

Towards an Indigenous Social Inclusion Paradigm: Igbo Apprenticeship System, Poverty Alleviation and Wealth Creation in South-East Nigeria

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This research looked at how the Igbo trade apprenticeship programme has helped lower poverty rates in that region of Nigeria. Five hypotheses were generated to test the potential existence of a causal connection between the independent and dependent variables. Using a survey methodology, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data, which was then evaluated using chi-square tests. The research found that the Igbo trade apprenticeship system contributed to lessening poverty in Nigeria's southeast. According to the results, the method was successful in developing rich Igbo entrepreneurs and businesses, who in turn eradicated hunger, poverty, disease, and unemployment in Nigeria's South East. The study concluded that the Nigerian government might better protect its citizens from exploitation within the Igbo trade apprenticeship system if it passed legislation to regulate, maintain, and prevent such abuse.

Keywords: entrepreneur, Igbo, southeast, poverty, apprentice, legislation

Introduction

Developing human capital and budding entrepreneurs through apprenticeship programmes appears to be a modern best practise. The practise of apprenticeship has always been used to build human capital (Orogbu, Onyезugbe, & Onwuzulike, 2021). The practise of entering into an apprenticeship with a skilled worker and agreeing to learn from them over time is centuries old. There are several forms the apprentice system can take. Apprenticeship can be defined as a system of education in which a person obtains a skilled trade through a formalised system of on-the-job instruction. Training traditionally entailed learning specific information, mastering applicable mechanical skills, and cultivating a suitable mindset or work ethic. Employees learn the theoretical and practical components of a profession, craft, or trade through a blend of on-the-job training and associated technical teaching (Akande, & Orogbu, 2021).

Despite the fact that there are different viewpoints on apprenticeship training, the Igbo ethnic group in southeast Nigeria has been replicating its apprenticeship system in every region of the country where its businesses are headquartered (Anigbogu, Onwuteaka, & Okoli, 2019). The Igbo apprenticeship system has gone

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global, and it appears to have been fuelled by a number of causes. There was the widespread entrepreneurial spirit of the people of the Eastern region before the Nigerian Biafran Civil conflict, and then there was the devastating poverty and malnutrition that followed the conflict. But after the Civil War, the apprenticeship system became one of the most reliable ways to help most families get started financially. According to Anigbogu et al. (2019), Igbo apprentices live with and work for their masters for a set period of time, after which the master “sets him up in business” by covering the apprentice’s rent for two or three years and providing a cash infusion so that the apprentice can begin trading. The term “locally generated venture capital” describes this source of financing. Several researchers (Anigbogu et al., 2019), the Igbo apprenticeship system, which controls the growth of their entrepreneurship, has been called the largest business incubation platform in the world by analysts.

Despite Nigeria’s rich people and material resources, the country’s rising unemployment rate and worsening poverty have prompted this research. Because of the social and economic damage they cause, the alarmingly high poverty rate and the high unemployment rate that goes along with it have become a major policy concern for the public, stakeholders, and the government in Nigeria today. Suicide bombing, hostage-taking, abduction and kidnapping, militancy, armed robbery, prostitution, banditry, human and drug trafficking, and countless more crimes have flourished in this climate of joblessness and poverty. The percentage of the Nigerian population living in extreme poverty has risen from 54.7% in 2004 to 79% in 2018 (NBS, 2018), with over 100 million people today surviving on less than \$1 USD per day. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that Nigeria’s human development index (HDI) is 0.453, which is much lower than the global weighted average of 0.7.

According to the literature, the Nigerian government is working hard to combat unemployment and poverty by encouraging the growth of small and medium-sized businesses across the country as part of a variety of poverty alleviation initiatives. However, most of the enterprises failed during the first five years of operation, suggesting that the fail was missing some essential ingredient to their success. This points to a high business mortality rate, which is bad news for the company’s chances of survival. However, as Orogbu et al. (2021), Nzewi and Onyima (2013) point out, the Igbo apprenticeship model gives the apprentice a unique chance to raise business start-up capital while simultaneously learning valuable business skills and gaining valuable work experience. Financial mentoring and lessons on budgeting are also a part of the apprenticeship programme (Onyima, Nzewi, & Obiekezie, 2017). Therefore, an empirical examination into the connection between apprenticeship training and poverty reduction among Igbo traders is necessary because it is uncertain whether or not these infrequent chances are included into the Igbo apprentice paradigm. This study is essential because of the gravity of the issues of poverty and unemployment that are now posing an existential danger to Nigeria. As a result, the goal of this study is to examine the relationship between apprenticeship programmes and the alleviation of poverty among Igbo traders in Nigeria’s Southeast.

Statement of the Problem

A fresh interest in undertaking empirical research on apprenticeship and entrepreneurial development in Nigeria has arisen in response to the increasing rates of business mortality, poverty, and unemployment in the country. With a rise from 54.7% in 2004 to 79% in 2018 (NBS, 2018), more than 100 million Nigerians are now considered to be living in extreme poverty on less than US \$17 a day. Since petroleum subsidies were recently eliminated, the situation has exacerbated, resulting in unthinkable hardship for the public. According to Anigbogu, and Okoli (2019), various apprenticeship and skill acquisition programmes targeted at the growth of Small and

Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) have been established by successive governments in Nigeria over the past four decades. The poverty rate is still one of the highest in the world, second only to India, and the unemployment rate is also rather high despite all the efforts that have been made. It would appear that small and medium-sized businesses owned by people of South-eastern Nigerian ancestry fare better than those held by people of other Nigerian ancestries. According to the available literature, the Igbo trading community's apprenticeship system is crucial to the growth and stability of businesses owned by Igbo people. Several factors have been identified as crucial to the long-term success of Igbo traders' businesses: access to start-up capital, apprenticeships that teach practical business skills, prolonged apprenticeships that help businesses grow and consolidate, mentoring programmes focused on sustainability, and the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset. An empirical study of this sort is needed because it is unclear how much of a role these factors play in the long-term success of Igbo merchants' businesses.

