



The Enduring Tradition of Igbo Apprenticeship And its Role in Shaping the Economic and Social Dynamics in Nigeria

Celestine Chimezie Ekweozo

Siam University, Thailand

ozocele93@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Igbo apprenticeship commonly known as “*Igba Boy/Boi*”, in the Igbo parlance is a trademark of indigenous economic stronghold in the Igbo section of Nigeria, with roots wiring deep into the very cultural fabric of the Igbo cosmology. This paper studies the lasting tradition of Igbo apprenticeship and its complex role in influencing economic and social dynamics within Nigeria. The paper employed a multidisciplinary approach, ex-raying the historical development of the apprenticeship, the nature of Igbo Apprenticeship, the types and intricacies surrounding the economic model. By using phenomenological qualitative research methodology which includes but not limited to participant observation, and interviews, this study scrutinizes the modern-day manifestations of Igbo apprenticeship, while emphasizing its importance in nurturing entrepreneurship, wealth creation, and social mobility.

Be that as it may, the paper digs deep into the complex network of relationships within the apprenticeship framework, studying the roles of apprentices, their masters, and the entire community stakeholders that maintain this tradition. Additionally, it addresses the adaptation of Igbo apprenticeship to modern economic structures and the challenges posed by globalization and urbanization. By delving into the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of Igbo apprenticeship, this paper contributes to a more profound understanding of indigenous economic structures and their implications for a more expansive socio-economic improvement in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Igba boy* “Apprenticeship”, Igbo Cosmology, Entrepreneurship, wealth creation, social mobility.



INTRODUCTION

The two most notable systems of education we were taught in schools included the formal and the informal education respectively. The term formal is commonly associated or is the system of education where literacy is employed for the purpose of learning ideas and subsequently getting certifications as evidence of learning in an organized structure called school. On the other hand, the informal education includes every kind of learning that is not limited to literacy and formal school system. The Igbo apprenticeship falls under the later, but can be developed to include become formal.

According to Walker, (2011), the apprenticeship system and its skill development approach within informal sector of the economy is seen to be the only saving grace embraced as observed earlier by many young school leavers whose parents could not train them beyond secondary school level. While this may sound true, it does not mean that those who attend this informal training are not capable of going through the stages of formal education. In fact, it is as it were, an opportunity for families whose financial abilities cannot afford the rigors of the university education. Rufai et al (2019), captured it clearly that it is wrongly assumed to be a program for those who cannot be successful with the formal education; it is very attractive to the youths.

Furthermore, the history of Igbo apprenticeship can be traced to the pre-colonial era of Nigeria. It is the oldest form of training in the sphere of work and business (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). Its emergence can be traced back to the time when journeymen, artisans and guilds were in vogue, building the foundation for utilization of productive manpower available to them at the time. Through this, craftsmanship, skills, knowledge, were transmitted from a crafts-master to an apprentice. This practice was as old as humanity itself. This practice entailed a detailed hands-on, on-the-job learning experience from a master. With this, skills as well as wealth of knowledge and finance are transferred from masters (the rich) to their apprentices, ensuring both continuity and circulation of wealth.

In Igbo land, this practice gained more popularity with the end of the unfortunate civil war that lasted for three years from 1967-1970. The Igbo people have lost everything they had prior to the war, including their wealth and businesses. After the war unfortunately, the then Nigerian government for whatever reason they dimmed fit, gave 20 pounds to every Igbo man who had money in the banks prior to the war irrespective of the amount they had. To

survive this situation they formed Entrepreneurship Incubation Business Model (EIBM) called the ‘Imu Ahia, or Imu Oru Aka’. (Ugwu, Ikechukwu, Njeze, Amobi, Oluka, & Ugochukwu, 2023). As a result, this process yielded and has been yielding a wonderful amount of success, producing so many billionaires and millionaires out of nothing. This model has generated many Small Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) and start-up businesses but with little global and or international recognition. (Ugwu, Ikechukwu, Njeze, Amobi, Oluka, & Ugochukwu, 2023).

