

## The Anatomy of Igbo Apprenticeship System; The Entrepreneurship Perspective

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### **Abstract**

*The Igbo people of Nigeria have excelled in entrepreneurship in recent years. This is due to the Igbo people's ownership and management of an expanding number of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and large business enterprises (LBEs), both of which are important indicators of the expansion of the Nigerian economy. There has long been an apprenticeship system in the Igbo people, which has spawned new enterprises and entrepreneurs. The largest business incubation scheme in the world, according to reports is Igbo apprenticeship system. This technique has been implied to be a secret of the Igbos, the most hardworking tribe in Nigeria, but the young are not drawn to it since it is falsely believed to be a program for people who cannot succeed in formal schooling. Modernizing this system is the goal of this study. The history, diversity, effectiveness, and drawbacks of the apprenticeship system in general, and the Igbo apprenticeship system in particular, have been studied in the literature. After identifying the system's flaws and weaknesses, this study promotes a hybrid apprenticeships were modern education and apprenticeship system are combined. It was suggested, among other things, that the system be overhauled so that it fosters an inventive ecosystem. This study will make it easier to strengthen Nigeria's Igbo-Apprenticeship program. The study comes to the conclusion that the Igbo people would eventually become a major socio-political and economic force in Nigeria and throughout Africa if they continue to advance at this rate.*

**Keywords:** *Apprenticeship; Entrepreneur; Performance; Igbo people, Nigeria*

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## 1.0 Introduction

In Nigeria, the Igbo ethnic group has a reputation for economic and entrepreneurial success. It is widely considered that the relationship between entrepreneurship and positive economic outcomes ensures a cooperative environment for the favorable collaboration of key players in an economy's commercial ecosystem (Vracheva and Stoyneva, 2020). Hence, it is now widely accepted that increasing entrepreneurial activity and sustainability is a must for improving economic performance globally (Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2020). The apprenticeship system (Igba Odibo/Igba Boyi), which is a key component of the Igbos' entrepreneurial culture, is particularly intriguing. A business/vocational mentor (Oga/Madam) will induct young Igbos into a specific entrepreneurial enterprise as part of this Igbo induction approach. An endeavor may be a business, a profession, or a trade.

The Nigerian economy continues to be supported by Igbo entrepreneurship and business activities (Orugun & Nafiu, 2014). Via the "Igba-boi" apprenticeship program, this ethnic group has dominated and has outperformed its contemporaries from other ethnic groups both within the nation and outside (Iwara, Amaechi & Netshandama, 2019). A human resources development program called the apprenticeship training system combines education and training to get people ready to start, own, and run their own enterprises (Iwueke, Halima & Oparaku, 2020). The "Oga - Nwaboi" relationship, or master-servant relationship, is the basis of the Igbo apprenticeship system, in which the master settles the servant after the apprentice time.

Onyima, Nzewi, and Chikezie (2013) state that "the Nigerian apprenticeship system was thrust to the forefront after the Nigerian-Biafran war. Many parents who lost everything after the war were compelled to put their kids (8–20 years old) to work as traders in order to live. Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, and the majority of Lagos were rebuilt in this manner by Igbo settlers following the war. Under the apprenticeship system, the „Oga“ and „Nwaboi“ are in agreement for a term ranging from 4-7 years whereby the apprentice is to serve and learn from the „Oga“. Often, the agreement specifies the method of settlement. The Igbos have benefited greatly from using apprenticeship as a means of establishing young people and training the unskilled. Because of the excellent training and settling they received from their "Oga," many persons excelled in their vocation. Indeed, apprenticeship provides the Nwaboi with the chance to learn commercial acumen, a work ethic, how to connect with clients and suppliers, and how to interact with other professionals. It offers connections and networks and relieves the strain on the Nwaboi family