Objectives of the Study

This study's overarching objective is to investigate the Igbo trade apprenticeship system and poverty reduction in the South East of Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the extent to which venture capital has reduced destitution in South East Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which business skills have contributed to the reduction of poverty in South East Nigeria.
3. Determine the extent to which apprenticeship duration has influenced the reduction of poverty in South East Nigeria.
4. Determine the extent to which mentoring has contributed to the reduction of poverty in South East Nigeria.
5. Evaluate the extent to which the development of an entrepreneurial mindset contributed to the reduction of poverty in South East Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. Has start-up capital influenced poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria?
2. Do business skills contribute to poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria?
3. How has tenure of apprenticeship influenced poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria?
4. Has mentoring helped in poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria?
5. How has development of entrepreneur mind-set brought about poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis were formulated for the study:

- H₀₁: Start-up capital has no significant influences on poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria
 H₀₂: Business skills have no significant contribution to poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria
 H₀₃: Tenure of apprenticeship has no significant influences on poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria
 H₀₄: Mentoring has no significant influence on poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria
 H₀₅: Development of entrepreneurship mind-set has not significantly brought about poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Significance of Study

The investigation focused on the Igbo trade apprenticeship in Nigeria's south-eastern state.

The research will generate actionable suggestions for enhancing the Igbo apprenticeship system as practiced in the south-eastern states of Nigeria.

As the findings of this study will be added to the extant literature on the subject, it is also applicable to scholars and researchers who may be interested in conducting additional research on the Igbo apprenticeship system.

Government agencies are not excluded. The findings of this study will assist the ministry of commerce, trade, and industry in refining its numerous productivity-enhancing policies and programmes.

Numerous managers and entrepreneurs of Nigeria's numerous small and medium-sized enterprises would find this study to be of great value. The study will enlighten them on more effective methods for fostering the growth and development of their employees.

The study would benefit apprentices across the states by highlighting the importance of diverse Igbo apprenticeship systems to the overall development of individual skills. The study's findings will inspire individuals to enhance their abilities.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is typically defined as a work-based learning model in which Masters (mentors) provide on-the-job training to young people (servants, also known as Odibo, or Nwa boyi in Igbo land) over a set period of time in order to better prepare the servants (apprentices) for future career paths in various occupations. The term "apprenticeship" now encompasses a wider range of activities than it once did. Currently, it is understood to be a paradigm of work-based learning pursued by people of all ages with the end goal of enhancing their employability. Despite apprenticeships' historical association with the building and trades industries, they are increasingly commonplace in all areas of the economy, including healthcare, information technology, banking, manufacturing, insurance, transportation, and logistics (apprentice Illinois, 2019).

In the United States of America, apprentices work alongside experienced professionals and learn on the job. Apprentices who successfully finish the programme earn a certificate that is recognised by employers. "Any system by which an employer undertakes by contract to employ a young person and to train him (or her) or have him (or her) trained systematically for a trade for a period, the duration of which has been fixed in advance, and during which the apprentice is required to work in the employer's service", as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Start-Up Capital and Survival Rate of Igbo Businesses in South East, Nigeria

Nnonyelu and Nyeizugbe (2020) coined the term "cash infusion" to describe the practise of providing a fixed sum of money to an individual or community in order to boost their standard of living. According to Obaeko, Ekene, and Netshandama (2019), once an Igbo apprentice finishes their training, the mentor helps them set up shop. Since an apprentice's master is intended to place him in a business incubation platform that enables the models to aid the communities in flourishing from the ground up, Onyeizugbe (2015) praised the Igbo apprenticeship system as the largest in the world.

Entrepreneurial development, as defined by Nnonyelu and Onyeizugbe (2020), is the process through which ambitious people who want to start their own businesses are inspired to take advantage of chances presented to them. Highly driven people are an inspiration to those around them; they show them the way to success in

business and help them find the best way forward. As a result, the Igbo apprenticeship system has shown that developing an entrepreneurial spirit is impossible without an inflow of capital, which in turn affects the success rates of these enterprises.

Mentoring and Survival Rate of Igbo Businesses in South East, Nigeria

An individual receives mentoring when two people work together to help another person take charge of their own learning so that they can reach their full potential, acquire new skills, and improve their performance. This is according to a definition of mentoring provided by Okorie and Okwo (2014). When two people work together in a similar setting and develop a mutually respectful and trusting connection, the result is a mentoring relationship. The mentor directs the mentee towards appropriate resources for resolving issues and builds the mentee's self-assurance by asking probing questions. Mentors don't just leave their proteges to figure things out on their own; they actively raise their mentees' levels of self-awareness through instruction and support.