Generally, apprenticeship is globally practiced training and skill development approach used for years to equip learners with occupational skills (Lerman, 2012, cited in Ejo-Orusa & Mpi, 2019). In addition to skill acquisition, apprenticeships also offer guidance and counseling, often involving trainees living with their masters to learn the necessary mindset, negotiation skills, behavior, and decorum required for the job through a process of acculturation (Anigbogu, Onwuteaka, & Okoli, 2019). This training and process varies from country to country, and from region to region within countries, but this study focused on the Igbo apprenticeship system. Despite these variations, the fundamental aspect of the Igbo system is its focus on developing apprentices through on-the-job training, sometimes leading to certifications or licensing in their respective trades or professions (Ejo-orusa & Mpi, 2019).

While the Igbo apprenticeship system differs from various models across the globe, there are two or sometimes three forms of training that are encapsulated into the term Igbo Apprenticeship, namely: “Igba odibo, Imu ahia or Imu oru, and Igba boy. All these are different forms of the Igbo apprenticeship system. As Onuoha (2010) had it, the Igbo apprenticeship system, also referred to as “Igba-Odibo,” “Igba-Boi,” “Imu-Ahia,” or “Imu-Oru” in the Igbo language, is a framework of formal and informal agreements that foster entrepreneurial communities among the Igbo people.

The stages include talent identification, knowledge training or scholarship, and graduation. Starting with the formal and informal agreements between the parents and guardians of the apprentice, the next phase is for the master to examine so many qualities including, compatibility, willingness to learn and be taught, as well as resilience and endurance. When these are established then the next is the proper training and induction into the real art of trading or skills while instilling life and business qualities like competitiveness, business language, bargaining strategies, financial management, and accountability in the new



apprentice. At this stage, the apprentice lives with the master and his family as a part of the household. The final stage is the graduation when the apprentice must have perfected the necessary skills needed in the business or field. Here the master ushers him into the real business as an independent person who can now manage himself to success.

No doubt the Igbo Apprenticeship System have assisted in nurturing entrepreneurs by generating business ideas and business location, raising capital for the new economic ventures and start-ups, and transference of practical business knowledge among Igbo ethnic group (Alike et al., 2019). The Igbo Apprenticeship system provides the apprentice with the platform to acquire good business knowledge and direct exposure to suitable suppliers. This further helped transfer wealth from the rich to the poor among the Igbo people. This model has created a viable and enviably raw business training system that continues to strive as a means of wealth creation and distribution among the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.

The Igbo apprenticeship therefore becomes a big and enviable thing used to shape the very dynamics of the economic and financial lives of the Igbo people in Nigeria. For a people with such a tragic past of having to survive three years of civil war that took lives and properties, this was a game changer. Today, the Nigerian economy sits on a keg of gun powder, with youth unemployment and poverty doubling as years goes by. This study presents the Igbo apprenticeship system as a model for pulling as many people out of poverty as possible, and as a paradigm shift from over-dependence on the government and white collar jobs, to entrepreneurship. This way wealth creation and distribution is even and poverty is alleviated from the Nigerian people. Finally, we cannot deny that it needs some touch of restructuring to make finer and more suitable for the global world of the 21st Century.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defined apprenticeship as a long-term training for a traditional occupation, primarily within an undertaking or under an independent artisan, a seamless transition from school to work for young people (ILO, 2010). The United Nations Education and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also sees apprenticeship as a unique form of vocational education that combines job learning and school-based training to develop specific competencies and work processes, regulated by law, based on a written employment contract with compensatory payment and a standard social protection scheme (UNESCO, 2015). While these definitions are wonderful, they do not fully grasp the model of

apprenticeship as practiced by the Igbo people. There are serious variances in tenets and practices of training and learning. As Vareto (2017) observed, these definitions exclude the type of apprenticeship prevalent in Igbo land, which is not affiliated with schools or colleges, they are ‘jobs that includes training’. The Igbo apprenticeship for context, involves a hands-on, on-the-job learning that young people undergo under the tutelage of a master called ‘oga’. This happens over a number of years with the apprentice forming a part of his master’s household. In this process, his knowledge encompasses every aspect of the business or art he/she is learning. At the end, unlike the former definitions, he is settled with some amount of money and supported to make sure he becomes as successful as his master.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What we now know as the Igbo Apprenticeship system has undergone years of study and review by so many scholars seeking to draw out, a refined and long lasting practice that will serve as a perfect model for a sustainable economic development in both the Igbo land, Nigeria and Africa as the case may be. Hence, there is a rich bank of literature that has dug and investigated this system, offering deeper Historical, social, cultural and economic insights into the very concept of Igbo Apprenticeship System.

