

Igbo Apprenticeship System: A Panacea for Small and Medium Scale Enterprise Development

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ABSTRACT

This objective of this study was to investigate the impact of Igbo apprenticeship system in the development of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design. Data were primary in nature and collected through the use of Likert scale structured questionnaire to generate responses from the selected sample. Copies of the returned questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the pattern of data. The hypothesis was tested using the Chi-Square Test statistics and the hypothesis was tested at 5% level of significance. Findings from the study revealed that Igbo apprenticeship system has positive and significant Impact on the development of small and medium scale enterprise. More so, Igbo apprenticeship system enhances the establishment and development of small and medium scale enterprises; promotes business growth and survival rate; creates access to trade and informal credit; and creates opportunity for excellent business management skills and competence. The study therefore recommended that the government of Nigeria and Africa by extension should adopt the practice of the Igbo man apprenticeship system, as a strategy for the development of Nigeria and African entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS: *Igbo; Apprenticeship System; Small and Medium Scale Enterprise; Development*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, people have transferred skills from one generation to another in some form of apprenticeship. In Nigeria and all over Africa, apprenticeship has been an age long method of training young people in trade and craft, agriculture, business and catering. When youths in olden days achieved the status of skilled worker; they became important members of the society. In Igboland, apprenticeship system was an institution that was generally guarded by customs, lineage and rituals. Every male born into a family was expected to learn his matrilineal craft, and it was easy to identify a young male child as a member of lineage found to be proficient in the lineage craft (Okeke & Osang, 2021).

The Igbo Apprentice and Apprenticeship programme have been given diverse explanations by various schools of thoughts and scholars (Onyeigwe, undated). The apprenticeship system is a training and skill development initiative practiced all over the world and it has long been used to prepare workers to gain occupational skills in many countries (Lerman, 2012 in Ejo-Orusa &

Mpi, 2019). According to Ejo-Orusa & Mpi (2019) apprenticeship allows a male or female, depending on the type of business, to spend time and work with another family or community member or in some cases, not necessarily a family or community member, but a successful business man (Ilianya & Nwanegbo-Ben, 2021). During this period of time, the apprentice receives mentorship and training from the businessman or craftsman. Alake (2018) described apprenticeship as part of the Igbo business culture, where an established businessman in a town, street or locale has a responsibility to take-in teenagers and young adults from their homes and give them informal business training and mentorship.

Apprenticeship is evident in specific sectors, such as the manufacturing, trading, service and construction sector. In the history of middle and western China, apprenticeship constitutes an important pathway to qualification and certification even with the presence of other formal training methods (Rufai, Assim & Iroh, 2019). The Chinese apprenticeship system just like the Igbo apprenticeship has never been specifically supported since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. But today, it has maintained as one of the training avenues that promotes employment, especially in the construction industry, in small production and repair workshops and in the traditional service trades, such as hair cutting and cooking (Risle & Zhigun, 2014).

According to the report by Risle & Zhigun (2014), Industrialization in Europe also is centered on a double system of qualifications, which is composed of skilled workers, who had been trained through apprenticeship, and technicians and engineers, who were trained in the new applied research & development and training institutions. The British model also depended heavily on apprenticeship, as well as on Science and Engineering Departments like the Imperial Institute, for training a skilled workforce and engineers for industry and mining.

The French employed apprenticeship strategy that brought about the French model "Ecole Polytechnique", that aims at linking applied research and planning with education and training in all types of technology, a predecessor of the modern engineering schools. The French economy relied also on traditional apprenticeship, which is maintained until today. The "Ecole Polytechnique" model was replicated in some German states, as well as Northern Italy, as a result of Napoleon's modernization agenda which began during the 19th Century and built upon the progressive elements of the French Revolution. This later made way for higher technician and engineering positions, whereas modernized apprenticeship was, and still is, the main pathway to middle-level skilled worker positions in a number of countries (Risle & Zhigun, 2014; Munch & Matthias, 1985). Relating this to the Igbo apprenticeship system in Nigeria, one will ask – is the apprenticeship system a valuable way to promote small and medium scale enterprise development in Nigeria? Consequently, this study sought to investigate the impact of the Igbo apprenticeship system in the development of small and medium scale enterprise in Nigeria.