A mentor's role is one of supervision rather than command and control. The mentor's primary roles are those of cheerleader, teacher, and enabler. The goal of mentoring is to help the protégé construct a successful business by increasing the likelihood that it will continue to operate. In a perfectly competitive industry, this tactic is occasionally used by the mentor entrepreneur to gain a foothold in the sector while simultaneously delving deeper and broadening the scope of their innovation. It is mutually beneficial for mentors and mentees when the former sets up a tiny, innovation-based extension for the latter to manage under tight supervision. Mentors grow their businesses with the help of their mentees, who gain knowledge and experience and are compensated at the end of the contract. Since mentees often go on to become mentors themselves and absorb their own mentees, the cycle never ends.

Types of Igbo trade Apprenticeship System

The Igba-Boyi (serving) and Imu-Ahia (learning) apprenticeship systems are the two most common types found in studies of the Igbo people and their culture. Through oral transmission, ImuAhia/Boyi has become an important component of the cultural history of Nigeria's eastern region. The desire of the Igbo people to recapture their lost future gave rise to the Imu-Ahia Igbo Apprenticeship System. People were always under pressure to find new sources of income as a result of resource scarcity. Small-scale trade and farming were essentially the only options for reviving devastated communities, with the latter requiring resources and time that were just not readily available. The vast majority of people went into some form of commercial activity.

Simple and effective, the Imu-Ahia/Igba Boyi approach entailed local business owners providing shelter and employment to younger males of the same gender and age group from the same area in exchange for mentoring and training. Once the Nwa boyi (the person who learnt the skill) had completed the required training—which may take anywhere from five to eight years—a brief graduation ceremony would be held. Nwa boyi would get paid up front for their services, and then use the money to start a business.

The Igba boyi: The Igbo apprenticeship system depicted here is one in which the apprentice of a given skill or craft lives with the master of that trade or craft, with the approval of both sets of parents. The master acts in place of the parents and is responsible for the well-being of the apprentice, who is nevertheless expected to tend to his primary duties at home, in the workshop, or on the factory floor.

Imu-Ahia: Igbo apprenticeship, or Imu-Ahia, is a system of training that is common not just in Nigeria's east but everywhere that such training is carried out. Apprentices in this system are not expected to move in with their mentors. Therefore, such students must pay a predetermined sum of money as compensation for the

knowledge he must gain in a predetermined amount of time. Under this system, students are held accountable for the company's operations during their designated "resumption time" and regular business hours. When an earner demonstrates proficiency on par with that of the master, the master does not reward them monetarily but rather with a certificate of service completion.

The Origin of Igbo in Nigeria

According to Kanu (2019), the Igbos live in a territory stretching from Benin to Igala and Cross River to the Niger Delta, yet they are a single people despite their dispersed and fractured nature. They share a common language (Igbo) with varying dialects that are easily understood by one another. A Supreme Being called Chukwu or Chineke is central to their religion. According to Kanu (2019), two competing explanations for where the Igbo people originally came from have developed. According to a theory put forth in *Igwbuike economics* by (Kanu, 2019), the Igbo emigrated from five northern centres located in the Western Sahara, the Chadian Centre, the Nok Centre, and Egypt and northern Africa. The states of Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi, as well as parts of Delta, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, and Rivers, make up Igboland, as described by Nzewi and Onyima (2013) and mentioned by Kanu (2019). The Igbo are one of Nigeria's three most populous ethnic groupings, with an estimated 40 million people (Kanu, 2019) according to (Iwara, et al., 2019).

The Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System in Nigeria

The Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System (ITAS) is a time-bound, ad hoc curriculum designed to help aspiring business owners learn a particular skill. As a result, people were forced into self-employment rather than relying on wage jobs, in which earnings were highly dependent on having ready access to physical resources. It was thought that the apprenticeship model's strength lay in its ability to pass on conventional skills from one generation to the next, but its weakness lay in its inability to provide the groundwork for innovation.

However, the Nigerian Biafran War of 1967-1970 led to the resurgence and widespread use of the apprenticeship system in Nigeria. Many parents, especially those of Igbo heritage, were forced to put their children between the ages of 12 and 20 into apprenticeships after the war since they had nowhere else to turn financially. A trading apprenticeship typically lasts between four and seven years, during which time the apprentice works for and is educated by the master. The agreement usually specifies the method of resolution to be used. After being calmed by their teachers, many apprentices went on to achieve great success. They were able to learn about running a business and developing a work ethic, and they were able to network with other professionals, all of which contributed to this success (Onyima et al., 2013). Those who struggled academically were often counselled to find a "master" to serve in order to learn a trade or a skill. The indigenous people of the region give these ideas the names "Igba-odibo" and "Imu-Oru Aka" (Nkemdili, 2020).

Igbos have proven themselves to be the best candidates to instruct students in the field of international commerce thanks to their creation and automation of this ITAS (Onwuka, 2015). The ITAS has long moulded the Igbo business community's collective IQ in terms of what it takes to be successful in the marketplace. The Igbo social construction of reality, the Igbo philosophy of resilience, and the Igbo think-home ideology all play significant roles in shaping the Igbo apprenticeship system. According to the authors (Iwara, Amaechi, & Netshadama, 2019), Igbo business is still vital to the Nigerian economy (Odili, Adim, & Kerema, 2020). According to Iwara et al. (2019), the Igbos have been described as naturally entrepreneurial, and their business operations have put them ahead of other ethnic groups in the country.