The first question one would answer when we talk about the Igbo Apprenticeship System is who is an apprentice? Typically, the apprentice is a teenager or young person who has completed primary school and engages in hands-on training, supplemented by theoretical knowledge, in their chosen vocation, trade, or occupation (Kanu, 2019). The Igbo Apprenticeship system involves individuals who seek to acquire a specific skill or trade, working for a designated period of time under the guidance of an expert in that trade (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). From the foregoing, one would deduce a number of characteristics; first that the individual must be learning a trade, a skill or a business as the case maybe. Second, that it must be under a mentor, usually an expert. Third, that it takes a number of years to complete the training. And lastly, that when one finishes, he is empowered to start-up on his own as independent expert.

This exercise starts with an agreement to be mentored by a master to acquire practical, hands-on experience and to master the intricacies of a trade, vocation, or profession (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). After the agreement, comes the actual training process where so many skills including negotiation, financial management to mention by a few are learnt from the master. These skills would arm the apprentice with survival and management qualities to sustain the business or profession when he leaves his master. In fact, the system serves as an extension of the Igbo entrepreneurial spirit, where established entrepreneurs, locally referred to as “Oga,” inducts young Igbos into entrepreneurial ventures (Iwara et al., 2019). This

exercise imbues the young ones with necessary components of learning namely: attention (Learning by keen observation), retention (ability to remember and regurgitate what they have learnt by observation), reproduction (being able to redo what they observed), and motivation (being zealous and committed to learning, as well as the drive to grow in knowledge and skills).

The Igbo apprenticeship system has been ranked as one of best incubation process for business and entrepreneurship. Studies on business and entrepreneurial development have put the Igbo ethnic group in the country, Nigeria (Olutayo, 1999; Chukwuezi, 2001; Ukaegbu, 2003; Igbo, 2006; Agoziuno & Maliga, 2013; Onwuka, 2015; Lady-Franca, 2016; Obi, 2016). In lagos, the Nigerian economic capital, Igbo businesses account for 74% of all investments (Maliga, 2013). The Igbo business enterprises not only improve the economic lives of the Igbo people, but also improve their social lives. This is not to downplay further education, but in fact to say that with the Igbo apprenticeship system, there is indeed an opportunity for anyone who wishes to be an entrepreneur in Igbo land, irrespective of your social and economic background.

Another interesting factor about the Igbo apprenticeship system is that it alleviates the parents of the apprentices who may be underprivileged financially of the enormous responsibilities of having to carter for those children who became apprentices. Anigbogu et al., (2019) observed that the type of apprenticeship system being practiced among the Igbo ethnic group is arranged in such a way that the apprentice resides and serves his or her master for some times, after the master settles the apprentice by setting up a business, and this is done by paying his rent and gifting him or her goods or cash to start his or her business with. With this the parents not only have their child trained in a skill but have their economic trajectory changed for better, if their child leverages the skills, business network, and knowledge he got from his master.

Moreover, there is a positive symbiotic relationship between the apprentice and the master. While the apprentice imbibes training and learning from the master, he adds to the betterment of his master's business. This way, he builds a continuous relationship that exceeds his settlement after his stay with the master. In some cases the master and the apprentices continue a combined business enterprise even after they are settled. This builds a system of continuous wealth creation and recycling of entrepreneurial spirit among the Igbo people of

Nigeria. This idea was best captured by Neuwirth (2017) who described the apprenticeship system as the world's most powerful business incubator platform. The best part is that it does not mind the social or financial background of the individual in question.

