



IGBA Odibo and Sustainable Business in South East, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The research on "Igba Odibo and sustainable business in South East, Nigeria", provide an insight into how the apprenticeship system in the South East has contributed to sustainable business development and thereby create wealth. The objectives of the study are to investigate the relationship between the mentoring and business development. And the relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquired by apprentices and business sustainability. The population of the study was 9806 was sourced from 15 markets in Abia, Anambra and Imo State market union registers. Taro Yamane formula was used to estimate the sample size (384) and simple random and criterions-based sampling techniques to pick the respondents from the population. 384 questionnaire was distributed to the respondents and 276 was returned and used for analyses. Descriptive statistic and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient statistical tool was applied with the use of Software Package for Social Science (SPSS) to test the hypotheses. In conclusion, Igba Odibo is the core of apprenticeship system in the South East. The researchers recommend that, youth mentoring should start at a very young age and entrepreneurs training should be practical oriented.

Keywords: Igba Odibo, Sustainable development, Mentoring, Business Development, entrepreneurial skills, apprentices, business sustainability.

Introduction

"Igba Odibo", this literally means "to serve the master" in Igbo Language is one of the primary methods most Igbo families used to lift themselves out of absolute poverty in the years after the Nigerian civil war (Kanu, 2020). According to Alike and Orjiakur-Umunze (2019) the learner of a particular trade or craft must move in with the master with an agreement between the master and the learner's parents or guardian. In loco parentis the master takes full responsibility of the learner and the learner is expected to carry-out his primary duties in the house and in the shop or industry (Mokyr, 2018). The master will settle the learner at the end of the agreed time and when the apprentice graduates from apprenticeship he is as good as the master (Kanu, 2020).

Igba Odibo or Nwa Boyi refers to someone being trained in buying and selling or marketing concepts (Obunike 2016). It is a process whereby a family gives out their children to live and serve the wealthy ones in the society. Through services, they gain knowledge and skill for life-long earning. The Igba Odibo is a kind of Igbo Apprenticeship System and different from "Imu Ahia". In Igba Odibo, the apprentices after learning the trade for 2 to 3years, he stays back and use the knowledge and skill gained to serve the master for an additional period may be 4 to 5years after which the master give him share of the profit. The system of Igba Odibo have the apprentices staying longer with the masters because is a combination of the learning period and serving period (Learning Period 3years plus Serving Period 5years = 8years).

Imu Ahia, this means to "learn trade", the apprentice pays the master a certain sum of money (apprenticeship fee) to learn the art, trade or business for a given period and usually between 6 months to 4 years, depending on the trade and the IQ of the apprentice. The apprentice paid for the skills acquired over a given period (Alike and Orjiakur-Umunze 2019). This model is mainly for those with capital to invest in a business but lack the knowledge of the trade. They are not under the direct supervision of a master, but who is just there to learn the business. In this model, the funding is not provided by the master but the apprentices sort for capital from his relations, loan etc. to start-up his business. Limited mentorship is provided in this model.

Iwara, Amaechi and Netshandama (2019), identified three key players in the Igba Odibo model, which are First is the parents/guidance who help identify their children's entrepreneurship ambition and provide capacity building such as identifying suitable mentor for skills training. Secondly is that the child who indicates interest of entrepreneurs and accept to pursue the career. Thirdly is a potential mentor/entrepreneur who takes the child/mentee through the journey of entrepreneurship career part and in the end provide capacity support for them to start an enterprise and become a mentor.

The story of Igba Odibo is changing and the system is regarded as something designed for the poor, and alternatives for those that can't get formal education (drop out) hence is becoming unpopular in the southeast (Fajobi, et.al 2017). A visit to the major market in the southeast, there exist a big gap from what is obtainable in the 90's and now, the duties and responsibilities of the Nwa Odibo is now been carried out by sales girls and cashiers (Nonyolu and Onyeizugba, 2020). The markets used to be flooded by Nwa Odibo, performing various tasks, such as; going to banks, visiting suppliers, attending to customers etc, these tasks are now given to sales girls/boys and cashiers for salaries at month end. This current trend is slowly destroying the wealth creation possibilities of the Igbo Apprenticeship System, and the commitment from the apprentices to the success of their master trade is declining.

