

The Igbo Apprenticeship model: A panacea for start-up failures in Nigeria

Ngozi C. J. Ukwueze

Department of English and Literary Studies University of Nigeria Nsukka

ABSTRACT

Much has been said about the uniqueness of the Igbo Apprenticeship system popularly called *Imu -Ahia*, which literally translates to 'to learn market /trade. It has been considered as perhaps, one of the major factors that helped pull majority of South -Eastern families out of poverty within 30 months of the Biafran Civil. There have also been the calls for a restructuring and mainstreaming of the apprenticeship system in accordance with the contemporary realities of business finding, processes and training. Learning a trade has always been the norm with the Igbo people of South -East Nigeria. An Igbo person believes in controlling his financial 'density 'and the best way to guarantee this was through commerce and venture into business. However, the end of the civil war and the harsh 20 pounds policy of Nigeria government made the adoption of the system invariable as poverty hampered business funding.

Keywords: Igbo, Apprenticeship, failures, Nigeria

A brief comparison

A brief comparison with the apprenticeship system in the south -west (predominantly Yoruba) region reveals an interesting divergence [1,2,3]. Here the apprentice, upon completion of their apprenticeship pays the master a 'freedom fee ' buys drinks and stage a party according to his /her financial abilities before they can graduate and get on with their trade officially [4,5,6]. The period of apprenticeship is usually 2-3 years on the average. The apprentice is usually presented with a certificate. The apprentice does not necessarily live under the case of his /her boss and is responsible for his /her own feeding in most cases [7,8]. Conversely, in the Igbo apprenticeship model is a departure from the above. Apprentices, leaves their parents / family to live under the care and supervision of the master. The apprentice is often closely related to the master. They do not travel home during festivities to their family without the

consent of the master even if the master and their family are in the same city [9]. Igbo apprentices also do other domestic chores in the house like washing cars, ironing and cleaning whenever they are not in shop. They are appraised based on not just work ethic while learning and growing the masters businesses but on performance in non - business related areas like respect for the masters spouse /family etc. At the end of the apprenticeship they are compensated with a take off fund which they use for shop rent, goods, equipment (if needed) and in some cases, accommodation for a given period of time [10]. This does not in any way present collaboration with the master despite being a competitor. In fact, in some cases due to the apprentice's weak buying power, a master can assist with goods procurement for apprentice to help them reduce overhead importation /exportation cost [11].

Critical success factors

You may wonder the reason for the high success rates of the 'Imu Ahia ' system despite the absence of structures and

processes seed Rounds , Equity splits Venture Capital and so on. First, as awkward as it may seem, apprentices

www.idosr.org

avoid the malicious use of the master's resources as it is believed that such actions could inhibit success in their own future business [12]. This fear engenders honesty during the years of service as every proven act of theft, diversion of fund and flamboyant use and wastage of business finances terminates the arrangement. There are cases of apprentices managing a business branch with little or no supervision. This ownership mindset that the success of the business is also theirs in the long run encourages them to commit enough sweat equity into it [12]. Second, no master would want to incur the wrath of the community back home, by failing to

Consideration for start-ups

The master always considers the apprentices that have suffered with him, by giving them substantial amount of money and in some cases they allow them to still leave in their houses, monitor their daily activities to make sure they are still on the right track. Some will even go a long way as to give goods on credit and also refer some customers to their shops for greater patronages. Looking at the Igbo apprenticeship model as a Panacea for Start-up failures in Nigeria [14]. In 2019, the failure rate of start-ups was around 90%. Research concludes that 21.5% of start-ups fail in the first year, 30% in the second year, 50% in the fifth year, and 70% in their 10th year. Ways to avoid failures is by Nigerians going into entrepreneurship the Igbo way which has survived and is still surviving till date. We have so many reasons why businesses fail. Business failure is not new in any part of the world. However the Igbo goes a long way in making sure things are avoided. For instance weak Team and poor leadership. Will never leave their own hanging and this is worthy of

- Little or no phobia for death through high level of commitment
- The choice of business with long term period of payback on investment capital
- No Optimism on future business growth and aversion of fear concerning business mortality.
- Establishment of business in a hash business environment.