An apprentice is someone who picks up a skill or job by working for someone who is very skilled at it for a set length of time (Apprentice, 2020). An apprentice is thus, typically, a teenager or young person who chooses to engage in or is encouraged to gain practical skills and, in some situations, theoretical knowledge in a specialized field of interest or occupation that they would like to pursue in the future or earn a living from. According to the International Labour Organization (2017), an apprenticeship is a formalized, lengthy training program for a recognized profession that is largely conducted within an organization or under a freelance craftsman, is governed by a written apprenticeship contract, and is held to predetermined standards. Moreover, (OECD-ILO, 2020) identified apprenticeship as a useful tool for facilitating a smooth transition for young people from school to the workplace. According to UNESCO (2015), an apprenticeship is a "unique form of vocational education combining on-the-job learning and classroom instruction for specifically defined competences and work processes, regulated by law and based on written

employment contract with a compensatory payment, and standard social protection scheme." Certification typically occurs at the completion of training, when successful apprentices are given the appropriate certificates.

Furthermore, the inductee gains the necessary exposure and understanding of the industry, finds employment for themselves, gets to know the customers, producers, importers, and middlemen regardless of where they are located, and develops the entrepreneur-customer relations and business skills required for success. Unique and important characteristics of courage, endurance, and determination that overcome business risks, difficulties, setbacks, unpleasant experiences, and significant economic obstacles in the modern world are at the core of the Igbo apprenticeship system. According to Forrest (1995), the Igbo people's distinctive characteristics help them overcome every obstacle, suffering, and risk-taking characteristic associated with entrepreneurship.

The Igbo people live in several areas of the Niger Delta and south-eastern Nigeria, where the entrepreneurial advancement and economic prominence are still the dominant narratives. Based on this, Anyanwu (1999) notes that Igbo people no longer look to benevolent government for salvation but instead are working toward self-reliance and even contribute up to 80% of Nigeria's economy while receiving the lowest decreasing allocation from the federal government. It is consequently obvious that Igbo people value personal effort that is colored by the community and deliberate hard work. This results from their worldview, which is instilled in them as a guiding principle and a motivation for entrepreneurial achievement from the moment of birth.

Researchers hope to boost the effectiveness of the growth of entrepreneurship in south-eastern Nigeria by introducing the pros and cons of the Igbo apprenticeship system in this paper and outlining the implementation procedure.

## **2.0 Research Methods**

### **Conceptual Framework**

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.

International Labour Organization (2017) defines 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. Also, (OECD-ILO, 2020) identify apprenticeship as an effective mechanism for a seamless transition for young people to move from school to the world of work. To UNESCO (2015) apprenticeship is defined as a "unique form of vocational education combining job learning and school based training for specifically defined competences and work processes, regulated by law and based on written employment contract with a compensatory payment, and standard social

protection scheme.” Usually, certification follows the expiration of training where relevant certificates are awarded to successful apprentices. The foregoing definitions seem to exclude the type of apprenticeship prevalent in Igboland that are not affiliated to, or derived from Schools, or Colleges.

Vareto (2017) looks at “apprenticeship as a job that includes training”. This is too sweeping a definition, as it includes everything in employment circles as apprenticeship, whether it is training on the job, or off the job. In several societies, in Europe and America, emphasis is now on school and work based apprenticeship system, although the current trend is moving towards company based model OECD-ILO (2020) where the industry influences the pattern, character and content of apprenticeship. It is however Gonnon’s definition that seems to mirror, or at least embrace apprenticeship, as it has been practiced in Nigerian type societies, where 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 (UNESCO, 2015).

### **3.0 Research Findings and Discussion**

#### **Igbo Apprenticeship System Process Based on Findings:**

The backbone of the Nigerian economy continues to be Igbo entrepreneurship and business operations (Orugun & Nafiu, 2014). The Igbo ethnic group has dominated and has outperformed its contemporaries from other ethnic groups in the country and abroad thanks to an apprenticeship program known as "Igba-boi" (Iwara, Amaechi & Netshandama, 2019). A human resources development program called the apprenticeship training system combines education and training to get people ready to start, own, and run their own enterprises (Iwueke, Halima & Oparaku, 2020). The "Oga - Nwaboi" relationship, or master-servant relationship, is the basis of the Igbo apprenticeship system, in which the master settles the servant after the apprentice time. The Igbo apprenticeship system consists of three stages, each involving a different set of personalities: the master or entrepreneur, the apprentice family or sponsor, and the trainee themselves. The Igbo apprenticeship system, on the other hand, has three stages: the Ability stage, the Mentoring stage, and the Settlement stage. We'll talk about these steps quickly.

