction of producing well-made products which will last, the additional costs involved are not great, in as much as the labour waste could be considerably reduced and a larger selling price can be asked.

Design work:

The industry could do more to be in the fore-front of furniture design and usage of standard products in joinery. As the training institutions have the responsibility of training people who will work in the industry, hence the industry must be one jump ahead, so that it is continually generating new ideas in the design field. The use of standards allows longer production runs to be made and a reduction of money tied up in work in progress. The person responsible for design work in industry should travel overseas to obtain ideas and follow trends. For instance, it would be worthwhile for industries to become a member of the Furniture Industries Research Association, Maxwell Road, Stevenage, Herts, United Kingdom so that they are in touch with new ideas; or any other similar association overseas which UNIDO is familiar with and can recommend as a technical assistance.

Distributor:

An improved means of selling to the general public still needs to be established. All the firms seen appeared to sell their goods direct, avoiding the use of retailers. A few industries have showroom conveniently sited through which they sell their goods. They also tender for contracts, having learned much through supplying the public, private enterprises, and government bodies.

Materials and equipment:

At present most materials and equipment are bought locally while efforts continue by overseas manufacturers in setting up manufacturing and production industries in Nigeria for all the materials and equipment required by the furniture and joinery industry other than timber. Joint-ventures between Nigerians and oversea representatives, representatives of overseas manufacturing/production companies and dealers all over the 19 states of this country are the sort of business developments that are now contributing immensely to the growth of the furniture and joinery industries in recent years. Technical assistance must come from UNIDO to enable these Nigerians in joint ventures fulfil their obligations to the industry in this country,

as it is evident that the self support is not here yet, particularly the technical aspects including equipment such as machinery.

Quality and reliability:

There are a number of small changes which could be made to improve the quality and performance of products. I was impressed by the range and design of products being made in some firms, but time and again the final products have been badly let down by unnecessarily poor quality. Firstly very little sanding seems to be done. No amount of polish will cover up inadequate sanding. Good products are often spoilt by the use of hammer and nails. Hinges were not properly attached with screws, and if tenons need to be pegged nails were used in place of wood dowels, while ends were not cleaned off.

Where wooden corner brackets were used to strengthen chair frames and tables, these should be glued in position and then attached by two screws (not nails or staples).

A change could be made to PVA wood working adhesive. This glue has excellent gap-filling properties, and produces a joint which is stronger than the wood itself.

Preventive maintenance could be practised whereby machines are serviced at regular intervals, instead of waiting for them to break down, or cutters to become worn.

Training for industry:

The significant effects in the sharp rise in our population and the possibility of raising the school leaving age will exert a powerful influence on the training of our future woodworkers as both imply a new approach to training. A policy may become essential to ensure closer control of the content of training and forge a closer link between industrial training and the technical college curriculum.

It is estimated that by the 1980s the number of apprentices attending colleges of further education, particularly in the south, will have doubled. The increase in the school-leaving age will tie up with the shorter apprenticeship period. Today, a carpenter and

joiner can complete an approved apprenticeship in three years and become a recognized craftsman. The policy may also demand a test of competence at the end of apprenticeship.

A decree will become necessary that every apprentice must obtain the appropriate technical or craft certificate in order to practice as a qualified craftsman or the so-called "contractor". A suitable remuneration of approved standards of ability and attainment will do much to raise the status of the craftsman.

The implications of these changes are quite clear. In the 1980s a potential apprentice will be subjected to a short diagnostic period on a building site or in a furniture and joinery industry, suitable lads will then receive an intensive training in the essential and fundamental principles of woodwork and the basic operations involved in its practice. This may be followed by training in specialist work. The teaching in craft course will also change and be adapted to new ideas.

There is a lot of unnecessary detail stuffed into apprentices today, both the so-called industrial training and in some colleges, this applies to practical work as well as technology. There is a great temptation for the technical teacher (or the older man) to pass on what he was taught during his own apprenticeship instead of the practices of the present. It must conform with modern concept of organized industry, without confusing an erector with a skilled craftsman.

Methods of learning and teaching as well as course content must change to meet the needs of furniture and joinery industry. It is my honest opinion that the answer to this call is in setting up of such industries in Nigeria in strategic towns with the technical assistance of UNIDO in joint-venture with either government or individuals which would exist in modern buildings and operate with both modern and new machinery. The purpose of the industries when set up is to combine commercial production with training on the job, and it must aim to run at a profit.

Conclusion:

It is my opinion that such industries when set up have good opportunity to start producing and selling good quality furniture and standard joinery consistent with the latest technical developments, at fair prices basing estimating upon commercial requirements thereby avoiding underpriced products and excessive claims on clients. The level of profit to be aimed at will however be decided by management.

The testing of practical ability will be one of continual assessment extending over the whole period of apprenticeship and the course of instruction in the industry. Practical ability and competence cannot be assessed fairly by one short examination. Changes in furniture and joinery industry techniques and administration will advocate dual apprenticeship and adult training schemes. This will enhance the change from craft industry to a scientific organization with professional administration.

The traditional skills will continue to be the rock upon which the furniture and joinery industry is founded.



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