

**A HISTORY OF APPRENTICESHIP IN IGBOLAND. A CASE STUDY OF
ONITSHA (1970 – 2015)**

BY

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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UNIVERSITY**

SEPTEMBER, 2023

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **Emmanuel Oraekwe** of the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under my supervision.

Dr. O. Oriakhi
Project Supervisor

Dr. Albert O. Onobhayedo
Head of Department

DATE _____

DATE _____

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to God, my dad, the late Prince Godwin Oraekwe, my Aunty, the late Miss Christiana Oraekwe, my darling mom Mrs. Eucharia Oraekwe and my ever-supporting siblings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to God for his mercies, provision, comfort, and protection during my time at this university as well as for guiding me to the successful conclusion of my research project.

Also deserving of my deepest thanks is my project supervisor, Dr. O Oriakhi, who served as my steady mentor throughout the project's research and writing. God bless you immensely.

Additionally, I want to sincerely thank my late father Prince Godwin Oraekwe who up until his death has been my pillar and strength. To my sweet mother Chief Mrs. Eucharua Oraekwe, for her unwavering concern, love, and support for my education, wellness, and all other aspects of my life. Your efforts are above what words can express. I want God to keep you both so you can enjoy the benefits of your labour.

I appreciate my ever-present siblings, Chidinma, Chijioke, Chijiokwu, Somto, Kate Njoku and every Igbo Youth who has benefitted from the apprenticeship system and those who are currently undergoing the apprenticeship system for the love and care they have shown for this project and their words of support. You guys are the very best.

I also want to express my gratitude to my lecturer, who has worked hard to improve me as a student and person from the very beginning of my degree at this university. Dr Monday Odion Osiki (of blessed memory), Prof. Eddy Erhagbe, Prof. E. A. Ifidon, Dr Frank Ikponmwosa, Dr. (Rev. Sis) J. C. Nwaka, Dr Charles Osarumwense, and other outstanding departmental lecturers deserve my gratitude.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my classmates. We have spent the last four years together and I have made friends who have turned family. God bless you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Introduction

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land is a unique and ancient system of education and socialization, which has been in existence for centuries. The system, which is known as "Otu ndi Igbo" in the Igbo language, has played a vital role in the social, economic, and cultural development of the Igbo people. This paper will focus on the history of the apprenticeship system in Igbo land, with a case study of Onitsha between 1970 and 2015.¹

The Igbo people are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, with a population of about 40 million people. They are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and their strong sense of community. The apprenticeship system is a traditional way of learning and practising a trade or craft, and it is an integral part of Igbo culture. The system involves a young person (usually a male) being taken under the wing of an experienced artisan or businessman, known as the "master," for a period of training and practical work. The apprentice lives with the master and learns the trade or craft through observation, practice, and guidance.

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land is based on the principle of communalism, which is the belief that individuals should work together for the common good of the community. The system is also based on the belief that every member of the community has a role to play in the development of the community. Therefore, the apprenticeship system is not just a means of acquiring skills, but it is also a means of socializing and developing a sense of community among the youth.

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land has a long history, dating back to the pre-colonial era. Before the arrival of the Europeans in the 19th century, the apprenticeship system was the primary means of acquiring skills and knowledge in Igbo land. The system was used to transmit traditional skills such as blacksmithing, weaving, pottery, and carving from one generation to another. During the colonial era, the apprenticeship system was modified to suit the needs of the colonial economy. The colonial authorities encouraged the establishment of modern industries such as textile mills, breweries, and soap factories, which required a skilled labour force. The apprenticeship system was used to train young people in the skills needed for these industries. The colonial government also introduced formal education, which reduced the importance of the apprenticeship system in some areas.²

After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the apprenticeship system regained its importance, as young people sought to acquire skills that would enable them to start their businesses. The system became particularly popular in the southeastern part of Nigeria, where the Igbo people were dominant. The Igbo people had a long history of entrepreneurship, and the apprenticeship system provided a way for young people to learn the skills needed to become successful entrepreneurs.

Onitsha is a major commercial city in southeastern Nigeria, and it is known for its vibrant market and entrepreneurial spirit. The city has a long history of trade, and the apprenticeship system has played a significant role in the city's economic development. Between 1970 and 2015, the city experienced significant economic growth, and the apprenticeship system played a significant role in this growth.

During this period, the apprenticeship system in Onitsha was used to train young people in various trades such as tailoring, shoemaking, motor mechanics, and trading. The system

provided young people with the skills and knowledge needed to start their businesses and become successful entrepreneurs. The apprenticeship system also provided a means of socialization and community building among young people.

The apprenticeship system in Onitsha is a unique system that has evolved. It is a system that is based on trust, mutual respect, and a strong work ethic. The system has been successful in producing skilled artisans, traders, and entrepreneurs who have contributed significantly to the economic development of the city.³

In this paper, we will explore the history of the apprenticeship system in Onitsha from 1970 to 2015. We will examine how the system has evolved, the challenges it has faced, and its impact on the economic development of the city.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of studying the history of the apprenticeship system in Igbo land, specifically in Onitsha from 1970 to 2015, is to understand the evolution of this traditional economic system and its role in the socio-economic development of the region.

The objectives of this study include;

1. To examine the evolution and development of the apprenticeship system in Onitsha and how it has impacted the economic, social, and cultural life of the people.
2. To investigate the factors that led to the emergence of the apprenticeship system in Onitsha and how it has been sustained over the years.
3. To identify the roles played by different stakeholders, including the apprentices, masters, and government, in the apprenticeship system.