**Ability Stage:** The Igbo apprenticeship system's initial stage is where the apprentice expresses his interest in and willingness to start a certain type of business. If a master wants to take on the responsibility of mentoring an apprentice, he or she should meet with the apprentice's family or sponsor and explain why it is necessary for him to instruct their child in the trade. In order to demonstrate that Igbo apprenticeship is not slavery, there would be a year of probation during which the apprentice and the master would get to know one another better and develop a strong master-apprentice relationship. Following this, the master would draft and sign an agreement with the apprentices' families. The number of years for servitude and apprenticeship would be specified within the framework of the agreement. It can range from six to seven years for some people.

**Mentorship Stage:** The master would caution the apprentice into his line of business during this stage, which is the business mentoring and tutoring stage. The apprentice would learn business terminology, tactics, and consumer persuasion skills throughout this time, and would be guided toward becoming a business tycoon and expert. Others include business ventures, customer

relationship management, bargaining, inventiveness, and transaction procedures. Up to the time of settlement, this stage is ongoing and developing.

**Settlement Stage:** Settlement, also known as establishment, is the final stage of the Igbo apprenticeship system. This stage is filled with joy and happiness when the apprentice has done a good job serving his master and has acquired all the necessary knowledge within the allotted years. At this point, the apprentice will be financially secure and will have established himself as a master who can manage his own business. Similar to the first phase, the agreement would be dissolved in front of the families during the settlement phase. The blessing and request to flourish in business more than his master or mentor would be made to the apprentice who is aspiring to become a new master.

The Igbo apprenticeship system has persisted as a method of subsistence and employment that helps incubating entrepreneurs stand on their own, generate cash for their businesses, and actively engage in financially rewarding ventures.

#### **Advantages of Igbo apprenticeship system:**

It has been noted that Igbo entrepreneurial activities form the foundation of Nigeria's economy and have helped raise peoples' standards of living in both rural and urban areas. Igba-odibo, the Igbo apprenticeship system, aids an entrepreneur in starting his own firm rather than as a learner. He is already acquainted with the company's clients and has their contact information. Building strong customer relationships is made much easier by doing this. Knowing where to get items more affordably and how to market them is helpful to the business owner. The Igbo apprenticeship system aids newcomers in learning all the methods and procedures of the specific industry. If their previous firms are not as profitable as they anticipated, they also use this technique to shift or diversify their operations. The Igbo apprenticeship system has helped raise peoples' standards of living in both urban and rural areas. Igbo businesspeople use their entrepreneurial abilities to expand existing markets and develop brand-new ones. While commerce and money are inseparable concepts to the Igbo, all eastern metropolitan areas, even the interior villages, are surrounded by marketplaces. Igbo entrepreneurs, according to Orugun and Nafiu (2014), are crucial to the expansion of the Nigerian economy. In southeast Nigeria, apprenticeship has a big impact on entrepreneurship development. Iwueke, Halima, and Oparaku (2020) and Anigbogu, Onwuteaka, and Okoli (2019) found that the Igbo apprenticeship system significantly affects the competitiveness of entrepreneurs.

#### **Disadvantages of Igbo apprenticeship system:**

In addition, the Igbo apprenticeship system has encouraged some selfish and foolish people to pursue wealth without cause. The contemporary pressures of globalization, westernization, and modernity, which have brought dishonest tendencies and systems among some Igbo businesspeople, exacerbate this predicament. These systems are rife with unfair commercial practices, feudalism, unhealthy competition, and swindling, to name a few. News of entrepreneurship outside the bounds of corporate ethics is therefore common. Gradual sanctions such as the confiscation of goods, jail, etc. are then administered to some Igbo businesspeople in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Several Igbo businesspeople lack the necessary education to take their enterprises to the pinnacle due to the Igbo apprenticeship system. Igbo apprenticeship practices frequently result in



wrongdoing on both sides. As a result, some cruel Mentors occasionally abuse their Inductees at home, while others neglect to settle their own at the conclusion of the service. Even worse, there have been reports of Inductees selling off their Mentors and throwing their money into the trash. The inability of the majority of Igbo businesspeople to harness their entrepreneurial tendencies productively and advance the development of the Igbo nation is one of the most notable and enduring flaws of the Igbo entrepreneur.