The standard of living has increased in parts of Nigeria where Igbo businesspeople and merchants are

particularly prominent. Okorie and Okwo (2014) The Igbos foster economic development and long-term security by means of their unique entrepreneurial apprenticeship model. As a result of their competitive nature and economic acumen, many of them have moved away from their traditional stronghold in southeast Nigeria and set up shop in other regions of the country and the world (Okorie and Okwo, 2014).

How Igbo Apprenticeship is Done

The apprentice in an Igbo apprenticeship typically moves away from his family to be trained by the master of his chosen profession. Five to seven years is a common estimate. This trainee and their mentor may be romantically involved. He could be his brother, cousin, or even a more remote relative. The apprentice could be a friend's child or the kid of a mutual acquaintance. It is common practise for the apprentice to hail from the same metropolitan area as the master (Ekekwe, 2022).

The apprentice is often not allowed to spend the holidays with his family, even if they are in the same city, unless his master gives special permission. The enslavement of the apprentice is total because the master has absolute power over him.

He must get his master's affairs in order before he arrives. Without uncertainty, he will finish his master's assignments. His duties go beyond the realm of business. The apprentice should help out around the house. He will be submissive to the master's wife and help about the house by doing chores like cleaning, fetching water, and even cooking. In exchange for the apprentice's services, the master provides the trainee with shelter, utilities, and transportation to and from work. The trainer is liable for the welfare of the trainee if the latter falls ill.

Apprentices are judged on their behaviour both in and out of the master's home as well as their work in the business.

When the apprentice's time with the master is up, the master gives him money to start his own business. Some mentors even go so far as to rent and stock shops for their most promising students. Some kind masters may supply goods for their ex-apprentices to help them get their feet off the ground when they go out on their own.

How the Igbo Apprenticeship System Reduced Poverty in South East, Nigeria

Means to Escape Hardship

Young people whose families cannot afford college or trade school often turn to apprenticeships as a means of evading poverty. Although the practise is rapidly declining as boys now refer to attending school, those remaining engaged in buying and selling continue to employ this approach to acquire enough money for schooling.

Helps to Reduce Unemployment

The Igbo have a strong belief that laziness will lead to one's demise. You must work or perish from hunger. Many young people today, in order to make ends meet, have had to learn new trades including trading, mechanics, and bricklaying. Apprenticeship programmes require even college grads who can't obtain professional jobs to acquire practical skills. After finishing an apprenticeship, a person doesn't have to sit around waiting for a job offer; they can start their own company.

Providing Funding for Business Start-up

The Igbo apprenticeship system saves young people the trouble of raising money to get their businesses off the ground. If he works hard for his master for a few years, he will have enough money to start his own business.

Builds Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Mindset

Because it prepares its apprentices to run successful businesses, the Igbo apprenticeship system serves as a model for effective mentoring. The apprentice is taught everything he needs to know about running a business by his mentor. He'll learn to think like an entrepreneur, one who isn't dependent on the state for survival. Many of Ndigbo's multimillionaires and billionaires credit their success to their upbringing and mindset.

Some apprentices manage their master's company with little to no oversight, and this is common knowledge. This teaches them that the success of their master is ultimately their own. This is why servants labour so hard: not just to win over their masters' approval, but also to take credit for his or her achievements.

Fear of Karma

The Ndigbo believe in karma and act accordingly. Apprentices worry that if they ruin their master's business, they would be punished in the same way. Because of this anxiety, they work tirelessly to secure the success of their master's business, so that when "their turn" comes, they will too enjoy commercial success.

The not-settling-apprentices stigma can be passed down through the generations, making no master happy. Fear of the apprentice's "chi" hurting the master's business after years of service is sufficient motivation for the master to keep to the rules, even if he or she would otherwise risk the wrath of the people back home if they broke them. The Igbo value spiritual guidance over material compensation in this case.

Theoretical Review

The research is grounded in the theories of cognitive apprenticeship, social learning, cognitive development, and modelling.

The First Is the Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation

In 1991, Schumpeter presented his now-famous innovation theory of entrepreneurship. He theorised that new ideas were the single most crucial component of successful entrepreneurship. He held the view that ingenuity was crucial for business success in today's cutthroat marketplace. He believed development to be an ongoing procedure that called for the modification of numerous product inputs, outputs, markets, and industrial structures.

He had the view that an innovative entrepreneur could break the economy out of its cyclical pattern and lead it to a whole new level of progress. The disequilibrium that results from the entrepreneur's activity is one in which the usual cyclical flow has been broken. According to him, the inventions of business owners are what really drive a country's rapid economic progress. He theorised that the emergence of novel ideas, methods, and products owed much to the emphasis placed on entrepreneurship in school curricula.

The Second Is the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory

It was proposed by Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989). The theory places a premium on the master-apprentice relationship and the value of the training process. Masters of a talent sometimes overlook the implicit processes required to achieve difficult skills when coaching beginners. The theory lays bare these unspoken procedures, allowing students to watch their masters perform them and then try them out on their own. As a result, the idea suggests that apprenticeship programmes should centre on teaching methods that emphasise observation, imitation, and modelling.

The Third Was by Albert Bandura's (1997)

In his theory of modelling, he argued that in order for a learner to successfully model, he or she must pay attention, be able to understand and remember what is being taught, have a strong desire to improve, and duplicate the desired skill with high precision. The theory of social learning is advocated by Bandura (1997); this is a

school of thought that proposes people can pick up social norms by emulating the actions of others around them. It also claims that learning is a mental operation that takes place in a group setting and that it is not limited to either observation or teaching.