4. To explore the challenges facing the apprenticeship system in Onitsha and how they have been addressed over time.
5. To assess the impact of modernization and globalization on the apprenticeship system in Onitsha.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of study of the history of the apprenticeship system in Igbo land, specifically in Onitsha from 1970 to 2015, would encompass the examination of the traditional apprenticeship system that has been in place in Igbo land for centuries. The study would focus on the apprenticeship system in Onitsha, which is known for its vibrant commercial activities.

METHODOLOGY

The use of qualitative analysis will highlight the importance of the primary sources used in this study, such as oral interviews, reports, publications, unpublished works, etc. The secondary data will be compiled from sources including seminar papers, web articles, newspapers, and textbooks. These will surely offer a thorough plan for achieving the objectives of the investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land, with a case study of Onitsha between 1970 and 2015, has undergone significant changes over the years and has played a crucial role in the economic development of the region. The system has produced skilled artisans and entrepreneurs who have contributed significantly to the growth of various industries and facilitated the transfer of business skills from one generation to another. Despite the challenges facing the system, it remains an essential aspect of Igbo culture and a vital component of the region's economic

development. As such, many scholars and business enthusiasts have given their two cents on the issue and I will be reviewing the various literatures.

Robert Neuwirt writes in his book "The Igbo Apprenticeship System in Nigeria"⁴ the Igbo Apprenticeship System is an unpaid business apprenticeship/incubator concept that enables individuals to learn the ropes from a master for a predetermined number of years before receiving funding and support to launch their own company. Although the master pays for meals, clothing, and travel during the apprenticeship period, there is no pay during that time. When the boy has finished learning, he is on par with his teacher. Because an apprentice's master is supposed to set him up on a business incubator platform when he completes his service, the Igbo apprenticeship system is the biggest in the world. This particular type of apprenticeship enables a male or female, family or community member to work alongside another family or community member—or, in some cases, a successful businessman (entrepreneur), depending on the type of business—for a period of time. The businessperson or craftsman provides the apprentice with guidance and instruction throughout this time. He also argues that in accordance with Igbo business culture, it is the established businessmen (referred to as "the nurturer") who have a duty to take in teenagers and young adults from their parents and provide them with informal business training and mentoring. Even though these apprentices are frequently not paid, they are given lodging, food, clothing, and transportation expenses (as needed). Depending on the apprentices' age, educational background, capacity for learning, and, of course, the nature of the business, trade, or craft, it can take anywhere from three to seven years. The "settlement" is carried out by the Mentor after the conclusion of this conventional business school and service, which can occasionally last up to seven years. In accordance with the original arrangement with the apprentice's family, this entails supporting the trainee both financially and in other ways while he

or she establishes his or her own business or career. When this is finished, the apprentice is no longer dependent on the Mentor.

The "What Makes the Igbo Apprenticeship model tick and Critical"⁵ essays by Okoro explains that any study of Igbo wealth production or commerce must take into consideration the Igbo apprentice system, also known as "Imu-Olu" (which means learning work), "Imu-Ahia" (which means learning trade), or "Igba boy" (which means to serve). According to him, it is an apprenticeship system that purports to be the responsibility of established businessmen [the nurturer] in a town, street, or locale to pick up teenagers-young adults [the apprentice] from their homes and give them an informally formal, but raw and practical, cutthroat business education. This adolescent may be a sibling, non-related, or relative from the same area. "The idea centers around taking them off the streets and the dangerous tendencies of an idle mind to give them a purpose, worthy of emulation, so they can also continue the trend when they are established," he continues. In his words

“The Igbo Apprenticeship System is an unpaid business apprenticeship/incubator model that lets people learn business from a master for a certain number of years (5-8) depending and at the end of their apprenticeship tenure, gets cash infusion and support to start their own business. There is no salary paid during the time of the apprenticeship tenure but meals, clothing and t-fare are provided for by the master. When the years of learning are over, the boy is as good as his master.”⁶

Before the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo had a system of commerce through which they distributed riches throughout the country of Nigeria. It was the Igbo apprentice system that lifted the majority of Igbo families out of poverty within two years of the Civil War, turning their struggles into a model of financial prosperity that is worthy of study and adoption. And even

after the Civil War, when the Igbo world was destroyed due to the terrible effects of the war, marked by great poverty, a cessation of livelihood, a lack of funds and human capital, and hopelessness. Many Igbo families were able to control their financial futures thanks to the "Imu-Ahia" system, in contrast to the Obafemi Awolowo-proposed "20 Pounds Policy," which stipulated that every Igbo person should receive £20 to live on regardless of how much money they had saved up before the war. The Nigerian government took the remaining funds. Despite this disadvantageous situation, the Igbo produced wealth through her network of apprentices that has remained a source of mystery, speculative interest, and astonishment for many.

This Igbo-specific apprenticeship system of trade is based on her social structure and resilient character. This is just to point out that the Imu-Olu system of apprenticeship is different in several ways from the apprentice systems used by other cultural groups in Nigeria. For instance, among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, a candidate's apprenticeship, which typically lasts between two and three years, ends when he or she pays the master a "freedom fee," buys drinks, and throws a party to mark the occasion. Before the applicant can start working as a professional tradesperson, they must complete this crucial component of the apprenticeship. Following this celebration, a certificate indicating graduation is given to the individual. The apprentice does not always reside with the master throughout these two or three years; therefore, the master is not always in charge of providing for the apprentice's dietary needs, clothes, and housing needs.

In Ndubisi's "The Major Defect in Igbo Apprenticeship System"⁷ he said that Men who may have developed vast empires and possessions cheerfully divide their accumulated market shares for more than 40 years under the Igbo Apprenticeship System. As a result, you won't find

any large corporations in Aba, Onisha, or elsewhere, as the Igbo Apprenticeship System was not intended to have just one iroko but rather a lot of trees in the forest!