The paper is sub-divided into five (5) sections. Section one introduced the study while section two is the review of literature. Section three and four presented the methodology adopted in the study and the analysis and interpretation of data respectively. Section five concluded the study.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Apprentice and Apprenticeship have been variously defined by different scholars. Apprentice refers to a person who learns a job or skill by working for a fixed period of time, for someone who is very good at that job or skill (Apprentice, 2020). An apprentice is therefore one, in most cases, a teenager or young person who elects, or is persuaded to undertake or acquire practical, and in some cases, theoretical knowledge in a specialized area of interest, or occupation he/she would want to go into in future, or earn a living from. Apprentice refers to a person who has agreed to submit himself/herself within a period of time under the tutelage of a master/mistress, with the aim of acquiring practical, hands on, experience, and mastering the nitty-gritty of a trade, vocation or profession (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020).

International Labour Organization (2017) defined apprenticeship as systematic long term training for a recognized occupation taking place substantially within an undertaking or under an independent craftsman, governed by a written a contract of apprenticeship, and is subject to established standards. OECD-ILO (2020) identified apprenticeship as an effective mechanism for a seamless transition for young people to move from school to the world of work. Gonnon (2011) contends that apprenticeship is a mode of learning that focuses on acquiring specialized skills pursuant to getting young adults ready for work and society. Generally speaking, apprenticeship provides the apprentice specific opportunity “to get a foot in the door for future employment (Gowlland, 2014).

The apprenticeship practice is in three categories, namely:

- the traditional model,
- the informal model and
- the modern apprenticeship model.

Traditional Model: The traditional model involves the transfer of family skill to the next generation of members.

Informal Model: The informal model, though traditional in nature, have non-family members engage in the apprenticeship scheme.

Modern Apprenticeship: The modern apprenticeship scheme involves training of participants in vocational skills, well-structured programme of learning, fixed working/training hours and combination of vocational training with educational programmes.

Apprenticeship Trades in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the practice of apprenticeship is popular among the Nupes, Igbos, Fulanis and other tribes that have specialized skills which they pass on from generation to generation. Trades in

apprenticeship category in Nigeria include; blacksmith, welding, trading, block moulding, motor mechanics and repair, barbing, electronics repair, wood carving amongst others. The apprenticeship system practiced among the Igbo ethnic group is arranged in such a way that the apprentice lives with his master so as to acquire through a process of acculturation the necessary attitude, diplomacy and decorum required for the trade or skill acquisition, usually for an agreed number of years after which the master settles the apprentice by setting up a business for him, that is provision of startup capital and the required guidance up until certain level of business maturity. It is the combination of these dispositions that make graduates of Igbo apprenticeship scheme, entrepreneurs instead of job seekers. (Neuwirth, 2017) stated that Igbo apprenticeship system that governs Alaba International Market is the largest business incubator platform in the world.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

A number of author researchers have over the years investigated the apprenticeship system. For instance; Onyima, Nzewi & Chiekezie (2013) investigated the effects of apprenticeship and social capital on new business creation process of Igbo entrepreneurs in Wukari, Taraba State. Findings revealed that while apprenticeship had significant effects on pre-founding activities-when the business was taking off, social capital became important when the business had been established. Apprenticeship had significant effects on business idea generation, idea modification, business location and financing while social capital served as source of insurance services and access to information. The study recommended that apprenticeship practice should be revived and modernized and also that ethnic based unions should be given legal recognition and restructured to play both social and economic roles.

Anigbogu, Onwuteaka & Okoli (2019) examined the Igbo man perspectives of apprenticeship and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria: Implications to economic growth using the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) and the regression model of the Ordinary Least Square (OLS). From the result of the PCA, the principal components that serves as motivations for apprenticeship by Igbo entrepreneurs is the cash infusion giving to apprentice as start-up capital. Secondly, the principal components form the Igbo man perspectives of factors influencing entrepreneurial development is tolerance for risk and thirdly, the principal components from the challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system is that apprentices sometimes steals from their masters and adds to their start-up capital. Regression results revealed that all the three coefficients, namely: motivations for apprenticeship by Igbo entrepreneurs; Igbo man perspective of factors influencing entrepreneurial development; and challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system, had significant effect on entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria. The study recommended that the government of Nigeria and African by extension should adopt the practice of the Igbo man apprenticeship system and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria as a strategy for the development of African entrepreneurship. This is because of its sustainability in SMEs development and poverty reduction among the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria among others.