Vygotsky's Cognitive Development Theory

Vygotsky (1934) proposed that social interaction is crucial to brain development. The theory encompasses ideas like the zone of proximal development, culturally unique instruments, and the relationship between language and mind. Important to a child's mental growth are the following three ideas:

Individuals learn and develop within the context of their function in the community. Language is the root of culture.

Fifth, mentees can learn how to apply cognitive models to real-world situations through cognitive apprenticeship. The apprentice learns the skill by observing the master perform it and by hearing the master discuss in detail what they are doing and thinking while they perform it. The apprentice tries to mimic the master's actions as the master instructs and monitors. Coaching aids the apprentice just when they need it most, at a point where they would otherwise struggle to learn on their own. According to Vygotsky (1978), fostering development inside this zone results in the most rapid growth. He called it the Zone of Proximal Development. Through further modelling, corrected comments, and reminders, the mentorship process is meant to bring the apprentice's performance closer to that of the master. With practise, the master provides less and less feedback and guidance to the apprentice until the latter's performance closely matches that of the master Johnson (OECD, 2018).

Empirical Review

Ezeajughu (2021) looked into how Igbo men felt about apprenticeship and company expansion in southeast Nigeria. Thanks to an apprenticeship programme known as Igba-boyi or Nwa-boyi, which is by far the most established and active entrepreneurship promotion vehicle in Nigeria, people from this ethnic group have dominated and have continued to excel above their contemporaries from other ethnic groups in the nation and abroad. The particular causes, circumstances, and skills that are the Igbo people's improving socioeconomic performance are examined in this study. The paper asserts that the Igbo people's economic ideals and culture, which are firmly embedded in their beliefs and practices, are what contribute to their corporate success.

The Anambra state Igbo apprenticeship plan was examined by Okeke and Osang in 2021. In the sense that it was, is, and will be, it has potential. The seed money and mentorship offered to the apprentices at the end of their indenture-ships are the main forces behind the program's ability to generate jobs in the state. But it looks that the plan's efficiency is dwindling. Since informal workplaces and trading locations are distributed across the state, the study used an observational methodology to investigate the perceived weakening of the system. The study discovered that young men's unwillingness to take over their fathers' enterprises, study programmes that will support their growth, and the apprentices' wilful theft of their master's money were the main causes of the scheme's efficacy drop. In order to support the tradition of company sustainability being passed down from generation to generation, the study advised young males to focus on family enterprises. The masters and the potential apprentices should engage into a written contract rather than an informal one in order to protect the scheme's objective to create jobs.

According to Ejo-Orusa's analysis of reinventing the "Nwa-boyi" Apprenticeship system as a platform for entrepreneurship promotion in Nigeria in 2019, it is by far the most well-established and active entrepreneurship

promotion vehicle in Nigeria and it significantly contributes to the growth and development of micro, small, and medium-sized businesses. The Nwa-boyi Apprenticeship system is a viable platform for promoting entrepreneurship in Nigeria, according to the research, because it has the potential to significantly increase the level of entrepreneurial metabolism and to accelerate the rate and pace of new venture formation.

Adesola (2019) looked on the practice of compensation-tied apprenticeships and employment creation among Ibo businessmen in the state of Osun. The majority of people trained under this type of compensation-tied apprenticeship remained in the industry they learnt in, according to the study's findings (92%, as opposed to 24% of those trained under other types of apprenticeship). Compensation-tied apprenticeships were demonstrated to have a p-value of (0.0001) as opposed to 0.00062 due to their superior reliability and viability in lowering unemployment rates in the research area. The study concludes that apprenticeship schemes with a pay component will reduce unemployment in Nigeria if given adequate consideration.

Fajobi, Olatujoye, Amusa, and Adedoyin sought to understand the importance of apprenticeship training to development in Nigeria, the reasons for the decline in apprenticeship development, and the effects of apprenticeship on young people's careers in their 2017 study. The study made use of both the Parson functional requirement postulate and the Modernization theory to improve our understanding of the subject. The study's findings demonstrated that the Nigerian economy cannot expand unless young people are encouraged to pursue apprenticeships.

Anigbogu, Onwuteaka, and Okoli (2019) looked into the views of Igbo men in southeast Nigeria towards apprenticeships and company expansion. According to the results of the regression, the three coefficients (Igbo man perspectives of factors influencing entrepreneurial development, Igbo man challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system, and Igbo entrepreneurs' motivations for apprenticeship) all have a sizable impact on the entrepreneurial development of southeast Nigeria. The research recommends that the government of Nigeria and, by extension, Africa, embrace the Igbo man apprenticeship system and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria as a strategy for the growth of African entrepreneurship. This is due, among other things, to its longevity in the development of SMEs and the decline in poverty among the Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Emejulu, Idigo, and Onyekwelu (2020) looked at the causes of the decrease of this Southeast trend and suggested solutions. Both the concept of apprenticeship and the unique Igbo apprenticeship system were looked into. It was also examined how apprenticeships aid in skill development and employment creation. A survey research design was employed in this investigation. The study focuses on Southeast Nigeria and examines five of its states. 500 people inhabited it. The data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire. The analysis of the data was strictly descriptive, using a mean and frequency combination. The study came to the conclusion that it is crucial to encourage young people to consider apprenticeships as a viable career option in light of the record unemployment rates that have been experienced in Nigeria as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak.