Igbo Apprenticeship System is flawed on a national and international scale. But it's ideal at the neighbourhood level. In my village in Ovim (Abia State), there are never any beggars because assistance is always available. However, those assistances come from market leaders giving up market share while funding their upcoming rivals. In general, the more you examine the Adam Smith economic system, the more alarming it appears to be. But if you approach it from the perspective of "Igbo Umunneoma" economics, you'll be amazed at the innovations that people have made to combat extreme poverty and social inequality.

The Igbo Apprenticeship System is the most sophisticated system that is designed to eliminate mass-scaled inequality, despite the fact that Elizabeth Warren, Joe Biden, and other U.S. Presidential candidates have spoken out against inequality as digital companies rake all the values while others struggle. However, do not anticipate Amazon, Google, or Facebook to grant competitors market share or even financial support.

Diyoke's "Entrepreneurship Development in Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospects"⁸ explains that the Igbo type does not currently belong to any schools, universities, or institutions, but this is where we hope to be in the foreseeable future. Small-scale enterprises in Igbo territory are currently and consistently run thanks to the Igbo apprenticeship concept and program. The Igbo Apprenticeship Program has been tested as a necessity for Nigeria's economy and the quality of life of its citizens in both rural and urban areas.

A system known as apprenticeship provides on-the-job training for a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession. Apprenticeships can also help professionals get a license to work in a regulated field.

The majority of their training is completed while they are employed by a company that assists the apprentices in learning their trade or profession in exchange for their continued labour for a predetermined amount of time once they have attained demonstrable competencies. The duration of apprenticeships varies greatly between industries, occupations, roles, and cultures. The "journeyman" or professional certification level of competence may occasionally be attained by those who successfully complete an apprenticeship. An individual is trained in a professional skill in a practical way through an organized program of on-the-job training during an apprenticeship, which may be thought of as a system of learning. It typically entails learning technical skills, developing a work-related mindset or discipline, and obtaining knowledge.

Orugun and Nafiu opine in their book “An exploratory study of Igbo entrepreneurial activity and business success in Nigeria as the Panacea for economic growth and Development”⁹ that apprenticeship places apprenticeship as the seedbed of entrepreneurship by ranking opportunities to acquire vital skills firms need to thrive. In addition, he said that the Igbo people's business and entrepreneurial activities continue to form the foundation of trade and industry in the Nigerian economy. The three types of apprenticeship practices are the conventional model, the informal model, and the modern model. While the informal model is traditional in nature, it uses non-family persons to participate in the apprenticeship program instead of passing down family skills to the next generation. The modern apprenticeship program entails providing participants with instruction in practical skills, a well-structured learning schedule, set working and training hours, and the integration of educational and practical programs. The Nupes, Igbos,

Fulanis, and other tribes in Nigeria that have specialized talents that they pass down from generation to generation are big proponents of the apprenticeship system. In Nigeria, the following trades fall under the category of apprenticeships: blacksmithing, welding, trading, block moulding, auto maintenance and repair, barbering, electronics repair, and woodcarving, among others.

Ejo-Orusa in his work "Reinventing The 'Nwaboi' apprenticeship System: A Platform for Entrepreneurship Promotion in Nigeria"¹⁰ mentioned that Igba boi and imuahia are two terms that are frequently confused to mean the same thing in the context of the Igbo apprenticeship system. This is because both terms refer to systems or different types of informal and unstructured training programs that are scheduled for an agreed-upon amount of time and that a person participates in order to gain desirable knowledge about entrepreneurship. Both include learning by imitation in its most basic form, where the apprentice receives a practical education in the harsh realities of the commercial world. In both apprenticeship systems, the apprentice gains entrepreneurial skills and learns all the nuances of running a business, including supply-chain management, quality control, marketing, and customer relations, forecasting, human relations, bookkeeping and accounting, negotiation skills, inventory control and analysis, and opportunity recognition and utilization. The apprentice learns from or through observation, imitation, and, in some situations, trial and error in both components of the apprenticeship system because there is typically no established curriculum, formal learning procedure, or pedagogies. According to direct training, the apprentice typically learns on the job. The capacity and management style of the master or mentor, on the one hand, and the learning capacity and motivation of the apprentice, on the other, will determine how much the apprentice learns.

CHAPTERIZATION

This project work is well-detailed with the information it wants to pass across. This work is divided into five chapters starting with the introduction down to the conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE – BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter provides an overview of the entire project, including the goals and objectives, the scope, the methodology, a literature review, and the work's historical context. The reader will be propelled and led into a thorough knowledge of the work by this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO – THE HISTORY OF APPRENTICESHIP IN IGBO LAND

This chapter births the whole idea of apprenticeship in Igboland. It gives a detailed background as to how this system is being practised today, why it is practised and how the system has been able to survive all through since its inception.

CHAPTER THREE – THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM IN ONITSHA (1970-2015)

This chapter gives a detailed breakdown of what the apprenticeship system in Onitsha looks like. The chapter further explains the structure and organization of apprenticeship, the roles and responsibilities of apprentices, masters, and parents, the selection and initiation process, the duration and stages of apprenticeship and the types of skills and trades involved.

