

SUPERVISION, PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFESSIONALISM ON CONSTRUCTION SITES IN ABUJA: QUACKERY AS A CLOG

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Productivity being a major concern to production and operation managers, higher productivity can be achieved through better utilization of available resources. Effective supervision of construction workers is one of the processes through which high productivity can be achieved. Hence, this study compared the productivity and level of adherence to quality on 20 active construction sites in Abuja-Nigeria through the use of direct measurement of productivity and personal un-obstructive observations. Findings showed that there was no difference between the sites supervised by professionals and non-professionals in terms of labour productivity. In a related development, there was also no difference in terms of adherence to quality between the sites supervised by professionals and non-professionals except in blocklaying due to the perceived “proficiency” by the non-professionals (masons as foremen). Quackery may continue to plague the Nigerian construction industry if clients held belief is not changed and construction foremen are not trained to meet up with the demands of the industry. Non-professionals such as foremen should be trained and certificated by Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON) in order to improve supervision and by extension productivity on construction sites.

Keywords: Foremen, Non-professional, Productivity, Professional, Quality, Supervision.

1 INTRODUCTION

Construction is the world largest and most challenging industry but human resources today have a strategic role to play for productivity increase of any organization and with the effective and optimum use of them, all the advantages supplied by the productivity growth can be obtained (Attar, Gupta and Desai, 2013). Construction is labour intensive and relies heavily on the skills of the workforce. This workforce is the industry’s most valuable asset, which can significantly influence the cost, schedule, and quality of the construction project (Han *et al.*, 2008).

Construction industry occupies a vital position in the economy of any country because of its important contribution to the process of development (Oyewobi *et al.*, 2011). In Nigeria, construction industry is of paramount importance for employment and economic growth (Ogunsami and Jabgoro, 2006). Therefore, Construction is a key sector of the national economy for the countries all around the world, as traditionally it took up a big portion in nation’s total employment and its significant contribution to a nation’s revenue as a whole. However, until today construction industries are still

facing a number of problems, regarding the low productivity, poor safety, and in sufficient quality of work (Attar *et al.*, 2013).

Productivity is one of the most important factors that affect overall performance of any small or medium or large construction firm, and there are number of factors that affect the productivity of labour, and it is important for organizations to identify and study those factors in order to take appropriate action for improving them (Attar *et al.*, 2013). These factors include absenteeism of gang members, instruction delays, supervisory incompetence, lack of materials, an unfriendly working atmosphere, and lack of proper tools (Odesola and Idoro, 2014). If productivity is improved, it ultimately decreases the unit cost of project and gives overall best performance of the project (Attar *et al.*, 2013). Lawal (2008) posited that construction workers in Nigerian public service have almost zero productivity.

Site supervision may affect the overall performance and efficiency of construction projects (Alwi, Keith and Sherif, 2001). Frimpong *et al.* (2011) asserted that inadequate supervision practices can lead to improper planning and poor management of tools, equipment, materials, and labour which affect the productivity. Alumbugu *et al.* (2014) stated that the inefficient method, lack of appropriate tools, poor supervision and training contribute to the low productivity in the Nigerian construction industry. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2005) added that project supervisors/engineers are supposed to be jack of all trades because the success or failure of a project depends largely on their knowledge and experiences.

Therefore, inability of supervisor to plan work, communicate with workers and direct activities adequately is fundamentally linked to increase amount of cost of rework (Alwi *et al.*, 2001). Eckles *et al.* (1975) (cited in Alwi *et al.*, 2001) established that supervisors are managers whose major activities focus on leading, coordinating and directing the work of others in order to achieve organizational goals. For project objectives to be met, supervisor needs several skills such as management skills, human relation skills and skills in leadership, motivation and communication (Aqua Group, 2002).

1.1 Productivity

Productivity is one of the key components of every company's success and competitiveness in the market. A construction contractor stands to gain or lose, depending on how well company's productivity responds to competition. Construction companies may gain advantage over their competitors by improving upon productivity to build projects at lower costs; yet, most contractors do not systematically and properly address this strategic issue or evaluate its impact on the project's profit (Hammad, Omran and Pakir, 2011).