In order to understand the reasons behind the Igbo youths in Southeast Nigeria's general fall in interest in apprenticeship, Nkemdili (2020) studies the practice and direction of Igbo apprenticeship. The results indicate that the much-discussed Igbo apprenticeship is experiencing significant challenges. A number of factors have combined to demarket Igbo apprenticeship, making it less appealing to young people who are jobless. This has severe implications for reducing poverty, wealth generation, and youth unemployment.

Adoga and Ohajinu investigated Igbo apprenticeship systems based on the Theory of Experimental Learning (TEL) in 2021 to see if they might increase the effectiveness of entrepreneurial education and practices in Nigeria

and other emerging economies. The proposed improved IAS increases the number of firm start-ups, significantly reduces the rate of start-up failures, and ultimately enhances regional and national economic development. These arguments are supported by growing empirical data in entrepreneurial education and practises, grounded theory of learning (Experimental Learning Theory), and verifiable proof of the socioeconomic effects of the IAS among Igbo ethnic groupings.

Research Method

Surveys were a part of this study's methodology. Because it encourages detailed responses from respondents (Masters and Apprentices from the business organisation), this approach is well-suited to this study's exploration of the relationship between the Igbo trade apprenticeship system and economic growth in Nigeria's southeast. It also helps the researcher collect relevant information.

The population of this study consists of 27,500 Masters and Apprentices working for businesses in the south-eastern United States. The researcher used a simple percentage to get an accurate count of business groups' masters and apprentices in south-eastern Nigeria.

The study's sample size was 393 persons, determined using the Taro Yamane method, and the researcher used a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale to collect data. There are five possible responses: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree, and uncertain. A value of 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 was assigned to each choice.

Five specialists in the field provided feedback on the study equipment, and their recommendations, comments, and observations were documented carefully. The final instrument's reliability estimate was checked by evaluating its consistency. To that end, we distributed 45 copies to the Masters and 55 copies to the Apprentices of various enterprises in southeast Nigeria.

Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the data and record the responses. It was found that the instrument is largely reliable because the test had a reliability of 90% for the variables. Of the 393 questionnaires sent out, 346 were filled out and returned.

Descriptive statistics and Chi-Square tests were used to examine the data. The acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses determined the selection of the variable. If the calculated value is larger than the critical value, then the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted if and only if the t-value is smaller than the significance level, in this case 0.05. Hypotheses were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval.

Data Presentation

Out of the 393 questionnaires that were delivered to the study's participants, 346 copies were returned, suggesting an 88% response rate or 88 participants who were interested in the study. The personal data was analysed using simple percentages, while the study questions and hypotheses were analysed using Chi-Square techniques.

Table 1

Response Rate

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Masters of businesses	160	46
Apprentices	186	54
Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

The above table shows that Masters of businesses have 160 (46%) response rates while the Apprentices have 186 (54%) response rates.

Table 2

Sex of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	186	54
Female	160	46
Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

The table above shows that male respondents are 186 (54%) while the female respondents are 160 (46%). It revealed that female respondents are less than the number of male respondents.

Table 3

Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
SSCE	70	20
OND/NCE	90	26
HND/B.Sc	110	32
M.Sc/MBA/Ph.D	76	22
Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

As indicated in the table above, the respondents with SSCE qualifications are 70 (20%), those with OND/NCE are 90 (26%), respondents with HND/B.Sc. are 110 (32%) while those with M.Sc/MBA/Ph.D are 76 (22%). Indicating that respondents with HND/B.Sc. qualification are more than the rest of the categories.

Table 4

Work Experience of Respondents

Work experience	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 yrs.	90	26
5-10 yrs.	75	22
10-15 yrs.	110	32
Above 15 yrs.	71	20
Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

The above table indicates that respondents with less than 5 years' work experience is 90 (26%), 5-10 years

are 75 (22%), 10-15 years are 110 (32%) and those above 15 years are 71 (20%). Thus, indicates that respondent with 10-15 years of work experience are more in number.

Table 5

Respondents' View on Start-Up Capital and Reduction of Poverty in South East, Nigeria

S/N	Options	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly agree	100	29
	Agree	85	25
	Disagree	76	22
	Strongly disagree	60	17
	Undecided	25	7
	Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

As the table above shows that 100 (29%) of the respondents agreed strongly that start-up capital has reduced poverty in south east, Nigeria, those in agree category are 85 (25%), 76 (22%) are in disagree, 60 (17%) are those that strongly disagreed, while 25 (7%) of the respondents remained undecided.

Table 6

Respondents' Opinion on Business Skills and Reduction of Poverty in South East, Nigeria

S/N	Options	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly agree	95	27
	Agree	85	25
	Disagree	70	20
	Strongly disagree	66	19
	Undecided	30	9
	Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

As revealed by the above table 95 (27%) of the respondents agreed strongly that business skills have reduced poverty in south east, Nigeria, 85 (25%) agreed, 70 (20%) disagree, 66 (19%) disagreed strongly, 30 (9%) remained undecided.

Table 7

Respondents' View on the Tenure of Apprentice and Poverty Reduction in South East, Nigeria

S/N	Options	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly agree	100	29
	Agree	75	22
	Disagree	70	20
	Strongly disagree	65	19
	Undecided	36	10
	Total	346	100

Source: Researchers' field survey 2023.

The above table reveals that one hundred (29%) of respondents firmly agreed that tenure of apprentice has reduced poverty in the south east of Nigeria. 75 (22%) were in agreement, 70 (20%) were opposed, 65 (19%) were vehemently opposed, and 36 (10%) were undecided.