CHAPTER FOUR - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ONITSHA'S APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

This chapter explains the challenges as well as the various opportunities that are available in Onitsha's apprenticeship system. Furthermore, challenges faced by apprentices and masters, issues of exploitation and unfair treatment, education and certification in apprenticeship and opportunities for improvement and innovation would all be looked at in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

This chapter scrutinizes the general overview of the entire research work.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF APPRENTICESHIP IN IGBO LAND

The slave trade industry from the 15th century can be linked to the Igbo culture of entrepreneurship. Around 320,000 Igbos were sold in Bonny by the 1800s, along with 50,000 in Calabar and Elem Kalabari. This method persisted up until the 1900s when the slave trade was abolished. Slaves from the Igbo ethnic group, in contrast to most African tribes, were exposed to entrepreneurship through their owners, who traded goods like spices, sugar, tobacco, and cotton for export to the Americas, Europe, and Asia. This action sparked the Igbo people's entrepreneurial spirit and inspired them to immediately engage in a variety of entrepreneurial endeavours throughout the pre-colonial era. The Igbos were among the top exporters of palm oil and kernel during the colonial era, in addition to being skilled artisans, traders, and small-scale industrialists. Through the apprenticeship system, this entrepreneurial culture has survived to the present day.¹

When it comes to socio-economic development in Nigeria, the Igbo tribe is regarded as the most assiduous of all the tribes in that country. Before attaining independence, the Ndi-Igbo (the Igbo people) possessed a wealth of technical know-how and human capital, which they utilised to independently establish and develop their geographical region. The Ndi-Igbo people are innately inclined to support one another, educate one another, mentor one another, and guide one another when it comes to business, craftsmanship, and business apprenticeship. Therefore, a typical Igbo businessman would teach you how to catch fish instead of giving you fish.² This implies that an Igbo man would prefer to see you develop into a successful and financially independent man rather than having you depend on him or remain a boy. According to history, there was widespread destruction of Ndi Igbo lives and property during the Nigerian-Biafran

civil war of 1967–1970. The Ndi Igbo's bank accounts were essentially confiscated, leaving them with nothing; they were so allowed to suffer in squalor, hunger, and starvation. The then-minister of finance, Obafemi Awolowo, recognized the necessity to give all those whose enormous wealth was seized by the banks just 20 pounds. This implies that an Igbo man would prefer to see you develop into a successful and financially independent man rather than having you depend on him or remain a boy. According to history, there was widespread destruction of Ndi Igbo lives and property during the Nigerian-Biafran civil war of 1967–1970.³

The Igbo Apprenticeship System is an unpaid business apprenticeship/incubator concept that enables individuals to learn the ropes from a master for a predetermined number of years before receiving funding and support to launch their own company. Although the master pays for meals, clothing, and travel during the apprenticeship period, there is no pay during that time. When the boy has finished learning, he is on par with his teacher. Because an apprentice is supposed to be placed in a business incubation platform by his master after serving time, the Igbo apprenticeship system is the largest in the world. This particular type of apprenticeship enables a male or female, family or community member to work alongside another family or community member—or, in some cases, a successful businessman (entrepreneur), depending on the type of business—for some time. The businessperson or craftsman provides the apprentice with guidance and instruction throughout this time. According to the Igbo business culture, it is the established businessmen's (the nurturer) duty to take in teenagers and young adults from their parents and provide them with informal business training and mentoring.⁴

The Igbo apprentice system, often referred to as "Imu-Olu" (which means learning work), "Imu-Ahia" (which means learning trade), or "Igba boy" (which means to serve), plays a significant role in any discussion of the Igbo economy. It is described as an "apprenticeship

system that purports to be a responsibility established businessmen [the nurturer] in a town, street or locale to pick up teenagers-young adults [the apprentice] from their homes and give them an informal formal, but raw and practical, cutthroat business education." This adolescent may be a sibling, non-related, or relative from the same area. In his subsequent writing, he states, "The idea centres around taking them off the streets and the dangerous tendencies of an idle mind to give them a purpose, worthy of emulation, so they can also continue the trend when they are established."

Before the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo had a system of commerce through which they distributed riches throughout the country of Nigeria. It was the Igbo apprentice system that lifted the majority of Igbo families out of poverty within two years of the Civil War, turning their struggles into a model of financial prosperity that is worthy of study and adoption. And even after the Civil War, when the Igbo world was destroyed due to the terrible effects of the war, marked by great poverty, a cessation of livelihood, a lack of funds and human capital, and hopelessness.⁵ Many Igbo families were able to control their financial futures thanks to the "Imu-Ahia" system, in contrast to the Obafemi Awolowo-proposed "20 Pounds Policy," which stipulated that every Igbo person should receive £20 to live on regardless of how much money they had saved up before the war. The Nigerian government took the remaining funds. Despite this disadvantageous situation, the Igbo produced wealth through her network of apprentices that has remained a source of mystery, speculative interest, and astonishment for many.

This Igbo-specific apprenticeship system of trade is based on her social structure and resilient character. This is just to point out that the Imu-Olu system of apprenticeship is different in several ways from the apprentice systems used by other cultural groups in Nigeria.⁶ For instance, among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, a candidate's apprenticeship, which typically

lasts between two and three years, ends when he or she pays the master a "freedom fee," buys drinks, and throws a party to mark the occasion. Before the applicant can start working as a professional tradesperson, they must complete this crucial component of the apprenticeship. Following this celebration, a certificate indicating graduation is given to the individual. The apprentice does not always reside with the master throughout these two or three years; therefore, the master is not always in charge of providing for the apprentice's dietary needs, clothes, and housing needs.

Compared to the Igbo apprentice system, this is significantly different. The master's child or daughter is the apprentice. As a result, the apprentice leaves his parents and moves in with an established business Igbo person, who becomes his master and he is his servant. He looks after his master for a predetermined number of years and completes all of his chores. He serves his master at home as well as in the shop or business-related activities, such as washing automobiles, keeping the house clean, washing and ironing his master's clothes, etc. Even if his parents reside in the same city as the master, he is not permitted to leave without permission. He must put out a lot of effort to get the respect and favour of his master because it is the master who will evaluate his performance in both business-related and unrelated areas. The master provides the apprentice with a take-off fund after the apprenticeship to be used for the rental or purchase of a shop, goods, equipment, and, if necessary, housing for a specific amount of time.⁷ Since the master is aware that the apprentice has limited purchasing power, he or she continues to help the apprentice with product procurement to lower overhead importation costs. This take-off fund in no way implies that the apprentice no longer collaborates with the master.