It was the Canadian Bandura (1977) who set out to discover a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals acquire knowledge and skills through observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory known as the "Social Learning Theory" shows how and why the apprenticeship system became a necessary and easy way of inspiring young people into the very heart of entrepreneurship by closely observing and imitating their masters. With a keen observation which is the most emphasized aspect of the Igbo apprenticeship system, the mentee not only acquire the skills of doing or selling, but goes on to learn every intricacy, nuances, principles, strategies, and secrets of a trade or profession, hence, becoming a master of the profession he is learning.

There are some very important lessons that apprentices learn from their masters. These skills can be divided into three main categories namely, interpersonal, managerial, and technical skills.

- a. **Interpersonal Skills:** One of the best skills learnt during the Igbo apprenticeship system is interpersonal skill of interaction and communication. Within the apprenticeship, the mentee gathers the business language necessary for relating with everyone necessary for the growth of his business, his master, customers, and other counterparts of his master who become allies and counterparts later in the years, his fellow apprentices, and so on. With these skills he is equipped to manage both customers and suppliers alike.
- b. **Managerial Skills:** The most important skill an apprentice learns is management skill. He can forecast, control inventory with great caution, analyze situations and people as they come, recognize opportunity when they present themselves, and utilizes them as and when due. He also learns leadership, listening, organizational culture, negotiation and even when to initiate or abort business. Another beautiful management skill that he grows into is that of team playing where he is taught how to associate with care to carry everybody along in the business.
- c. **Technical Skills:** It takes technical know-how to learn certain professions and trades as the case may be. Apprenticeship offers one the opportunity to imbibe so many

technical skills including, monitoring, accounting, supply chain management, quality control, bookkeeping, forecasting and so on. These skills equip one for the actual management of personal business when they are settled eventually.

These set of skills are the root of the success of Igbo people round the globe, in manufacturing, real estate, commerce, mercantile trading, ICT equipment, artisanship, film, automotive to mention but a few (Ejo-Orusa, & Mpi, 2019). This testimony of doggedness and commitment to wealth creation and distribution sets the Igbo people aside from others.

There are three major stages or phases of the Igbo Apprenticeship system namely: Talent Identification, Scholarship, and Graduation.

- **Talent Identification and admission stage:** This is the first step towards the Igbo apprenticeship. So many factors set stage for this, it could be the ineptitude of the family of the mentee to help their child further their academic journey, or the lack of interest or zeal of the child to continue with formal education, or sometimes it comes from lack of interest in the child to take up the family established pattern or trade. In this case the parents would be forced to make a deep search for a suitable person in a particular profession or trade to take the child in for a proper training towards his or her profession. Once a suitable ‘Oga’ is identified, a traditional handover ceremony is conducted, and the terms of the apprenticeship are established (Iwara et al., 2019).
- **Scholarship:** With the agreements reached on the terms of the apprenticeship, the child goes with the new master to his abode. One good thing about Igbo apprenticeship is that it incorporates a lot of things including boarding, feeding, health care, as well as the actual training. The mentee automatically becomes a member of his master’s household. Before then, the master spells out for him the basis of living, according to the preferences of his master. This is regarded as induction or initiation into the household. Next, the master takes him around the enterprise locations to begin the actual induction into apprenticeship. This takes about three months. Moreover, the child needs to be careful at this stage as it is a period of testing for compatibility which will show whether the mentee is eager to learn, is resilient and trustworthy and some other necessary factors that will indeed determine a hitch-free training process for the master and the mentee. Irrespective of former agreements, if

the child is unable to show at least two or more of these aforementioned qualities, the scholarship is likely to be terminated and the mentee sent back home to his parents.