Successful construction project is one that is completed on time, within budget, meets specified standards of quality and strictly conforms to safety policies and precautions. This is feasible only if the premeditated levels of productivity can be achieved. All the same, productivity, or lack thereof, is one of the construction industry's most prevalent problems. Due to the nature of construction projects, its importance to society and the existing economic resources, more emphasis should be given to improving productivity

(Kuykendall, 2007). Contractors must strive to improve productivity continuously or risk losing important contracts. A company has the ability to increase its competitiveness through enhanced productivity by raising the level of value-added content in products and services more rapidly than competitors. The concept of productivity is importantly linked to the quality of input, output, and process. Productivity is also key to long-term growth. A sustainable improvement in productivity, when associated with economic growth and development, generates non-inflationary increases in wages and salary (Hammad *et al.*, 2011).

However, sometimes the nature of construction industry makes the productivity concept a complex one, due to some variables such as small firm sizes, low profit margins, industry fragmentation, environmental issues, limitations on the supply of skilled labour, and other resources (Abd-El-Hamied, 2014). Despite the importance of productivity, productivity enhancement in construction has been overlooked for decades, while the manufacturing industry drew benefits from production management techniques (Neumann *et al.*, 2003). The construction industry lagged due to insufficient research in the area of productivity. One of the methods of improving construction productivity according to Hammad *et al.* (2011) is to assist managers to identifying productivity barriers and offer solutions. In contrast, enhancement of productivity in construction site leads to the following:

1. Projects are completed more quickly.
2. Project cost is lowered.
3. The contractor can submit more competitive bids.
4. And the project can be more profitable.

1.2 Site Supervision

Researchers have assigned several definitions and interpretations to supervision, but almost all of them centre on a common aim or objective. The main objective of supervision is to help the workers to realize their full potential in their respective careers and has a lot to do with the communication and leadership. Workers are groomed by their superiors through discursive interaction to carry out tasks in line with the professional codes of conduct (Chika and Chijioke, 2013). In a similar vein, Pierce cited in Baffour-awuah (2011) established that supervision is a developmental process designed to support and enhance an individual's acquisition of the motivation, autonomy, self-awareness, and skills necessary to effectively accomplish the job at hand. Chika *et al.* (2013) added that supervision deals with guiding, advising, encouraging, refreshing, motivating and ascertaining the stated goals of the organization. Site supervision according to Aqua Group (2002) is the activities designed primarily to ensure that the employer's requirements as expressed in the contract documents are correctly integrated and that the problems which are bound to arise even on the smallest jobs are resolved.

To achieve an effective site management with focus on attainment of quality, cost, and building within the pre-set time frame and client satisfaction, certain actions becomes necessary: Among this item is the site management team which include consultants, Project Builder, Building supervisors and Trade foremen (Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria [CORBON], 2011).

CORBON (2011) opined that Consultants in the building environment are expected to perform their supervisory roles according to their inputs at the pre design stage and among them those that have role to play in the effective site management practice are: Architect, Engineers (Civil, Structure, Mechanical and Electrical) Quantity Surveyor, Surveyors, and Consultant builder.

Ogbiti (2015) further revealed that the major task of contractors is to assemble and allocate the resources of labour, equipment and materials to the project in order to achieve completion at a maximum efficiency in terms of time, quality, and cost.

Project builder is the overall construction personnel in charge of building production management. He coordinates and manages the trades men and artisans in site execution process. He is empowered by the national building code to carry out all the function of building production process through management of both artisans and tradesmen on site (CORBON, 2011). Similarly, Ekundayo, Jewe and Awodele (2013) discussed further that a project manager is one trained in one of the construction-related disciplines include architecture, quantity surveying, building and civil engineering, and qualify with either a degree or diploma (or both) from a recognized institution of learning.

Trades foremen are the next to the supervisors who had acquired all the required trade test 1, 2, 3 and reasonable length of experience in their trade before so appointed as trade foremen in their organization, and they are leaders of their respective trade such as: Masonry, Carpentry and joinery, Steel Bending, Painting and interior Decorations, Plumbing and Electrical works (CORBON & Nigerian Institute of Building [NIOB], 2010).