Therefore, the researcher embarked on the study to:

- i. To investigate the relationship between the mentoring and business development.
- ii. To investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquired by apprentices and business sustainability.

The following hypothesis was formulated:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between mentoring and business development.

HO₂: Entrepreneurial skills do not have significant relationship with business sustainability.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Mentoring

Gabadeen and Raimi (2012) views mentors as individuals that shares their inspirations and experiences, and enthusiasm towards successful performance of tasks by apprentice. This justifies that an apprentice is able to gain significant insight from numerous mentors through apprenticeship. A study by Onuoha and Uahunoma (2019) supports that mentoring helps to provide access to wider array of ideas, values and thoughts. Hence, mentoring an apprentice lies in identifying mentors early, promoting continuous engagement of mentors, and effective involvement of mentors in collective planning and implementation of training/learning towards achievement of apprenticeship goals. Okadi et al. (2020) suggests that both on-the-job and off-the-job training requires planning and have to be structured to meet the learning needs of apprentice based on the earlier need assessment. To sustain training, there is need for close facilitation and support to ensure effective application of theory in workplace for improved performance of apprentice.

In apprenticeship, mentoring involves relationship between mentor and mentee and this enhance high rate of retention of apprentice after completion of apprenticeship. Mentoring programme helps to increase apprentice opportunity to acquire the needed skills. Adeyeye, Falola, Waribo and Akinbode (2015) notes that effective mentoring scheme offers the opportunity for apprentice to learn and grow under the guidance of the mentor and have creative ideas through experimenting, problem solving skills and supportive environment to be efficient and effective in a chosen task. In a given training, it is important for mentors to break down a particular skill or method of working for it to be understood by apprentice. This will enable deep understanding of working practices on the way things are done, and why work is automated. The importance of the analysis enables apprentice to be adapted with efficiency and improvement. Mentoring enables the provision of support to individuals sharing similar experience. A mentor serves as guide to apprentice and provide them relevant advice on their future career.

Entrepreneurial Skills

Apprenticeship is an experience building process that allows the apprentice to learn and relearn while on the job. This process allows the individual involved in the apprenticeship process to learn from the experience of the teacher/master and also learn from his or her mistakes while on the job. This form of learning therefore provides hands-on skills and abilities that prepare the individual to be more capable of independent replication. This explains how several generations of successful entrepreneurs were created in pre-colonial times.

In pre-colonial times, entrepreneurship was intrinsic to the Nigerian society. It was the way people were prepared for life. Entrepreneurial skills were passed down from one generation to the next through apprenticeship. It was thus a natural inclination for individuals. Colonialism cum industrialisation brought the advent of formal schooling, which was intended to prepare students for paid employment. The instituted educational system thus provided a pipeline that led to jobs and thus instilled a job-seeking orientation. Over time, people gradually transited from learning a skill or trade with which to earn a living, to going to school with the aim of getting a paid job. Consequently, with time, apprenticeship and entrepreneurship became less common as an ordinary way of life, as more people embraced salaried jobs. Most of those who went through the system and attempted entrepreneurship failed, because they were not adequately prepared for it. Their training was better suited for waged employment.

Business Sustainability

The World Council for Economic Development (WCED) defines sustainability development; as the development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainability is an approach to creating true and real value to the systems and resources upon which that value depends on. Taking this further, Business Sustainability can be said to be a process of analysis and decision-making across business functions, obtained through a committed and clear understanding of transitions that may occur in the present or the future.

This means that a business practices sustainability when it holds a multi-dimensional view of its operations and its stakeholders, while positioning itself to thrive now and. In doing so, the business manages its triple bottom line, namely profit, people and planet (Paul, Jose & Maria, 2018).

Business sustainability is based on the principles of sustainable development – considering the three pillars of profit, people and planet; which are enabled by long-term thinking and resilience planning. Business sustainability or green business is a business practices that advocate for businesses to use little resources to meet their needs over a long period. Business should be able to avoid wastage of resources and maintain profitable relationship with the environment in which they operate (Ann-Kristin 2017). For wealth to be created, it must be sustained over time. The Igbo Apprenticeship System has been sustained over time, from generation to generation.

Business Development

Business development is the creation of long-term value for an organization from customers, markets, and relationships.