Ukwueze

adhere to the terms of apprenticeship after the agreed number of years of service. No master will like to be seen as someone with a reputation of not settling apprentices. It is a tag that lasts forever and the fear of the apprentice's 'Chi' (a person's personal deity in Igbo traditional religion) affecting the master's fortune for not keeping their own side of the agreement after years of service. This informs the reason behind accepting a small settlement package given with the master's blessings rather than a big but grudgingly -given one. To the Igbo people, the 'Imuahia relationship is spiritual before being financial [13].

emulation [15]. The master will give out financial help to his or her apprentice and will equally stay in touch with him or her without seeing him or her as a rival in the business but as a team mate, thereby making sure that things are moving well. Nigerian youths in entrepreneurship need this type of encouragement from the government. They need take off grants and monitoring which is one of the ways the Igbos were able to pull through all these years. Another factor to be considered about the Igbos is what is called Igbo high risk taking phenomenon. Igbos are the most fearless ethnic group in Nigeria, who sees risk as a means of exploring opportunities. They do businesses under very hash environment where there are no well planned city arrangement that can make business less stressful, convenient with full functional infrastructure [16]. The type of risk that would have paralyzed an average entrepreneur is their set-up opportunity. Igbo risk taking phenomenon can be viewed from the following outlines

- Uncertainty about loss of capital if business process failed.
- Impatience to invest without minding the future fall in the value of naira.

The secret of this ethnic group in Nigeria is embedded in their ability to take risk transform it into opportunities, and this has often led to their business success in the economy. It is quite glaring that the Igbos have so much attributes and factors that keeps them in business [17]. The

- Ability to cope in a dynamic environment
- Ability to organize, reorganize and forecast
- Ability to delegate responsibility
- Ability to utilize business opportunities
- Apprenticeship training
- Energetic and hardworking spirit.
- Courage
- Confidence
- Critical thinking
- Curiosity to learn
- Creative and innovative skill
- Determination
- Independence
- Optimism
- Perseverance
- Risk transformation skill.

The Igbo are known to be very successful in their lines of businesses because of their effectiveness in business management Among the Igbo, wealth is determined through a number of things such as : the development projects lunched in one's community as the Igbo saying goes "Azure ruoUlo, O kwuoebe O Si ". (developmental projects declare one wealthy) - and how many opportunities one coaches or trained in his community, as Igbo is aggressively command rather than individualistic wealth, therefore, is only a means of acquiring social prestige among the Igbo people. That is why, business success is not hidden away among the Igbo entrepreneurs believe that success in their businesses is not a choice but a must [8]. Circumstances like poor background and illiteracy are not limiting factors but a reason and strength of success. Successfulness connotes effectiveness : effective entrepreneurs are successful. Business success is defined as

Igbos have recorded successes in their various ventures across Nigerian rejoin and borders in the derecent times. Central to the attainment of these successes is the high level of solidarity amongst them. Some of the observed business factors in the Igbo businesses are

the ability to choose an appropriate object to achieve a given business objective. There is need to have a systematic, well planned sensitization program that is geared towards promoting apprenticeship as a tool to making themselves employable in the labour market particularly in the light of the shrinking of government revenue owing to the dwindling oil revenue. The Nigerian Directorate of Employment, and it's parents ministry- the Ministry of labour, Employment and productivity should focus on this sensitization programme. There is need to involve other stakeholders in this narrative, and making apprenticeship attractive to the members of the organized private sector (OPS), manufacturers Association of Nigerian (MAN) Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA). Market traders Association Trade Union and Cooperative Societies etc. Utilizing the

different social media devices as well as traditional communication tool should be

very effective.