The scholarship stage opens the stage for the actual training and on-the-job learning for the mentee. The mentee will be taught a set of necessary business and professional skills besides the art of the profession, like competitiveness, business language, innovative skills, transaction and negotiation processes, customer relationship skills, bargaining strategies, to mention but a few. As the Igbo's understanding of entrepreneurship and business is embedded in the market worldview, where individuals "bargain" themselves in or out of any situation. Hence, the entrepreneurs see every interaction with the customer as an opportunity to bargain for a good outcome. There is equal opportunity for everyone to bargain and everything is subjected to this bargaining process. This philosophy is passed unto the apprentice (Iwara et al., 2019)

- **Graduation (Settlement):** Apprenticeship does not last forever. During the pre-agreement between the parents or guardians, the would-be apprentice, and the would-be master, a time frame is set for the apprenticeship. Upon completion of the training, the mentor offers the mentee capital for a start-up subject to the mentee's efficiency and commitment during the scholarship and the financial capacity of the mentor. This is usually done in the presence of the mentee's people who host a small ceremony to mark the occasion (Iwara et al., 2019).

This becomes the conclusion of the process and opens a wider door for the apprentices to further develop him in the business. Sometimes the mentor and apprentices begin a new form of agreement to work together as a team, but not always. With the years of training, the apprentice is now fully equipped with art and strategies of entrepreneurship. He must have secured adequate drive to penetrate the markets and gently spread his tentacles into a more competitiveness. At the start, the master still serves as a supervisor to monitor his growth and ensure that he is fully established and grounded in the profession or trade. With the passage of time he now becomes a fully independent person ready to take a new apprentice. This ensures that the cycle of entrepreneurship is never broken in Igbo land. The Igbo people refer to it as 'the beautiful cycle'.

IMPACT OF THE IGBO APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM IN IGBO LAND



- **Economic and Social impact:** The impacts or benefits of the Igbo Apprenticeship is enormous, and touches the very balance of the social, economic and general life of both the apprentice and his family. Recall that the major factors that pave way for apprenticeship included the financial impecuniousness of the parents and guardians of the mentee to train him or her further in education. The Igbo apprenticeship therefore acts as a poverty alleviation program for the less privileged of the society to rewrite their stories through their children.
- **Social Impact:** One of the best benefits of Igbo apprenticeship system is social mobility, the ability to offer people from varying background the opportunity to access a high-quality training and employment. This ability to dismantle the barricades between educational employment and social status for people with lesser privilege makes it even more interesting. By arming the apprentices with practical skills, work experience and connection, it ushers them into a new economic world of financial stability irrespective of their background. The resultant effect is that the labor market is filled with a well trained set of people with necessary skills to make even more difference at the long run.
- **Community and personal development:** Another interesting benefit of the Igbo apprenticeship system is that it gives individuals the opportunity for self development. Skills and life qualities such negotiation, bargaining, customer management skills, the art of trading or of a particular profession and so on are all learnt within these years of apprenticeship. With these skills one feels content and worthy in the society. The overall effect is that the society is filled with valuable people with necessary qualities, training and skills; therefore, crime rates are reduced drastically. It is a win-win situation for the parents, the individual, the mentor, and the community as a whole. It used to be an alternative for university education, but currently, so many people have broken the stereotype, believing that it offers a more invaluable practical skills and connection for entrepreneurship than degrees some of the times.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The ultimate aim of this study is to establish how much the economic and social lives of Nigerians can be improved if the Igbo Apprenticeship System is adopted as a social model of training in Nigeria. To do this the study employed qualitative research methodology which included interview and discussion to understand the experience of being an apprentice, and a graduate of apprenticeship. The research used phenomenological methodological approach that explored what it really means to be an apprentice, and how being an apprentice affects the individual and the people around him economically and financially. To do these, three categories of individuals were considered; current apprentices, some who graduated from apprenticeship, and the masters of the apprentices respectively.

An in-depth semi-structured interview and questionnaire were used to gather necessary details concerning the participant's personal experiences with the apprenticeship. Details like their personal stories of their day-to-day lives as apprentices, their perception and understand of apprenticeship and how it affects their personal and social lives, and cognitive and emotional responses to what they experienced or are experiencing. To make it easier due to time constraint, the social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, and X) were employed with a focus on the Igbo people who practice the apprenticeship system predominantly. Igbo-Ville, and Voice of the East were our major focus. This was resultant of Salmons (2017) argument that social media sites provide users with rare opportunities to post content familiar to each other and obtain ideas from a shared interest group. 40 questions were sent across three different markets where Igbo people were prevalent with a selected 150 participants from the Main Market, Onitsha; Relief Market, Onitsha; and Ochanja Main Market respectively. The focus was to understand the lived experiences of the current apprentices, the graduates of the apprenticeship system, and their masters. The study also tried to know how it affects their lives socially and economically, and whether it is a worthwhile experience.