Table 8

Respondent's View on Mentoring and Poverty Reduction in South East, Nigeria

S/N	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly agree	100	29
2	Agree	75	22
3	Disagree	70	20
4	Strongly disagree	68	19
5	Undecided	33	10
	Total	346	100

Source: Researcher's computation (2023).

From the above table 100 (29%) of the respondents strongly agreed that mentoring has reduced poverty in South East, Nigeria 75 (22%) agreed 70 (20%) disagreed, 68 (19%) strongly disagreed and 33 (10%) remained undecided.

Table 9

Respondents Opinion on the Development of Entrepreneurship Mind-Set and Poverty Reduction in South East, Nigeria

S/N	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly agree	95	27
2	Agree	85	25
3	Disagree	70	20
4	Strongly disagree	66	19
5	Undecided	30	9
	Total	346	100

Source: Researcher's Computation (2023).

The table above revealed that 95 (27%) of the respondents strongly agreed that development of entrepreneurship mind-set has reduced poverty in South East, Nigeria, 85 (25%) agreed, 70 (20%) disagreed 66 (19%) strongly disagreed and 30 (9%) remained undecided.

Test of Hypothesis

Chi-squares techniques was used in order to ascertain the validity and reliability of outcome of the research.

Test of Hypothesis One

H_{0i} : Start-up capital has no significant influence on poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Table 10

Expected and Observed Frequencies Applying the X^2 Distribution

Observed frequency O_i	Expected frequency E_i	Deviations ($O_i - E_i$)	Deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ²	Weighted deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ² / E_i
100	69.2	30.8	949	14
85	69.2	15.8	250	4
76	69.2	6.8	46	0.66
60	69.2	-9.2	85	1.23
25	69.2	-44.2	1954	28
346			X^2O	47.89

At level of significant 0.05 and $n - 1$, $df = 5 - 1 = 4$;

X^2 critical from table = 9.49.

Decision Rule.

Since the calculated t – value (X^2O) 47.89 is greater than critical t – value 9.49, null hypothesis H_{01} is rejected and accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion is that start-up capital has reduced poverty in South East, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : Business skills have no significant contribution to poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Table 11

Expected and Observed Frequencies Applying the X^2 Distribution

Observed frequency O_i	Expected frequency E_i	Deviations ($O_i - E_i$)	Deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ²	Weighted deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ² / E_i
95	69.2	25.8	666	9.6
85	69.2	15.5	240	3.5
70	69.2	0.8	0.64	0.009
66	69.2	-3.2	10	0.14
30	69.2	-39.2	1537	22
346			X^2O	35.24

At level of significance 0.05 and $n-1$ $df = 5 - 1$;

X^2 critical from table = 9.49.

Decision rule.

Since the calculated t – value (X^2O) 35.24 is greater than critical t – value 9.49, null hypothesis is rejected and accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion is that business skill has reduced poverty in South East, Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses Three

H_{03} : Tenure of apprenticeship has no significance influences on poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Table 12

Expected and Observed Frequencies Applying the X^2 Distribution

Observed frequency O_i	Expected frequency E_i	Deviations ($O_i - E_i$)	Deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ²	Weighted deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ² / E_i
100	69.2	30.8	949	14
75	69.2	5.8	33.64	0.486
70	69.2	0.8	0.64	0.009
65	69.2	-4.2	17.64	0.255
36	69.2	-33.2	1102.24	15.9
346			X^2	30.65

At level of significance 0.05 and $n - 1$, $df = 5 - 1 = 4$;

X^2 critical from table = 9.49.

Decision rule.

Since the calculated t – value (X^2O) 30.65 is greater than critical t – value 9.49, null hypothesis is rejected and accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion is that tenure of apprenticeship has reduced

poverty in South East, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Four

H_{04} : Mentoring has no significant influence on poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Table 13

Expected and Observed Frequencies Applying the X^2 Distribution

Observed frequency O_i	Expected frequency E_i	Deviations ($O_i - E_i$)	Deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ²	Weighted deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ² / E_i
100	69.2	30.8	949	14
75	69.2	5.8	33.64	0.486
70	69.2	0.8	0.64	0.409
68	69.2	-1.2	1.44	0.0208
33	69.2	-36.2	1310.44	18.93
346			X^2	33.85

At level of significant 0.05 and $n - 1$, $df = 5 - 1 = 4$;

X^2 critical from table = 9.49.

Decision rule.

Since the calculated t – value (X^2O) 33.85 is greater than critical t – value 9.49, null hypothesis is rejected and accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion is that mentoring has reduced poverty in South East, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Five

H_{05} : Development of entrepreneurship mind-set has not significantly brought about poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Table 14

Expected and Observed Frequencies Applying the X^2 Distribution

Observed frequency O_i	Expected frequency E_i	Deviations ($O_i - E_i$)	Deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ²	Weighted deviation squared ($O_i - E_i$) ² / E_i
95	69.2	25.8	666	9.62
83	69.2	13.8	190.44	2.75
70	69.2	0.8	0.64	0.009
66	69.2	-3.2	10.24	0.147
30	69.2	-39.2	1536.64	22.20
346			X^2	34.72

At level of significance 0.05 and $n - 1$, $df = 5 - 1 = 4$;

X^2 critical from table = 9.49.

Decision rule.