The study of Rufai, Assim & Iroh (2019) aimed at modernizing the Igbo apprenticeship system. Literatures were reviewed pertaining to the origin, diversity, success and limitations of the apprenticeship system in general and Igbo apprenticeship system in particular. Having identified

the gaps and loopholes of the system, a suitable educational model was proposed combining general and apprenticeship education. Recommendations were also provided based on international best practices. It was discovered that the system has become unattractive to the youths. Amongst others, it was recommended that the system should be reviewed such that it creates an innovative ecosystem.

Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe (2020) sought to interrogate the practice and direction of Igbo apprenticeship, with particular interest in unraveling the reasons for the declining interest in apprenticeship generally among Igbo youths in South East, Nigeria. The findings indicated that the much talked about Igbo apprenticeship is facing significant challenges, and several factors have combined to de-market Igbo apprenticeship, making it less appealing to unemployed youths, with grave implications for unemployment, wealth creation and poverty reduction. Given the demand of the modern labour market, the paper calls for a hybrid model of apprenticeship that introduces in a more systematic manner, elements of traditional structure with a view to improving skill levels, job independence, higher remuneration, active engagement and sustenance of interest of all stakeholders.

Chinweuba & Ezeugwu (2017) investigated the peculiar sources, circumstances and skills that are the fulcrum of increasing socio-economic performance of the Igbo people. The study found that entrepreneurial performance of the Igbos is underscored by their economic culture and value, which are highly existential in their traditions and belief system. These are however fostered by the long years of marginalization by successive Nigerian governments, as well as other prominent factors in pre and post independence Nigeria within the socio-political and techno-economic sector of Nigeria and Africa at large.

Ekesiobe & Dimnwobi (2020) investigated the entrepreneurship practice of the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria. Findings from the study indicated that entrepreneurs who participated in the IEM have higher business survival rate, business growth rate and access to trade and informal credit, while non-IEM entrepreneurs have better access to formal credit source than the IEM graduates. The study recommended, among other things, the IEM as a veritable approach for enterprise development and youth employment in Nigeria.

Iwueke, Halima & Oparaku (2020) investigated apprenticeship training system and business sustainability in Anambra state using a population of 1000 respondents from different trades/crafts/ business. Findings revealed that the level of education of the apprentices determines the acquisition of the trade knowledge and also the Masters willingness to mentor the apprentices who must be ready and have the capacity to learn. Therefore, the study recommended that apprentices must possess some levels of education that is basic for effective understanding and comprehension of trade knowledge and secrets. Also the masters must have mentoring skills to bring out the creativity in apprentices, while taking cognizance of business trends.

Okeke & Osang (2021) examined the Igbo apprenticeship scheme in Anambra state. Its potency as it were, as it is and will be. The study discovered that, the unwillingness of young men to take up the businesses of their fathers, study courses that will promote their growth and malicious stealing of their masters money by the apprentices are key factors that led to the decline of the scheme's potency. The study therefore recommended that young men should key into family

businesses so as to promote the heritage of business sustainability being transferred from generation to generation.

Ezeajughu (2021) examined the Igbo man perspectives of apprenticeship and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria. The study analytically investigated the peculiar sources, circumstances and skills that are the fulcrum of increasing socio-economic performance of the Igbo people. The study found that entrepreneurial performance of the Igbos is underscored by their economic culture and value, which are highly existential in their traditions and belief system. The paper concludes that the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has the potential to significantly increase the level of entrepreneurial metabolism and to stimulate the rate and pace of new venture creation and thus a viable platform for entrepreneurship promotion in Nigeria. The study recommended that the government of Nigeria and African by extension should adopt the practice of the Igbo man apprenticeship system and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria as a strategy for the development of African entrepreneurship.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design. A sample size of 216 was taken from the total population of the traders and businessmen at the Nnewi and Onitcha markets using the Adams and Schvaneveldt (1985) formula for determining the sample size of an unknown population. The data were primary in nature and were collected through the use of Likert scale structured questionnaire to generate responses from the selected sample. The questionnaire items were made of five- (5) point scale type of responses as follows: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The copies of the returned questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the pattern of data. The hypothesis was tested using the Chi-Square Test statistics. The hypothesis was tested at 5% level of significance.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

In this section, collected data were analyzed, presented and interpreted for easy appreciation by users. These analyses were carried out using such research tools as tables and simple percentages; while the SPSS version 21 was applied with logistic analytical tool for the test of hypothesis.