1.3 Impact of Supervision on Workers' Productivity on Construction Sites

Construction productivity largely depends on the performance of construction workers (Jergeas, 2009). In practice, most supervisory visits may be focused on inspection and fault-finding rather than providing workers the opportunity to improve their performance and solve problems during service delivery. This 'traditional' form of supervision may be detrimental to worker motivation. Instead, supervisors should encourage discussion of problems, provide immediate feedback and establish goals to assist workers in maximizing performance (Frimpong *et al.*, 2011). Willis-Shattuck *et al.* (2008) opined that the impact of supervision on construction workers outputs is felt particularly through improvements in motivation and job satisfaction.

The labour force plays a vital role in the construction process. Therefore, improvement in construction productivity needs to be achieved through greater resource allocation, human resource efficiency, supervision, increased innovation and technology diffusion (Jergeas, 2009). However, Construction labour productivity improves as construction supervision is provided. The additional supervision has the effect of reducing the construction gang sizes and is usually associated with defined construction packages to be executed (Merrow *et al.*, 2009). Frimpong *et al.*, (2011) stressed that supervision increases workers empowerment, time management, fewer complaints and more positive feedback. Supervisors encourage workers to adopt good practices in order to achieve a high level of performance. Such 'supportive' supervision is significant and more beneficial to productivity of construction workers. The benefits of supervision on

construction workers using limited resources remain largely uncertain, even though the quality of supervision may be a key determinant of its impact on productivity (Morrow *et al.*, 2009). Fischer (2009) concluded that the impact of management styles and techniques on worker productivity is significant. It is through exercising power that leaders (supervisors) are able to influence others, this power can lead to one of the following reactions: commitment, compliance or resistance which affects productivity.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to determine the relationship between supervision and construction workers productivity in the study area, twenty construction sites were visited for the on-site un-obstructive observations and measurements of activities of workers. Observation is a method where data is collected by direct contact with real life situations and by behaviours that occur naturally (Sanoff cited in Okolie, 2009). The observation method involves the researcher in watching, recording and analysing events of interest (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006).

For the purpose of this research, small and medium sized construction firm with staff strength between 10 to 199 employees were considered (SMEDAN Abuja, 2007). Site supervisors and sites workers were observed on twenty (20) selected construction sites. The first ten (10) sites were observed with professional supervision while the second ten (10) sites were observed with non-professional supervision (foremen). The study considered duplex structure of four and five residential buildings with Gross Floor Area GFA ranging from 200m² to 470m².

Professional supervision in this context refers to supervision carried out by people who had attended tertiary education in construction related courses such as Architecture, Building, Quantity Surveying, or Civil Engineering and have attained corporate membership of their bodies with at least 5 years of working experience in the construction industry. Non-professional supervision (trades foremen) are supervision carried out by those who had acquired all the required trade test 1, 2, 3 and reasonable length of experience in their trades before being so appointed as trade foremen in their organizations, and they are leaders of their respective trades such masonry, carpentry and joinery, steel bending, painting and interior decorations, plumbing and electrical works (CORBON & NIOB, 2010).

The construction activities observed were foundation excavation, block laying, casting of columns and beams which were achieved 100% for the ten sites with professional supervision and ten sites without professional supervision observation, plastering was achieved 50% for the two categories of supervision observed, while painting only 30% was achieved in terms of completion. Checklist from CORBON (2011) was modified and used to determine the adherence level of quality of the activities observed. Paired samples T-test (this is applicable to sample size that is less than 30) at 95% confidence interval was used in analysing the results obtained from the observations and measurements that formed the basis for the conclusion reached and the recommendations made.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are as presented in the following section.

Table 1: Observed productivity per labour with professional supervision in 8 hour per day

Activities	Unit	Mean	Site I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Foundation	M ³	0.886	0.842	0.866	0.876	0.847	0.904	0.933	0.837	0.866	0.958	0.928
Blocklaying	M ²	0.899	0.963	0.850	0.875	0.825	0.913	1.013	0.938	0.900	0.863	0.850
Column & beam	M ³	0.116	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.111	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.111	0.117	0.117
Plastering	M ²	2.732	-	2.734	-	-	2.715	-	2.726	-	2.738	2.749
Painting	M ²	7.685	-	7.856	-	-	7.020	-	8.100	-	-	7.763

Table 2: Observed productivity per labour with non-professional supervision in 8 hour per day