DATA ANALYSIS

Employing the phenomenological research approach was to make the understanding of the Igbo Apprenticeship easier. 150 participants were selected from three different markets of Anambra State, Nigeria, namely, 'Main Market, Ochanja, and Relief Market, all in Onitsha respectively. The questions were focused on four things: a. whether the apprenticeship is necessary (W). b. whether it is capable of affecting the economic trajectory of one's life

economically and socially (N) c. whether it is a necessary part of business success (S). d. whether it should be removed or continued, and if possible be recommended as a model for the whole Nigeria, and Africa as a whole (R).

Same questions were repeated in the social media polls, and the responses were all the same. Their responses were graded from 1-5, where '1' means 'Strongly disagree', '2' means 'Disagree', '3' means 'Not sure whether to agree or not', '4' means 'Agree', and '5' means 'Strongly agree'.

Of the 150 participants, W1=10, W2=5, W3=20, W4=90, W5=25

N1=0, N2=5, N3=50, N4=70, N5=25

S1=40, S2=7, S3=23, S4=9, S5=71

R1=100, R2=10, R3=10, R4=15, R5=5

The results show that over 70% believe that the Igbo Apprenticeship is very necessary, 80% believe it is capable of changing the economic and social trajectory of the apprentices and their families, 35% believe it is not so necessary for business success against 65% who believe it is. Finally, 90% plus, believe it should be recommended and supported by the Nigerian government to help combat youth unemployment, reduce crime, and build a more skillful society. The result of this research is that the Igbo Apprenticeship is so necessary and should be encouraged and supported by the Nigerian government to help alleviate poverty through those who are rich already in the society.

	W	N	S	R
1	10	0	40	100
2	5	5	7	10
3	20	50	23	10
4	90	70	9	15
5	25	25	71	5

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

HOW DOES THE IGBO APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM HELP IN SHAPING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF NIGERIA?

The Igbo apprenticeship system has been one of the best things that ever happened to the Igbo people. Going back to the period after the civil war, this was the saving grace that helped the Igbo people to rebuild themselves from a disastrous war, and pulled as many people as possible out of poverty. In the Igbo culture, the value of labor is paramount. It is not just an end, but a cornerstone of dignity, self-respect, and societal recognition. The Igbo proverb, *Aku ruo uno a mara onye ketara ya (One's true wealth is one's contribution to the community)*, underscores the importance of a good reputation in Igbo society (Okeke & Dimonye, 2024). The above proverb shows why it is necessary for people who have established themselves in different fields of life to give back to their communities by taking some young people, especially those from poor backgrounds to learn and as well establish themselves, thereby pulling their family out of poverty. It affirms the rich communal relationship that exists in the Igbo society. One does not need to come from a rich background, possess certain features, or even be related to the other to be given the opportunity of apprenticeship.

The important question now is, can the Igbo apprenticeship system help reshape the economic dynamics of Nigeria if applied? The answer is yes. Despite the rich human and natural resources abundant in Nigeria, the nation has failed to live up to expectation in almost every ramification possible. Corruption, bigotry, nepotism, racketeering etcetera, have all contributed to the continuous retrogression in the development of the country. Inflation and very low income have all dragged the economy even further down the pit. The average individual cannot feed or take care of him or herself.

Moreover, so many government owned schools are dilapidated and the only hopes of standard education are left in the hands of private individuals, with exorbitant fees, not favorable to the poor. Education in Nigeria seems like a luxury reserved for the rich and politicians. University education seems like one left for the rich families alone, because the average individual can barely train his children further beyond the high schools. According to the World Bank, Nigeria, in 2020, had more than 11 million out-of-school children

between the ages of 6-15. This figure represents 1 in 12 of out-of-school children globally, and 22 percent of children in the age group in Nigeria (Abdulsemiu, 2022).