Since the calculated t – value (X^2O) 34.72 is greater than critical t – value 9.49, null hypothesis is rejected and accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion is that development of entrepreneurship mind-set has not significantly brought about poverty reduction in South East, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The research examined the effectiveness of the Igbo trade apprenticeship system in reducing poverty in

South East Nigeria. The first of five hypotheses tested shows that funding for new ventures has a considerable impact on reducing poverty in South East Nigeria. This indicates that start-up investment has reduced poverty levels in South East Nigeria.

Apprenticeship and social capital are two factors that Onyima, Nzewi, and Obiekezie (2017) found to have a significant impact on the success of new businesses started by Igbo immigrants in Wukari, Taraba State. This result agrees with what they found. Furthermore, a lack of start-up money hinders the establishment of new enterprises, and in the long run, apprentices lack the requisite entrepreneurial skills and talents, as stated by Anigbogu, Onwuteaka, and Okoli (2019).

The second hypothesis was supported by the data, which found a positive and direct relationship between business acumen and poverty alleviation in South East Nigeria. Results from a survey conducted by Obaeko, Ekene, and Netshandama (2019) indicate that business competency positively affects success in South East Nigeria. This is consistent with what they found. According to Nzewi, and Onyima (2013) research, most of the employees at the small businesses he surveyed in South East Nigeria had just a secondary degree or less and had acquired their skill through an apprenticeship.

Results from testing the third hypothesis suggest that the length of an apprenticeship is positively related to lessening poverty in South East Nigeria. Business acumen among the Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria grows in tandem with the duration of their apprenticeships. Keppa and Vuuran's (2019) remark that the ability to bear failure is a necessary entrepreneurial virtue is supported by these findings. They pointed out that this quality helps businesses succeed because it fosters risk-taking, which leads to new ideas and innovations from entrepreneurs and, if controlled, leads to increased profits and expansion.

The findings of this study also supported hypothesis four, which found a positive and direct link between mentorship and the alleviation of poverty in South East Nigeria. Odili, Adim, and Keremah's (2020) study on the long-term viability of Port-Harcourt's deposit money institutions finds that mentoring initiatives are crucial to their continued success.

The fifth hypothesis was supported by data, indicating that an entrepreneurial attitude is positively associated with reducing poverty in South East Nigeria. This assertion accords with Nkemdili's (2020) examination of Igbo apprenticeship practise and duration, which seeks to identify the root causes of waning interest in apprenticeship among Igbo youth in South East Nigeria. Several factors have combined to demarket Igbo apprenticeship, which has dire consequences for youth unemployment, weak creation, and poverty reduction, as shown by the data.

Conclusion

This research looked into the relationship between the Igbo trade apprenticeship system and economic development in south-eastern Nigeria. The findings proved that it is a miracle cure for boosting economies. This approach is straightforward, long-lasting, and sustainable; it also offers the apprentice with seed money to kick off the new enterprise smoothly. The Igbo people of Nigeria's south east have used this technique to deal with the devastation caused by the country's civil war, therefore it must have some merit. The elimination of poverty, disease, and famine in Igbo land was made possible by the creation of successful Igbo traders and entrepreneurs. The trainee now possesses fundamental, long-lasting business skills thanks to the programme. Apprentices who, upon completion of their training and after relocating, start their own businesses help bring the unemployment rate down. This strategy helps apprentices develop the cultural intelligence necessary to succeed in any setting by teaching them the ins and outs of dealing with cultural and legal difficulties that may arise in the course of

doing business.

The research team hopes to answer the question of whether or not the chronic issues of youth poverty, unemployment, and all forms of insurgency can be solved by bolstering these human-platforms.

Recommendations

This research looked into the relationship between the Igbo trade apprenticeship system and economic development in south-eastern Nigeria. The findings proved that it is a miracle cure for boosting economies. This approach is straightforward, long-lasting, and sustainable; it also offers the apprentice with seed money to kick off the new enterprise smoothly. The Igbo people of Nigeria's south east have used this technique to deal with the devastation caused by the country's civil war, therefore it must have some merit. The elimination of poverty, disease, and famine in Igbo land was made possible by the creation of successful Igbo traders and entrepreneurs. The trainee now possesses fundamental, long-lasting business skills thanks to the programme. Apprentices who, upon finishing school and settling down, launch their own businesses. The study's authors conclude that the Nigerian government can better control and safeguard the Igbo trade apprenticeship system if it strengthens and standardises it through legislation and appropriate regulations.

After completing their apprenticeships, the Igbo business owners in Nigeria should receive support from the federal government. The number of people living in poverty will diminish dramatically as a result of this, and so will the number of businesses that fail.

If developing countries want to bring about social transformation through entrepreneurship, they should adopt the Igbo business model and apprenticeship culture. If the country is to remain sustainable, the government must also create policies and initiatives that encourage businessmen to mentor the next generation of entrepreneurs. This strategy helps apprentices develop the cultural intelligence necessary to succeed in any setting by teaching them the ins and outs of dealing with cultural and legal difficulties that may arise in the course of doing business.

The research team hopes to answer the question of whether or not the chronic issues of youth poverty, unemployment, and all forms of insurgency can be solved by bolstering these human-platforms.

Contribution to Knowledge

Considering the results of this study, it can be said that this work has made a significant contribution to knowledge by examining apprenticeship in relation to poverty reduction in south east Nigeria while modelling business kills, apprentice tenure, mentoring, start-up capital, and development of entrepreneur mind set as independent variables.

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