### **Empirical Framework**

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. Questionnaire was the main instrument of data collection while Chi- Square was used to test the hypotheses. Related literatures on apprenticeship and business sustainability were reviewed. 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.

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 paper was an exploratory, qualitative research paper premised on desk research encapsulating a comprehensive review of ethnographic and historical records while also utilizing the observation method in informal workplaces and trading sites spread across diverse work settings. The findings indicate that the much talked about Igbo apprenticeship is facing significant challenges, and several factors have combined to demarket 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 called 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.

Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi (2020) investigated the entrepreneurship practise of the Igbos of SouthEastern Nigeria. The study intended to deepen entrepreneurial development and employment generation in the country as well as provide empirical support to situate the Igbo entrepreneurship model (IEM) among existing entrepreneurship literature, particularly for research in developing countries. The study adopted a quantitative approach to examine 1187 responses carefully drawn from the Onitsha and Nnewi business clusters in Anambra state. In addition to descriptive demonstrations, the Propensity Score Matching (PSM) technique was employed to estimate the effects of treatment on the treated by pairing treatment and control units with similar attributes on the propensity score and other likely covariates. Specifically, the PSM is used to perform a counterfactual analysis of the effect of the entrepreneurship model on business outcomes by examining participants and non-participants in the IEM. Findings of 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.

Kanu (2019) reviewed the Igbo apprenticeship system (IAS), a popular model used in Nigeria, especially by people of the South East. The system recognized as the most successful business incubation platform in Africa and, arguably, in the world. Analysis of literature on IAS showed that complementarity was the secret behind the success of the IAS. The complementarity features of the IAS were identified and a descriptive survey was used to investigate whether integrating the complementarity features into EDP will be helpful in raising successful entrepreneurs. Subjects for the investigation were 92 entrepreneurs whose businesses emerged or benefited from entrepreneurship development programmes in Nigeria and have operated their businesses for at least one year. The subjects, who were selected from South-West Nigeria, responded to a 30-item questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by 5 experts and pre-tested. The pre-test result produced a Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of 0.87. Data collected in the study were analyzed using frequency, percentage and mean. Results revealed that integrating the complementarity features of the IAS into EDP will be very helpful in creating more successful entrepreneurs. The study recommended that sponsors and organizers of EDP need better understanding of the IAS and develop capacity to integrate its complementarity features.

Rufai, Assim & Iroh (2019) in their view sought to modernize this system. Literatures were reviewed pertaining 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. They aimed at facilitating the improvement of the Igbo-Apprenticeship system in Nigeria.

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). A total sample of four hundred and eighty two (482) SMEs owners of Igbo extraction were the respondents of this study. 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 (The motivations for apprenticeship by Igbo entrepreneurs; Igbo man perspective of factors influencing entrepreneurial development; and challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system) have 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 African entrepreneurship. This is because of its sustainability in SMEs development and poverty reduction among the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria among others.

Chinweuba & Ezeugwu (2017) analytically investigated the peculiar sources, circumstances and skills that are the fulcrum of increasing socio-economic performance of the Igbo people. The study finds 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. The research concludes that with this progressive rate, Igbo people will in time be a force to reckon with in the sociopolitical and techno-economic sector of Nigeria and Africa at large.