- i. Long-Term Value: First, what do I mean by “long-term value?” In its simplest form, “value” is cash, money, the lifeblood of any business (but it can also be access, prestige, or anything else a company seeks in order to grow). And there are plenty of ways to make a quick buck for you or your company. But business development is not about get-rich-quick schemes and I-win-you-lose tactics that create value that’s gone tomorrow as easily as it came today. It’s about creating opportunities for that value to persist over the long-term, to keep the floodgates open so that value can flow indefinitely. Thinking about business development as a means to creating long-term value is the only true way to succeed in consistently growing an organization.
- ii. Customers: The “customers” portion of the definition may be slightly more obvious – customers pay the bills. They are the people who pay you for your products and services, and without them you won’t have any business to develop. But not everyone is a natural customer for your business. Maybe your product doesn’t have the features I’m looking for. Maybe your product is perfect, but I don’t even know your company sells it. Or maybe you’re not reaching me because you’re not knocking on my door.
- iii. Markets: That’s because customers “live” in specific markets. One way to understand markets is by geography - if I only focus on selling in the U.S. but you reside in London, then you are currently unavailable to me as a customer as I do not currently reach the European market. But customers also “live” in markets that are defined by their demographics, lifestyles, and buying mindset. Identifying opportunities to reach new customers by entering into new markets is one important gateway to unlocking long-term value.
- iv. Relationships: And then there were “relationships.” Just as the planets and stars rely on gravity to keep them in orbit, any successful business development effort relies on an underlying foundation of strong relationships. Building, managing, and leveraging relationships that are based on trust, respect, and a mutual appreciation of each other’s value is fundamental to enabling the flow of value for the long-term. Relationships with partners, customers, employees, the press, etc. are all critical to the success of any business development effort and as such they demand a bold-faced spot in any comprehensive definition of the term.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Institutional Theory

The study adopted the institutional theory propounded by Douglass C. North in 1990. Institutional theory focuses on the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping economic behaviour and outcomes. In South East Nigeria, the apprenticeship system operates within a set of established norms, rules, and informal institutions. These institutions provide a framework for the apprenticeship system to function effectively and contribute to wealth creation. They include apprenticeship agreements, customary practices, community support networks, and mechanisms for dispute resolution. By conforming to these institutional arrangements, apprentices and master can ensure a stable and productive apprenticeship experience, leading to wealth creation.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Eneh, Chris-Nnamchi, and Otiji (unknown), study on “the effectiveness of the Igbo apprenticeship system in achieving sustainable business education” aim at determined the relationship between the system and successful business start-ups. Also, establishing the extent to which the system ensures business networking among the traders in the markets in Nigeria and establish the extent to which the system assures the raising of initial capital for business start-ups and sustainability of businesses. The survey was carried out on the 20 major markets in the Nigeria, 110 questionnaires were shared at the markets in the course of the study. Finally, the study confirmed that there is a significant relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and; successful business start-ups, business networking among traders, raising of initial capital for business and business sustainability.

Ifeanyi, Onwuchekwa and Dimgba (2020); study on “re-engineering apprenticeship scheme for economic sustainability in industrial areas of South East of Nigeria: post-civil war experience”, examined apprenticeship scheme and economic sustainability in industrial areas of South East of Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to evaluate how apprenticeship scheme influenced employment generation after civil war in South East of Nigeria, identify problems affecting apprenticeship scheme and ascertain ways apprenticeship scheme could be re-engineered in the South-East of Nigeria. Survey research design was used, and Convenience sampling method was used because the population is infinite. Questionnaire was used to elicit information from 140 business operators in Aba, Nnewi and Onitsha, as the industrial cities in South East before and after the civil war, who undergone apprenticeship scheme before establishing their own business. The data were analysed using mean, percentage and simple regression at 5% level of significance. The result revealed that Successful business start-up by apprentice generated employment for people over a long period of time in the South East after civil war. Apprenticeship scheme in the recent times lacked; involvement of labour representative in the apprenticeship agreement, written agreement under the watch of a labour officer; and opportunity to further education as well as apprentice physiological and social well-being. The study concluded that apprenticeship scheme provided employment after civil war in South East of Nigeria over a long period of time; notwithstanding, apprenticeship scheme faces a lot of problems in the recent times. Thus, to re-engineer apprenticeship scheme in South East, the study recommended that labour laws that would persecute the defaulting master(s) or servant(s) in the contract of apprenticeship scheme have to be established, apprentices have to be given educational

opportunity while in apprenticeship scheme; and apprenticeship scheme has to be covered with an effective contract agreement under the supervision of a labour officer.