Table 4.1: Questionnaire distribution

Number of Copies Distributed	Number of Copies Retrieved	Number of Valid/Used Copies
216	192	171

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 4.1 showed that out of the 216 copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents, 192 copies were retrieved. This was 89% of the sample size. However, out of this number, only 171

copies were found valid and useful for further analyses. This was 79% of the sample size and 89% of the total number of copies retrieved.

Table 4.2: Respondents' rate of the degree of impact of Igbo apprenticeship system to the development of SME

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	81	47.3684211
Agree	63	36.8421053
Fairly Agree	18	10.5263158
Disagree	5	2.92397661
Strongly Disagree	4	2.33918129
Total	171	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 4.2 shows that 81 (47%), 63(37%), 18(11%), 5(3%), and 4(2%) of the respondents disclosed that they strongly agree, agree, fairly agree, disagree and strongly disagree that Igbo apprenticeship system impacts on the development of small and medium scale enterprise.

Table 4.3: Analysis of responses on the degree of impact of Igbo apprenticeship system to the development of SME

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total
1	Igbo apprenticeship system enhances the establishment and development of small and medium scale enterprises.	93	64	8	4	2	171
2	Igbo apprenticeship system enhances business growth and survival rate.	98	30	30	9	4	171
3	Igbo apprenticeship system provides access to trade and informal credit.	81	75	6	6	3	171
4	Igbo apprenticeship system creates opportunity for excellent business management skills and competence.	121	33	7	6	4	171
	Total	393	202	51	25	13	684
	Average	98	51	12.8	6.25	3.25	171
	Percentage	57	30	7.46	3.655	1.9	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 4.3 presented responses to the questions relating to the degree of impact of Igbo apprenticeship system on the development of small and medium scale enterprise. On the average, the table showed that 98 (57%) respondents, 51 (30%) respondents, 13 (7%) respondents, 6 (4%) respondents and 3 (2%) respondents strongly agreed, agreed, were indifferent, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively on the questions relating to the impact of Igbo apprenticeship system on the development of small and medium scale enterprise.

The hypothesis is stated in both Null and Alternative forms as follows:

H₀: The Igbo apprenticeship system has no positive and significant impact on the development of small and medium scale enterprise.

H₁: The Igbo apprenticeship system has positive and significant impact on the development of small and medium scale enterprise.

To test this hypothesis, table 4.3 was used and SPSS applied thus:

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Impact of Igbo apprenticeship system on the development of small and medium scale enterprise	171	4.1228	1.14384	1.00	5.00

Chi-Square Test

Frequencies

Impact of Igbo apprenticeship system on the development of small and medium scale enterprise

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
SD	9	34.2	-25.2
D	10	34.2	-24.2
UN	18	34.2	-16.2
A	48	34.2	13.8
SA	86	34.2	51.8
Total	171		

Test Statistics

	Impact of Igbo apprenticeship system on the development of small and medium scale enterprise
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Chi-Square				127.392 ^a
Df				4
Asymp. Sig.				.000
	Sig.			.000 ^b
Monte Carlo Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	.000
				.017

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 34.2.

b. Based on 171 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

Interpretation

The SPSS output shows that X^2 calculated is 127.392 at 0.05 level of significance and df (4) and p-value equals 0.000. This shows that the test is significant.

Decision

Since X^2 calculated (127.392) is greater than X^2 critical (9.488) and p-value (0.000) is less than alpha (0.05), we therefore reject H_0 and accept H_1 which states that Igbo apprenticeship system has positive and significant Impact on the development of small and medium scale enterprise.

5. CONCLUSION

A consumption country cannot without doubt, boast of a sustainable economy. For a country to develop politically, economically and socially, it must be able to cater for the needs of the citizens and also involve more in export than import. It is also expedient that citizens do not simply depend on the government for provision of jobs and employments but become entrepreneurs and thus become job creators.

Nigeria has benefitted immensely as a nation from the Igbo apprenticeship system, which has produced many successful entrepreneurs and those businesses have also been able to reproduce themselves in other young entrepreneurs. This study set out to investigate the impact of the Igbo apprenticeship system on the development of small and medium scale enterprise in Anambra State of Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that the Igbo apprenticeship system enhances the establishment and development of small and medium scale enterprises; promotes business growth and survival rate; creates access to trade and informal credit; and creates opportunity for excellent business management skills and competence. The study therefore recommended that the government of Nigeria and African by extension should adopt the practice of the Igbo man apprenticeship system, as a strategy for the development of Nigeria and African entrepreneurship.

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