Challenges of Entrepreneurs in Nigeria Business Environment

Due to Nigeria economic and political voodoo, most entrepreneurs or face some challenges. These challenges are highlighted and briefly discussed below.

1. Financial challenge

Fund accessibility obviously constitutes a confronting problem for translating business idea and plans in Nigeria business environment. Financial institutions in Nigeria either make funds unavailable for would be entrepreneurs or scare them away by way of capital. This cold attitude may be attributed to uncertainty concerning the future of businesses and it's resultant and debt from mortality some entrepreneurs have no property to mortgage, and therefore source for fund through:

- Contributions from friends and family .
- Personal savings through paid jobs and or gift
- Loans from non - financial institutions (group, local savings, cooperative societies, etc.)
- Deferred payment (debt owed to be paid later in the future)
- Contributions from churches and mosques (help from religious organizations)

2. Power Supply Challenge

If an entrepreneur must operate a business in Nigeria without bottleneck, then he/she must devise means of generating a power supply. Most multi -national firms in Nigeria have mini power plants as an alternative to avoid the embarrassment of power failure that can hinder production process or service delivery. Small

business firms with limited financial strength face dooms due to persistent failure of this power supply.

3. Transportation Challenge

The major means of transportation in Nigeria are by road, sea, rail and air. Most firms restrict their business activities (of supplying raw materials and finished goods to their target market) to transport by road within the locality due to its cheap nature. One militating factor against this choice of transportation is usually the condition of Nigerian roads. This poor road network has been problematic for the application of just -in-time delivery. This makes the intelligent entrepreneurs today to locate their business.

- near raw business
- near producers and consumers market
- near labourmarket
- in the urban and not the rural settlement

4. Security Challenge

In Nigeria today, insecurity is a critical bone of contention, and this creates tensions concerning the lives of businesses and business owners. But amble experiences of some entrepreneurs relocating their businesses have shown that not all the parts of the northern Nigeria may be lucrative, but highly risky. Security Challenges in Nigeria may span beyond terrorist activities and include:

- Financial insecurity (fraud perpetuated by hackers called yahoo yahoo and by fraudsters called 419)
- Robbery attacks
- Employee Crime (arson, destruction of properties etc.
- Threat to life of entrepreneur

- The dark aspect of justice (in Nigeria, justice is fair, but justice is as dark as charcoal)
- Government ill-support
Obviously, the contributory negligence of the government concerning the growth of SME and the economy is on the high side. Little attention is often rapture with artificial lips, and there are almost daily commitment by the sweet words of the mouth concerning business well being in Nigeria. Funny enough Nigeria most know footballers will always want to retire to politics and not entrepreneurship. It is observed also that being a successful entrepreneur nationwide will premise on your ability to incorporate business with politics. SMEs face:
 - High taxation
 - Frivolous levies and duties
 - Disturbance from government agencies
(Corporate Affair Commission, Standard Organization of Nigeria, National Agency for food and Drugs Administration control etc.)Nigeria comprises of three major ethnic groups, Igbo, Hausa in the North and Yoruba in the West. Of all these ethnic groups Igbos are distinguished with a unique trait which can holistically serve as a solution tool for the dynamic economic situation of developing nations of the world [9]. This set of people is cultured particularly in the area of business. There was a prior conception that most Igbo business Veterans acquired their business skill from their past colonial masters. It was also argued that the post civil war placed an agony of survival before them, which forced the rich and prominent ones among them to conceive investment of their little

Ukwueze money for returns. The Igbo culture taught the Igbos that no condition is permanent. No wonder the Igbos are self contented and self-reliant. The Igbos of Nigeria are African's most energetic and most entrepreneurial people. And this is obvious to other ethnic groups. However, they are risk-takers and intelligent entrepreneurs who are committed in totality to economic activities as their lineage hobby. The Igbo entrepreneurs play inevitable roles that are capable of proliferating healthy state for the Nigeria economy for a distant time in a nutshell, their entrepreneurial activities have indisputably dominated and are still dominating all sectors of the economy of Nigeria, and even across the border. It will be unnecessary to distinguish the roles of the Igbo entrepreneurship from the conventional roles of entrepreneurship around the world, in the development axis in particular. The roles of entrepreneurship in the development of any nation is as follows [10].