Onyima, Nzewi & Chiekezie (2013) investigated the effects of apprenticeship and social capital on new business creation process of Igbo entrepreneurs in Wukari Taraba State. The high success rate of apprentice turned entrepreneurs and increasing attachment of these entrepreneurs to their ethnic based union were the reasons that gave rise to the study. 40 businesses located in Wukari Local Government Area that were established by Igbos were randomly selected and questionnaire method was the mechanism applied in generating responses. 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.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Moving Forward**

Is the Igbo apprenticeship system a useful tool for fostering business in Nigeria? Certainly, but only if the appropriate policies are in place, the strength is increased through the creation of strong partnerships, and the system is made appealing to young people. The Igbo apprenticeship system would be strengthened by the following suggestions, helping Nigeria become economically viable on a worldwide scale.

Combining formal education and apprenticeship should be promoted by relevant authorities. The Igbo apprenticeship system should be practiced in such a way that the apprentice should be allowed to enroll in formal education to enable him/she acclimatizes with modern education. This ecosystem will increase the number of spin-offs and successful new enterprises. It will also spur Nigeria to eliminate illiteracy and eradicate poverty.

Governments should foster an environment that allows the apprenticeship program to succeed. A direct improvement of the apprenticeship program, raising the overall skill level, and providing enormous financial support may be the solution to the system's apparent problems.

Through pertinent statutory measures, the apprenticeship system's organizational paradigm must completely alter.

In the Igbo apprenticeship system, apprentices must be provided with financial support; the mentor is only required to provide for the apprentice's basic needs, such as housing, transportation, and food. Nonetheless, it is possible to enforce the Mentor's payment of salaries to these potential apprentices by employing the appropriate policies.



The continuance of an apprentice's education will not be affected by their relocation or travel inside or across their state of residency because apprentices are known for constantly seeking for better pastures. Also, this will improve employment prospects.

### **Conclusion**

No consumer country can claim to have a sustainable economy. A nation must be able to meet its citizens' demands and engage in more export than import in order to advance socially, economically, and politically. It is important that people become entrepreneurs and job creators rather than relying solely on the government for their needs and employment. The Igbo apprenticeship system has generated many successful businesspeople, and those enterprises have also been able to repeat themselves in other young entrepreneurs. Nigeria has benefited much as a nation from this system.

The Igbo people have a dynamic and ongoing apprenticeship system that dates back to ancient times. Since they employ excellent business practices, Igbo apprenticeship systems have proven successful. Yet, their worldview, economic significance, and other crucial historical elements drive these activities. The Igbo apprenticeship system has given Igbos the skills they need to dominate not just the economy of Nigeria, but also those of Ghana, Niger, Togo, Gambia, Mali, Cameroon, China, and South Africa, to name a few. From the discussion thus far, it is clear that they are made possible by a number of precepts and abilities learned through apprenticeship, including self-assurance, a feeling of duty, a strong will, commitment, flexibility, fearlessness, and vision. In spite of this, the Igbo are unique in having a rare entrepreneurial spirit. Some people consider achieving financial success to be a form of servitude that necessitates even greater success. The motivation behind socioeconomic strife and effort is this existential philosophy. Igbo people rarely lose up on life as a result. He has faith in his unwavering mental and physical toughness as well as in the idea that sincere effort results in substantial financial reward. The Nigerian government must thus conduct an urgent evaluation of the apprenticeship system in general and the Igbo apprenticeship system in particular.

The focus is on creating a long-term, supportive atmosphere that fosters socioeconomic inventiveness, which is frequently lacking in Nigeria (Ukaegbu, 2005). With things considered, it follows that the Igbo people view circumstantial factors like illiteracy and a poor upbringing not as barriers to achievement but as reasons and strengths for doing so.

### **Suggestion for Further Study**

This study has highlighted the necessity for a deeper and more thorough investigation into the developments, trends, and future possibilities of the Igbo apprenticeship program. More research is required with a focus on the recruitment procedures supporting the present informal apprenticeship program, attrition rates in various industries, anticipated results, and potential benefits. The current paper might be further enhanced by a triangular methodological approach that makes use of the quantitative and qualitative approaches. In our perspective, an apprenticeship duality is possible in the context of evolving contemporary workplace realities, and this merits further study.

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