The resultant effects of this failure to get children educated in Nigeria are glaringly obvious to see, poverty, insecurity, kidnapping, banditry, and a high rate of crime which have all become a common phenomenon in the Nigerian society. For a people who have been failed by the society they pledge to, the next resort is to survive by hook; or by crook, which is a menace to the society. Unwanted pregnancy and child marriage are some of the negative results of the menace of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

In the midst of all these societal defects, the Igbo Apprenticeship system comes as a big remedy that has and will continue to redefine and reshape the paradigm of the economic situation of the country. This study sees the Igbo apprenticeship system as one of the best ways to rewrite the ugly stories of the Nigerian economy. We have seen how it functions as an informal indentured agreement where young individuals gain practical skills and knowledge through hands-on experience within the established business of ‘Oga’(Mentor), seasoned entrepreneurs (Okeke and Dimonye, 2024). With the Igbo apprenticeship, the emphasis on university degrees is reduced and people enter into more practical knowledge that would help transform their lives in a systematic manner as time progresses. The skills and knowledge acquired translate into future value creation as they establish their own business....The system equips individuals with necessary skills and knowledge to lead a satisfying economic life, promoting both material prosperity and a feeling of control and independence (Okeke and Dimonye, 2024).

Finally, beyond the cultural background of the Igbo Apprenticeship System, it is an empowerment scheme for individuals which foster progress in the society. With the practical skills and knowledge acquired during this training the individual is automatically empowered with relevant experience to survive in the society. With this, one of the major problem in the Nigerian society is solved, youth unemployment. Because Igbo apprenticeship offers a wide variety of opportunities to the apprentices, it promotes a culture of independence and creativity, important factors for economic development throughout the country.

ARE THERE NEEDS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE IGBO APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Igbo apprenticeship has raised many millionaires and successful entrepreneurs. This is the reason it is attractive to many young people who consider further education after their secondary education in Nigeria a waste. Earlier studies revealed that young people below 12 are motivated to opt for entrepreneurship apprenticeships because it offers them earlier opportunities to build entrepreneurial skills (Nworah, 2012; Maliga, 2012; & Onwuka, 2015). Because many individuals have been empowered through this entrepreneurship approach, contributing immensely to sustainable livelihood and economic growth, entrepreneurship has been recognized as a significant occupation among the Igbo people (Agoziuno & Anyanike, 2007).

However, despite all the positives around the Igbo apprenticeship, there are still so much room for improvement, to make it even better. The world is evolving, and any system that wants to catch up with the global growth must have to adapt to that upward developmental movement. Indeed, the Igbo apprenticeship system is not left out because it boasts of a huge number of youths in the entrepreneurial world.

Therefore this study recommends the following:

1. **Systematic structure of Training:** Irrespective of the beautiful lessons and takeaways of the Igbo apprenticeship system, the system is still left with no structure of training. The training is almost spontaneously guided by the master's whims which largely depend only on the extent of a master's knowledge. While hands-on experience remains invaluable, incorporating workshops, mentorship programs, or even online courses could provide apprentices with a more structured learning experience (Nnaemeka, 2024).
2. **Education and Apprenticeship can work concomitantly:** Unfortunately, in the mind of the average Igbo person, the apprenticeship is another alternative to formal education and the alternative forgone when you choose to go for apprenticeship is the ability to further your education or at least learn as you train. This study seeks to integrate education with apprenticeship to equip the apprentices with adequate knowledge to

compete in the wider horizon. Education gives one the means to stand his ground in the wider society and the global settings. Unfortunately the Igbo Apprenticeship system seems to de-emphasize education for only the hands-on learning. It is pitiable that majority of the apprenticeship graduates find literacy so difficult that sometimes their wealth are easily manipulated by more educated fellows.