Adeyeye et al. (2015); work is on “the effects of apprenticeship system on skill development of employees in the printing industry in Lagos State, Nigeria.” Their examined the contribution of apprenticeship system to skill development in the printing sector of the Nigerian economy. A descriptive research method (Structural Equation Model (AMOS 22)) was applied to analyse five hundred and sixty- four (564) copies of valid questionnaire completed by employees of printing establishments in ten major geographical locations within Lagos metropolis using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The results obtained from the survey shows closed relationship between observed variables and also regression between the dependent and independent constructs of the study. The results from the survey indicate that apprenticeship system has positive significant impacts on employees’ skill development in informal sector and in particular in printing industry. This suggests that training tools, on-the-job training, level of education, mentor-mentee relationships and observability, have significant effects on employee skill acquisition and development.

Emejulu, Idigo and Onyekwelu (2020), studied “apprenticeship system, an eroding culture with potential for economic anarchy: a focus on Southeast Nigeria.” apprenticeship system has over the years helped in employment generation and improvement of the living standard of the Igbo people in the past, but the interest in the scheme appears to be dying, thereby necessitating this study to examine the causes of this dying trend in Southeast and proffer solutions. The concept of apprenticeship was examined, along with the unique Igbo apprenticeship system. Also, the role of apprenticeship in skill acquisition and job creation was examined. This study adopted a survey research design. The study area is southeast Nigeria, with the study covering five states of the region. The population was 500. The source of data for the study was a structured questionnaire. The method of data analysis was purely descriptive; using a combination of mean and frequencies. The study concluded that the unprecedented unemployment statistics in Nigeria can only get worse in the aftermath of the Corona virus pandemic, and therefore the need to encourage youths to embrace apprenticeship as a viable way forward. Among others, the study recommended that the government should partner private organizations for a public-private arrangement to create more modern apprenticeship centres suited for the 21st-century economy.

Olubisi (2018) concentrated on identifying the indigenous Igbo apprenticeship trades in Ibadan. The trainees for the research were chosen using a proportional stratified selection procedure. 35 tailors were asked to fill out questionnaires. For data analysis, the researcher used frequency distribution, mean, and chi-square statistics. The study's chi-square results found no significant difference in respondents' opinions about the effects of indigenous Igbo apprenticeship on technical education in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, at $p > 0.05$. According to the findings, indigenous Igbo apprenticeship training would assist youngsters in developing interests and marketable talents that they may use in productive activities for the benefit of themselves, their parents, and their communities. As a result, the study suggests that the leading trades in Ibadan, Oyo State, be sufficiently promoted and rejuvenated.

Udechukwu and Essien (2020) looked into some of the ways for strengthening the Igbo apprenticeship training program. The study was directed by three research questions and three hypotheses. The study used a descriptive survey design. Purposive sampling was used to choose a sample of 280 respondents from a total population of 2450. The study questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while the hypotheses were tested using the t-test at 0.05alpha levels. The findings indicated that there is no significant difference in trainees' and instructors' mean replies on the roles, limits, and methods for enhancing Igbo apprenticeship training in River's state. Based on the findings, it was suggested, among other things, that workshops and seminars be held to teach apprentices on how to start their own business after graduation. Their main focus should be on how to plan a personal business, the role of human and public relations in the development of a personal business, and the appropriate use of earnings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used descriptive sample survey, with the population of 9806 masters selected from 15 markets in Abia, Anambra and Imo state using simple random and criteria-based sampling techniques was used to select the sample from the population. Taro Yamane formula was used to estimate the sample size of 384. Questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument, interview was used and data was collected from secondary sources such as textbooks, journals etc. 384 questionnaire was distributed and 276 questionnaire was returned as valid and used for analyses. The reliability of the questionnaire was done using Cronbach's alpha. Results of Cronbach's alpha showed that Mentoring 93.7%, Entrepreneurial Skills has 90.2%, Business Development as 84.2%, and Business Sustainability has 87.1%, and all these above results show that data is acceptable and reliable for further statistical analysis and after running the Validity analysis in SPSS we get results that explain no value has been lower than 0.7 so they are conversion on their variables.