Activities	Unit	Mean	Site XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
Foundation	M ³	0.883	0.838	0.923	0.829	0.876	0.933	0.848	0.895	0.904	0.866	0.914
Blocklaying	M ²	0.887	0.913	0.775	0.838	0.863	0.888	0.963	0.925	0.850	1.013	0.837
Column & beam	M ³	0.115	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.111	0.117	0.111	0.117	0.111	0.111
Plastering	M ²	2.723	2.730	-	-	2.708	-	2.736	-	2.719	-	-
Painting	M ²	7.470	8.370	-	-	6.615	-	-	-	7.425	-	-

The results of the site observations and measurements are shown in Tables 1 and 2. When compared across sites, it was discovered that the mean observed productivity of blocklayers in sites I to X were higher than that of sites XI to XX. In the laying of 225mm sandcrete blocks for example, the mean productivity in sites I to X (Table 1) was 0.899 m² per manhour while it was 0.887 m² per manhour for sites XI to XX (Table 4.1). For the plastering the mean productivity was 2.732 m² per manhour and 2.723 m² per manhour for site I to X and sites XI to XX respectively. While casting of columns and beams, the mean productivity was 0.116 m³ per manhour and 0.115 m³ per manhour for sites I to X and sites XI to XX respectively. The significantly higher level of productivity achieved in sites I to X could be attributed to the observed professional supervision impact on the sites workers (sites I to X). The supervision was assumed to have established close monitoring, training programmes, simple and efficient communication among employee as well as with link parties and adopted motivational measures to increase workers morale.

The result corroborated Ameh, and Osegbo, (2011) study which stated that contractors and subcontractors should ensure adequate training and supervision of the operatives on construction sites as it would improve on the quality of output as well as minimize the chances of doing wrong work or even application of wrong construction method by the workers. It also lends credence to Fischer (2009) study which implied that effective delegation of responsibilities and management of required number of workers by the supervisors will give better performance and increase in productivity. Construction labour productivity improves as construction supervision is provided. The additional supervision has the effect of reducing the construction gang sizes, idle time and is usually associated with defined construction packages to be executed (Merrow *et al.*, 2009).

mortar uniform?													
Are the masons using wall range and builders levels to check against bulging?	4	4	3	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	3.9	3 rd	

Rating scale used: High adherence-5; adhere-4; moderately adhere-3; slightly adhere-2; no adherence-1

Comparing the results across sites, it was discovered that the mean adherence to quality of 225mm block laying in sites I to X are higher than that of sites XI to XX. For example, the mean of adherence level of forming stretcher bond on sites I to X (Table 7) was 4.9 while it was 4.7 for sites XI to XX (Table 8). For the uniformity in mix ratio of the mortar used, the mean adherence levels were 4.5 and 3.9 for sites I to X and sites XI to XX respectively. The same trend was observed in other activities as contained in the two Tables.

Table 9: Paired samples T-test of adherence level of 225mm blocklaying with professional supervision and non-professional supervision

Variable	Correlation	Degree of freedom	P-value	Remark
X (Professional) Y (Non-professional)	0.456	3	0.051	SS

Key SS = Statistically Significant

NS= Not Significant

Since the calculated p-value of 0.051 is equal to critical p-value of 0.05, it can be concluded that significant difference existed between adherence level of 225mm in blocklaying with professional supervision and non-professional supervision. From the authors’ personal experiences, many foremen serving as supervisors had masonry background in most cases. Due to the supposed ‘proficiency’ they have acquired over the years, they might lower their guard during supervision thereby compromising adherence to quality.

4 CONCLUSION

The paper examined professional and non-professional supervision in relation to labour productivity and adherence to quality on construction sites in Abuja. Findings showed that there was no difference between the sites supervised by professionals and non-professionals in terms of labour productivity. In a related development, there was also no difference in terms of adherence to quality between the sites supervised by professionals and non-professionals. However, adherence level to quality when laying 225mm blocks on sites supervised by professionals and non-professionals was found to be different using paired samples T-test at 95% confidence level. Based on these results, quackery may continue to plague the Nigerian construction industry if clients held belief is not changed and construction foremen are not trained to meet up with the demands of the industry. Non-professionals such as foremen should be trained and certificated by Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON) in order to improve supervision and by extension productivity on construction sites. This will to a large extent bring the incidences of building collapse under check and the industry will

become better sanitised. In addition to this, clients should be enlightened on the dangers inherent in patronising quacks since it is at times difficult to identify the professionals by the clients.

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