The "Igba-audio" (Traditional Business School) offers benefits to both the master and the servant. An entrepreneur is assisted in starting his firm by "Igba-audio" (Traditional firm School),

not as a student. He is already acquainted with the enterprise's clients and has their contact information. Building strong client relationships is made much easier by doing this. Knowing where to buy items more cheaply and how to sell them benefits the business owner. Before investing in their businesses, most wealthy families send their kids to "Igba-audio" (Traditional Business School). This enables them to learn every tactic and strategy used in the specific industry. If their previous firms are not as profitable as they anticipated, they also use this technique to shift or diversify their operations. The servant should constantly be appreciative of his or her lord and/or mistress for guiding them.⁸ Igbo people in Nigeria have excelled in entrepreneurship on many fronts. They might be viewed as the economic cornerstone of Nigeria at present. Given this reality, Igbo businesspeople are crucial to the expansion of the Nigerian economy. It has been noted that Igbo entrepreneurial activities form the foundation of Nigeria's economy and have helped raise people's standards of living in both rural and urban areas. Igbo businesspeople use their entrepreneurial abilities to expand existing markets and develop brand-new ones. As commerce and money are inseparable concepts to the Igbo, all eastern metropolitan areas, even the interior villages, are surrounded by marketplaces. Currently, Igbos are becoming more and more prevalent in credit associations and entrepreneurship on a bigger scale.

TYPES OF IGBO APPRENTICESHIP

The Igba-Boy (serving) and Imu-Ahia (learning) apprenticeship systems are essentially the two types of apprenticeship used in Igbo countries, according to studies. As it has been passed down from generation to generation, Imu Ahia/Igba Boy has developed into a cultural heritage in Nigeria's Eastern area. Because the Igbo people wanted to reclaim their stolen future, the Imu-Ahia Igbo Apprenticeship system was born.⁹ They had to devise a means of earning income at any moment because they had little money to live on and few resources to use. Aside

from farming, which took the time that was not readily available at the time, petty trade was one of the only methods to rebuild damaged towns.

The traditional business school "Igba-odibo" focuses on the acquisition, sale, promotion, and distribution of items as a business strategy. The apprentice is introduced to marketing ideas in this instance. "Imu-ahia" (business coaching) is a term for a student who is merely there to learn the business and is not directly under the supervision of a master or coach in marketing. It is primarily intended for people who have some money to invest in a business but lack the necessary experience.¹⁰ This is also used by many merchants to diversify their enterprises.

IMU-ORU (CRAFT/VOCATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP): Working with various tools and equipment is required for this. It entails becoming knowledgeable in a particular field of expertise. Additionally, it allows for diversification.

IGBA-OSO-AHIA (A FORM OF BUSINESS TRICK): traders utilize this to raise funds for their businesses. It entails charging more for the commodities of another individual. This study looks at Igba-odibo (Traditional Business School) as an introduction to business strategy for indigenous Igbo entrepreneurs seeking micro-business success.

IGBA-ODIBO (TRADITIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL): A ward turns into a servant "Odibo" (servant) after he or she is in the master's or mistress's custody. In this context, the term "Igba-odibo" (Traditional Business School) refers to a person who is receiving instruction in the process of buying and selling or marketing principles. A family gives its children away to live with and serve the affluent members of society. Although "Igbaodibo" terms and conditions are primarily oral in nature, they are nonetheless deeply ingrained in Igbo customs, norms, and traditions. Unlike some apprenticeship training programs, "Igba-odibo" is also free of charge. A trial or test phase of roughly three months, during which the apprentice's suitability for the work

or other function is being tested, typically precedes the final apprenticeship contract between the master and the apprentice's family. An apprentice turns into a servant after he or she is in the master's or mistress's custody.¹¹ For a predetermined amount of time, the master and/or mistress take care of the servant's or maid's needs while the latter helps the former with household chores and business while residing with them. The apprentice must be devoted to his or her master or mistress. During this time, the mentor, who is the master or mistress, reveals to him/her the business methods. The master/mistress may open another business outlet for the servant to run if the apprentice is capable of managing it. This enables them to learn every tactic and strategy used in the specific industry. The apprentice is expected to devote himself completely to his master. "Onye fee eze, eze e-ruo ya aka" (You will be measured in the same way as you measure others) is a common proverb among the Igbo. This implies that when a servant or maid faithfully serves his or her master and/or mistress, he or she will also be faithfully served by another servant or maid.

This system has worked throughout the years despite the lack of well-defined laws to govern the relationship between the master and the apprentice. This accomplishment is the result of numerous reasons. The apprentice treads carefully, fully aware that if he fails or destroys his master's business, his own future will be destroyed. This is the first reason it works. Because he is aware that his future is intertwined with his master's financial future, he exercises caution when handling his affairs and working to grow the master's firm.¹² This dread encourages honesty during the years of apprenticeship because any recognized act of theft, fund misappropriation, and extravagant use and waste of company funds results in the termination of the agreement.

Second, the master is cautious to avoid a poor reputation from his society if he has chosen the son of a brother or relative, even though the apprentice tries his best to avoid the end of the apprentice arrangement. The community back home may take offense if the apprentice is fired for unsupported reasons or if the terms of the apprenticeship are broken after the designated number of years of service.