Descriptive statistical tools were used in analysing the data collected from the questionnaire and for test hypotheses; Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to ascertain the nature of relationship that exist between the dependent variables and the independent variables.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between mentoring and business development.

H_{A1}: There is significant relationship between mentoring and business development.

**Correlation is significant at 0.05level (2-tailed)

Table 1: Correlation Result on Mentoring and Business Development

Correlations		Mentoring	Business Development
Mentoring	Pearson Correlation	1	.871**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	276	276
Business Development	Pearson Correlation	.871**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	276	276

Source: Researcher computation using SPSS 23

Table 4, shows the correlation analysis and the hypothesis test for the relationship between mentoring and business development. From the table, the correlation coefficient is .871 and the probability value (p-value) is .000 which is lesser than the level of significance of .05. The results established that there is a statistically significant relationship between mentoring and business development in Southeast, Nigeria. Hence, we accept the research hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: Entrepreneurial skills do not have significant relationship with business sustainability.

H_{A2}: Entrepreneurial skills have significant relationship with business sustainability.

**Correlation is significant at 0.05level (2-tailed)

Table 2: Correlation Result on Entrepreneurial Skills and Business Sustainability

Correlations		Entrepreneurial Skills	Business Sustainability
Entrepreneurial Skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.954**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	276	276
Business Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	.954**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	276	276

Source: Researcher computation using SPSS 23

Table 2, shows the correlation analysis and the hypothesis test for the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and business sustainability. From the table, the correlation coefficient is .954 and the probability value (p-value) is .000 which is lesser than the level of significance of .05. The results established that there is a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurial skills and business sustainability in Southeast, Nigeria. Hence, we accept the research hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one accesses the relationship between mentoring and business development. The result revealed that there is a positive correlation between mentoring and business development. Mentoring in apprenticeship system start from the day the apprentice came into the system and even after settlement, the master still continues to mentor this new master on their new found role. This is in line with the work of Onuoha and Uhunoma (2019) that mentoring helps in developing the business of the apprentice by given them wider access to array of ideas, values and thoughts.

Hypothesis two examines the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and business sustainability. The result statistically revealed that there is a positive relationship between entrepreneurial skills and business sustainability apprentice during their period of apprenticeship are given on the job training, they enjoy the profit when it comes and also suffer the loss when one occurs. They have practical training about the business they are into.

The system did not give room for trial and error, as they are taught to evaluate situation as it comes and take sound business decision with the information available to them. The result is in line with the study of Moya (2015), which established that start-up businesses that does go through apprenticeship has

a failure rate of 70 – 80% globally and Onwuegbuzie (2015) established that apprenticeship system effectively produced successful entrepreneurs because of their training.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

Based on the results of the analyses, the summary is presented as follows:

- i. There is also a positive and significant relationship between mentoring and business development in South East, Nigeria (given that: $r = 0.874$, and $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). This denotes that, mentoring provided by the master to their apprentices contribute significantly to their business development in South East, Nigeria.
- ii. Entrepreneurial skills and business sustainability are significantly related ($r = 0.954$, and $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). This relationship could also be said to be significant and direct because entrepreneurial skills acquired during their apprentice is responsible for the sustainable business practices in South East, Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Igbo Apprenticeship System (Igba Odibo) as an informal and unstructured training programme, scheduled for an agreed period, which a person undergoes to acquire a desirable part of entrepreneurship skill and under mentoring (Kanu, 2020; Alike and Orjiako-Umunze, 2019; Orugun and Nafiu 2014). It's an unpaid business apprenticeship/incubator model that lets people learn business from a master for some certain numbers of years (5 – 8years) depending and at the end of their apprenticeship period, get cash infusion and support to start their own business.

Because of the sustainability of Igba Odibo, and its survival across generations, it can be argued that the entrepreneurs who emerged from this process had significantly higher success rates than those of modern-day start-ups. Statistics show a high failure rate of start-up businesses with figures ranging between 70-80% globally (Moya, 2015; Fatoki, 2014). On the other hand, the traditional apprenticeship system (learning from a master through practice) effectively produced successful entrepreneurs (Onwuegbuzie, 2015).

Therefore, the researcher recommends that:

- Youth should be exposed to mentoring programme as soon as possible early in life.
- Entrepreneurship training and skill acquisition should be more practical oriented than theoretical.

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