3. **Digitalization:** Even after years of technological advancement, it seems that most businesses and masters that train apprentices enjoy the crude methods of doing things, thereby subjecting some of the young people under them into excruciating training that leaves them with negative mindsets and trauma more than they learn skills. One in ten of apprentices around the country complain of overwork that they are subjected to do. Providing access to modern technological tools not only reduces the burden on the apprentices, but equips them for the digital economy that is in vogue round the globe.
4. **A Collaborative Venture between Government and Private Individuals:** The government can partner with private sectors to restructure and support the apprenticeship program through funding and certification programs. With this the system is made more attractive and improved through a partnership that aims at creating as many entrepreneurs as possible. The government can leverage this to eradicate poverty and create more jobs for the youths. As a result, youth unemployment is tackled and crime rates reduced.
5. **Legal Framework:** The Igbo apprenticeship program starts with an informal agreement between the parents or guardian of the apprentice, the master, and apprentice. Irrespective of these agreements, the system is dotted with a number of unfortunate breaches by either side with no legal framework to protect either side. It is often the case that some apprentices steal from their masters and do all sorts of negative things that is against their initial agreements, on the other hand, the number of apprentices that were rendered useless, maltreated or subjected to slavish treatments, accused falsely of stealing or racketeering and as a result were never settled as the agreement were are triple the amount of apprentices that were treated fairly. This study recommends that a legal framework be incorporated into the Igbo apprenticeship system to protect all sides of the deal from unfair treatments later in the years.

These above recommendations are necessary to reshape and restructure what seems to be one of the best preserved and beneficial systems in Nigeria and indeed, Africa. These recommendations will further make the Igbo apprenticeship meet the global needs and attract

more interest for the development of entrepreneurship, economic boom, and a better livelihood for the Nigerian people.

CONCLUSION

The Igbo Apprenticeship System is recorded as the oldest form of training in the sphere of work and business (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). This practice involved the training of young individuals under the guidance and tutelage of skilled masters to learn practical experience in a trade or profession. This practice became very popular after the events of the civil war of late 60s.

Moreover, it requires an agreement between the parents of a young person, the young person usually boys, and a master, to allow the young individual live and learn on the job with the master. Sometimes there are different connotations and understanding to Igbo apprenticeship system. The first understanding is learning a trade *imu ahia or Igba boy, imu oru*, learning handiwork (carpentry, car or motorcycle repair mechanic, barbing and so on), then *igba odibo*, a helper and sometimes a nanny. These ventures can be trades, enterprises, or vocations and sometimes involve domestic work (Iwara et al., 2019).

The Igbo apprentice was broadly divided into three phases, the talent identification where the agreements and initial observations to test the compatibilities are done. Scholarship is the actual training when the master impacts the mentee with entrepreneurial knowledge and experience through a hands-on training. Here the mentee develops into a full scale professional and is equipped to compete and adapt to the business intricacies and dynamics. Finally, when the apprentice has been confirmed fully trained and up to the agreed time of his stay, he is set free by his masters with support to start his own, or to combine trade with his master.

The Igbo Apprenticeship provides an opportunity that could help reshape the dynamics of Nigerian economy should it be restructured and supported by the Nigerian government. Neuwirth (2017), describes the apprenticeship as the world's most powerful business incubator platform. Rightly so, the Igbo apprentice has helped pull as many poor and less privileged people out of poverty as possible. It does this by nurturing business ideas, and business locations, raising capital for new ventures and starts-up, and transference of practical business knowledge among the Igbo Ethnic group (Alike et al., 2019).

Does the Igbo apprenticeship need improvement? Of course yes. The study recommended that the Igbo apprenticeship system be restructured to be more systematic. There should be a synergy between the Igbo apprenticeship and education to equip and enable apprentices get ready for the wider world. Moreover, the Igbo apprenticeship program should also incorporate modern technological tools to make training better, easier, and modernized to suit the digital era. However, there should be legal agreements between all parties to be able to forestall future breach in agreements by any of the parties. Finally, the government should partner with the private sectors to leverage the apprenticeship to combat youth unemployment and thus reduce crime rates in the country. The Igbo apprenticeship offers a lifeline for reshaping the paradigm of the Nigerian economy that had become so dependent on crude-oil, thereby reducing productivity in the country. With this, independent and creative mindset is built, and men and women of quality created in Nigeria.

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