As a result, the Igbo apprenticeship system encompasses more than just a master and apprentice relationship; it also involves the community or family. Since every master's treatment of his apprentice is documented, apprentices rarely choose to work for masters who are known for not settling their apprentice. And among the members of the community or family, these stories—whether positive or negative—remain for decades. It makes sense why some masters receive more apprenticeship applications than others. Insincere masters incur the risk of having their companies or wealth destroyed by the Chi, the apprentice's personal deity. Because of this, every master tries his best to provide the apprentice with a take-off package following the completion of the specified number of service years.¹³ The master's blessing is essential at this stage of settling. The master's blessing is more crucial than the cash bundle because, without it, the financial package will fail. Consequently, the Igbo apprentice system now assumes a spiritual component. There are no written documentation or court papers to sign at the location of pickup and settlement. There is trust involved.

The Igbo apprentice system is a sensible economic choice that leverages inexpensive labor to develop human resources while providing the chance to foster self-employed people. Talent (or ability) identification, scholarship (or knowledge training), and graduation (or clearance) are the three primary stages or phases of the system.

TALENT IDENTIFICATION

Identification of a future mentee's potential entrepreneurial skills starts in the home. It may also be due to the household's incapacity to support the mentee's continued literary education or his or her disregard for basic house rules and regulations. The family starts talking to one other and looking for a business mentor for their kid. When a match is complete, a customary ritual of giving over is held, and parents counsel the mentee on the benefits and expectations of apprenticeship. In order to eliminate any instances of uncertainty, the parties set and agree on the apprenticeship agreements during the ceremony.¹⁴

SCHOLARSHIP

As part of the mentoring program, the mentee is provided with boarding and is required to help out around the house. At this stage, the fundamental ways of life are started in accordance with the mentor's preferences. The mentee is then driven to the business location to start the entrepreneurship induction process. Both procedures often take place within the first three months of the mentee's arrival and act as a trial period to determine compatibility with the requirements of the scholarship. The compatibility test determines whether a person is "willing to learn," "resilient," and "trustworthy." The scholarship will be terminated and the mentee will be returned back if they fail at least two of the three checks. At this stage, specific programs including competitiveness, business language, and bargaining strategy are coached. Others include business ventures, customer relationship management, bargaining, inventiveness, and transaction procedures. Because the Igbo people have a market-based worldview and "bargain" their way into or out of any circumstance, they have a unique understanding of entrepreneurship and commerce.¹⁵ As a result, the business owner views every interaction with a consumer as an

opportunity to haggle for a favourable result. Everyone has an equal opportunity to bargain, and everything is included in this process. The apprentice is given this philosophy.

GRADUATION

Attaining the pre-determined scholarship time is a sign that the full program has been completed. Depending on the mentee's performance and dedication throughout the scholarship and the mentor's financial capacity, the mentor grants the mentee capital for a start-up. This typically takes place in front of the mentee's family, who organize a little ceremony to celebrate the occasion. The innovation process starts at this step, which also summarizes the entire learning process. The goal of a settlement is to start aspiring business owners on their entrepreneurial path. They start a business, with their mentor keeping the profits. It is expected that they were familiar with the fundamental strategies needed to promote innovation, as well as the necessary abilities and alliance-building market connections. In a highly competitive market, entrepreneurs adopt the strategy to penetrate the market, gradually expand, and diversify their innovation. Mentors will occasionally create a small innovation, sort of extension, or outlet for their business for the mentee to control while they run others. This has implications for the development and growth of businesses.¹⁶ The strategy has a win-win outcome. The mentees gain knowledge and receive benefits at the conclusion of the contract. The mentor, on the other hand, uses their mentees to grow their business. Given that mentees become mentors and then absorb mentees, the circle keeps turning.

The Industrial Revolution brought about numerous new sorts of craftsmanship as more Europeans got access to South-Eastern Nigeria, which is inhabited by the Igbos, including painting, mechanics, bicycle repair, driving, printing, sewing, and others. Because of these new work opportunities, family members' monopoly on funding apprenticeships was broken, and the

importance of picking a vocation outside the family's area of competence began to grow. This gave rise to the Igbo entrepreneurship and apprenticeship system's distinctive "Imu-Oru Aka" (learning a craft or skill) distinction, which was soon followed by "Imu-Ahia" (learning to trade) to trade in the after-sales market of the new technologies introduced into their communities as a result of the industrial revolution.¹⁷

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CHAPTER THREE

THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM IN ONITSHA (1970-2015)

The apprenticeship system is a global training and skill development initiative that has long been used to prepare workers to earn occupational skills in various countries. The system differs from country to country, and sometimes even from region to area within the same country. The system's unifying element, however, is that it emphasizes establishing a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession through on-the-job training, which is occasionally complemented with study. In certain countries, at the end of the training time, the apprentice receives some kind of certification or license to practice a specific trade or profession. The system has enormous potential, including the ability to address skill mismatches, pay inequalities, and high young unemployment. Every country tailor its apprenticeship system to its culture, economic history, economic development level, socioeconomic institutions, and legal environment. The Onitsha Apprenticeship System was founded by the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria and is now practiced throughout the country. Although the system is rather informal and receives little or no attention from the government, it has made and continues to make significant contributions to entrepreneurship promotion and the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), wealth and job creation, poverty eradication, and the overall economic growth and development of the country.¹

Apprenticeship is the process of acquiring and developing skills by enlisting in the service of a master craftsman or an experienced businessperson. The system of the young learning on the job from an experienced Master has its origins in traditional African society, when blacksmiths, carvers, farmers, native doctors (traditional healers), and others with specific skills took members of the younger generation (usually close relatives) into their households to provide years of specialized training. The apprenticeship system used in Nigeria has existed in

various forms for millennia. It was, in particular, the primary form of education and entry into any occupation or profession before to the arrival of the colonial authority, which introduced Western-style education to Nigeria. Following the introduction of Western education to Nigeria, the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System became the norm for young people who had no type of formal education, but it progressed to include those who had primary school education, but the bar later shifted to include those who had secondary education but could not progress further. However, in the last thirty years, the system has become a veritable platform for the unemployed, including young graduates, to explore in pursuit of self-employment opportunities, owing to the high number of young people graduating from an increasing number of tertiary institutions every year without the availability of employment opportunities. What distinguishes the Onitsha Nwaboi Apprenticeship System from others is that at the end of the training, the apprentice is encouraged to start his or her own business or workshop.² The system is thus an important first stage of the entrepreneurship process, by far Nigeria's most entrenched and vibrant entrepreneurship promotion vehicle, a major contributor to the growth and development of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, and a major driver of wealth creation, job creation, and poverty reduction, and thus economic growth and development.