- It enhances job creation and reduces crime.
- It enhances structural change in business and society.
- It embraces provision of resources to large firms.
- It prompts creation of new technology
- It provides practical applications for students
- It utilizes resources
- It contributes to regional growth and development.
- Rural-urban migration comfort ability through their transportation business
- It increases the standard of living.

- Contribution to the country's

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian economy have suffered inequality in the ways in which the government concerns are been channeled towards a single means. Undoubtedly the contributions of entrepreneurs towards the economy of Nigeria are immeasurable. Igbos are the people of southeast Nigeria, who have demonstrated a distinguishing and unique trait among other groups in Nigeria. The Igbo business culture and entrepreneurship are essential drives for the nations economy. The Igbo entrepreneurial activities in recent times it is commendable effort towards

improving the living standard and reduced unemployment from the urban to the rural settings. The judicious utilization of the scarce economic resources by the Igbos, Nigeria has recorded a fairly stable economic climate. Igbo business success and entrepreneurial activities have contributed greatly to the development and growth of the nations economy. Therefore, the Igbo entrepreneurial activities are the panacea for the Nigerian development and economic growth.

REFERENCES

1. A.Harriett. Sievers, Construction of Belonging to Igbo communities and the Nigerian state in the Twentieth century, Rochester: University of Rochester press 2006.
2. A.Vareto, "Apprenticeship: What you need to know ",NursMang, vol.24,no 7 pp-26_37,2017.
3. Apprentice (2020). In Merriam-Webster.com.retrieved April 22, 2020,from <https://www.Merriamwebster.com/dictionary/apprentice>.
4. C.Achebe, There Was A Country: A Personal History Of Biafra USA, Pearson 2021.
5. C.G.E. Salami, "Entrepreneurship and Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: The Missing Link Global Journal of Management and Business Research, vol.2 no 5 pp21-26,2011.
6. D.Anthony, Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity power and violence in Nigeria city, 1966-1986, Oxford: James Cunrey,2002.
7. D.F Lancy, "First you must master pain: The nature and purpose of apprenticeship ",Anthropology of Work Review, vol.33,no 2 pp 113-126 2012.
8. D.Lee."Apprenticeship in England: An Overview of current issues", Higher Education, Skills and-based Learning, vol.2 no.3, pp 225-239, 2012.
9. Delivery TVET through quality Apprenticeship Born, Germany: UNESCO-UNEVOC, International Center for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 2015.
10. N.M.Ile. Entrepreneurship Development: The NigeriaPerspective.Enugu, Chiezugo Ventures 2003.
11. S.Maliga, Igbos Dominates Economically in Lagos Because YorubasAre Lazy. October 11,2013 Available at elobah.com.

12. U.Nworah, Culture and Igbo Business Practices. Sahara Reporters, 2011, Available at: Saharareporters.com/article/culture-igbo-business-practices.
13. O.B. Olutayo. The Igbo Entrepreneur In the Political Economy of Nigeria, African Study monographs vol.20 no3 1999.
14. A.P.Onu and AJC. Onu. An Assessment of the contribution of small Business from To The Development vol.7No1, 2009.
15. B.C .Onuoha, Small Business Management and Entrepreneurship, 2nd Edition, Port Harcourt, African Entrepreneurship and leadership initiative, 2010.
16. K J Sunday, Effective WorkingCapitalManagement vol.6 No9. 2011.
17. C.Udegbe The Igbo's Have More At State in Nigeria, Vanguard July 26,2013.Available at www.vanguard.com.2013/07. The Igbos-have - more at - in -Nigeria/.