While the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has a lengthy history, it became more intense and underwent a paradigm shift following the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. The Civil War drove the Igbos from other regions of Nigeria to their traditional homeland in Eastern Nigeria, which also happened to be the heart of the conflict. At the end of the war in 1970, the majority of them had lost their investments and businesses; they were not only unable to resume their pre-war positions at the forefront of education, public administration, the military, industry, or commerce; they found themselves outside the mainstream of all economic sectors of Nigerian economy and

society. Furthermore, due to a lack of wealth and virtual exclusion from the financial sector, they were unable to benefit from the 1970s indigenization programs, which transferred ownership of many foreign-owned enterprises to Nigerians. Because they were excluded from most sectors of the economy and were financially disadvantaged, petty trading became one of the few options available to them to make a livelihood, and it became a survival strategy for the Igbo people. They established an unwritten norm of "zero tolerance" for child and adult inactivity, and many of them flourished over time.³ Those who were able to relaunch their careers as traders and artisans hired more apprentices at a higher level than before the Nigerian Civil War. The system benefited both the business operator and the trainee. For businesspeople, the motivation was a rational economic decision to use cheap labor to supplement limited resources, whereas for young people whose parents could not afford to send them to school, apprenticeship provided sustenance, the opportunity to learn new skills, and the hope of becoming self-employed while reducing the financial burden on their families. The system is now a fundamental and important element of Igbo culture, and the Igbos have customized and changed it to deal with economic issues as they emerge. The system is also resilient and self-adaptive. For example, as new technology enters the economy and entrepreneurs uncover new profitable ventures, they produce apprentices who eventually become full-fledged entrepreneurs. Even if it is only a differentiation tactic, these new entrepreneurs have a tendency to instil competition and stimulate creativity. A notable illustration of this type of flexibility may be found in the Nollywood movie industry, which has risen to become the world's third-largest in a relatively short period of time. The same can be said for the computer and telephone repair industry, which was unheard of twenty years ago but has since grown into a thriving business with many successful entrepreneurs.⁴

A considerable majority of Onitsha entrepreneurs today are products of the Nwaboi apprenticeship system, implying that Igbo traders have evolved their own entrepreneurship system. There are various variations of this system or model available today, but they all entail an apprentice working with an experienced professional on agreed-upon conditions to gain skills that will help them build their own company. Some entrepreneurial researchers have advocated for a model similar to the Nwaboi apprenticeship system.⁵ The enormous success that has been recorded over the years has popularized and reinforced the Nwaboi apprenticeship system in the country, and it has become a popular model that is practiced throughout Nigeria and Africa in general. It is argued that the Onitsha people established a reputation after the Civil War as clever businesspeople who rose from the ashes and ruins of the Civil War to become great entrepreneurs by utilizing the apprenticeship system. It should also be noted that the success of Onitsha traders and Igbos, in general, has aided their reintegration into the Nigerian economy and society. Furthermore, the system has built a sustainable and enviable local innovation, mentorship, concept incubation, hatching, training, and investment solution that is widely regarded as best practice among entrepreneurship educators worldwide.

Clearly, certain creative approaches to business promotion and education that have become commonplace have their roots in the Onitsha enterprise culture. For example, Onitsha enterprises are mostly concerned with buying and selling, and the majority of them operate in clusters. They have long recognized the value of business clustering and have been using it long before researchers did. This unique type of apprenticeship allows a male or female (depending on the type of business), family or community member to spend time and work with another family or community member or, in some cases, a successful businessman (entrepreneur). During this time, the apprentice is mentored and trained by the merchant or artisan.⁶ As part of the Igbo

business culture, the experienced businessman (the nurturer) in a town, street, or region is responsible for accepting teenagers and young adults (the apprentice) from their households and providing informal business training and mentorship. The Onitsha apprenticeship system is a type of informal and unstructured training program that a person goes through for a set amount of time in order to gain relevant entrepreneurship knowledge. It is learning-by-example in its purest form, where the apprentice receives raw, real-life, and practical cutthroat business education, of the type and quality that funds cannot buy even from the greatest Business Schools, and it is the classic example of the mentor-mentee relationship. Though these apprentices are frequently not paid, they are supplied with housing, transportation (where necessary), food, and clothing (i.e., physiological necessities).⁷ It takes between 3-7 years, depending on the apprentices' age and academic qualifications, learning ability, and, of course, the nature of the business, trade, or skill. During this time, the apprentice learns his or her Master's trade and is mentored. The Master is responsible for establishing the apprentice at the end of the agreed or defined period, either by establishing a separate but similar firm or by providing money or instruments to settle the apprentice, as the case may be.

During the training period, the apprentice develops entrepreneurship skills and learns all aspects of the business, including supply chain management, quality control, marketing and customer service, forecasting, human relations, bookkeeping and accounting, negotiation skills, inventory control and analysis, and opportunity recognition and utilization. Because there is no fixed curriculum, formal learning technique, or pedagogies, the apprentice learns by observation, imitation, and, in some situations, trial and error. Typically, the apprentice learns on the job through direct guidance and is penalized for mistakes. As a result, the extent to which the apprentice will learn will be determined by the Master's/mentor's capacity and management style

on the one hand, and the trainee's learning capacity and motivation on the other. The learning, mentoring, and settlement models are applicable to practically all micro, small, and medium-sized businesses, as well as most sectors of the economy.⁸

Onitsha apprenticeship shares the same sorts of apprenticeship system as the general types of apprenticeship offered in Igbo society. Under the Onitsha apprenticeship system, there are two major forms of apprenticeship. 'Imu-OruAka' and 'Imu-Ahia' are their names.

1. 'Imu-OruAka' (Learning a Craft or Skill): In this sort of apprenticeship, the apprentice is assigned to a master or professional artisan for mentorship and training over a certain length of time. This sort of apprenticeship lasts between three and five years, depending on how quickly the apprentice learns the craft or skill.
2. 'Imu-Ahia' (Learning a Trade): Another sort of apprenticeship available under the Nwaboi system. In this instance, an apprentice is assigned to a successful businessman, usually a trader. During the agreed-upon time period, the apprentice receives supervision and instruction. This sort of apprenticeship lasts between 3 and 7 years, depending on how quickly the apprentice learns the skill.⁹

The businessman or artisan in charge of the apprentice is known as the 'Master' (also known as 'Oga') or 'Madam' (if a woman) in either Imu-Oru Aka or Imu-Ahia. The Oga may elect to collect money as payment for the apprentice's training and mentoring. Where money is not offered, the apprentice is required to serve the 'Oga' in various capacities (usually including domestic chores) while undertaking the apprenticeship. Payment is frequently followed by some drinks intended to entertain witnesses, who are usually family, fellow tradesmen or artisans from the environment in which the trade or craft is to be learned. It is vital to note that whether or not payment is made, refreshments for the enjoyment of witnesses are required. It is a type of

initiation ritual for the trainee. The apprentice(s) learns to know the 'Ogas' and other apprentices in the area and in that line of trade or craft during this procedure. Furthermore, the Master or Madam is expected to mentor and train the apprentices in the specific line of business or craft, as well as guide them in the development of skill sets such as planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling, and decision-making, which is required to run the business effectively. When the method is examined thoroughly, it is clear that it is intended to be a real entrepreneurship training and management development program, albeit of an informal character and limited only by the Master's experience and the apprentice's learning capacity.¹⁰

The worry is that the apprentice will acquire certain unfavourable entrepreneurship skills that will be difficult to unlearn in areas where the Master's is inadequate. In general, an Igbo entrepreneur seeks possibilities to profit through innovativeness, creativity, customer happiness, and efficient usage of scarce resources through coordinating the use of production components. As a result, he or she is visionary, energetic, and results-oriented. These are not far from the reasons why they take commercial risks; often in situations where others see turmoil and disaster. Even in the face of an unfavourable economic environment, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of institutional support, these particularly resilient Igbo entrepreneurs frequently achieve success. People throughout Nigeria rely greatly on the efforts, inventions, and high entrepreneurial metabolism of Onitsha entrepreneurs for new products and services, as well as better quality of life and economic well-being. However, the Onitsha entrepreneur is also a teacher, mentor, entrepreneur promoter, human capital development investment, and important player in economic growth.

The entrepreneurs of Onitsha have established dominance in the Nigerian commercial climate, and they are now significant participants in the West African Sub-Region and beyond.¹¹

In fact, they are present wherever there is a buying and selling industry, and they may even be found in distant China nowadays. The Onitsha entrepreneurs' firms not only provide a return on investment, but they also advise and train future entrepreneurs as apprentices. The apprenticeship system is used in the following businesses:

- i) transportation and haulage
- ii) handset and computer repairs
- iii) trading (all types of products)
- iv) Auto-Spare Parts Business
- v) Automobile Mechanics, Vulcanizing, and Welding
- vi) Electrical and Electronic Appliance Repair and Maintenance
- vii) Fashion Design, Tailoring, Hairstyling, and Shoemaking
- viii) Draughtsman ship, Building Construction, Electrification, Plumbing
- ix) Carpentry & Furniture Making
- x) Film Making, Photography.¹²

The Onitsha Apprenticeship System encompasses the majority of enterprises and all areas of society, as can be seen from the information above. A coterie of apprentices is created as business owners venture into new industries. Apprentices are employed by the majority of firms run by successful (and unsuccessful) entrepreneurs. It is possible that the greatest and most active entrepreneurship development program in the world is the result of this natural and mutually reinforcing interaction between the entrepreneur and apprentice. Many young people,

especially those from low-income families who couldn't afford a formal education, have benefited from this system by acquiring the skills they need to start their own businesses, become financially independent, and make significant contributions to society. The system is said to have a wealth redistribution mechanism, among other things, that makes sure that wealth is distributed from the wealthy (the entrepreneurs) to the poor (the apprentices and their families). I further assert that the Igbo/Onitsha entrepreneurship model is the largest Corporate Social Responsibility regime in Nigeria and possibly the entire world given the breadth and depth of the Onitsha Apprenticeship System and the number of successful entrepreneurs who are alumni of this system.¹³

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CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ONITSHA'S APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

The apprenticeship system is an initiative that has given rise to a large number of businesspeople in Onitsha and improved their economic well-being. They have been able to develop skills for life, like managing and growing enterprises and creating value chains. Most importantly, the apprenticeship system as it is used in the Igbo region has been a valuable tool for creating, maintaining, and passing wealth from the elder to the younger generation. As a result, the goal of this chapter is to analyze the Igbo land apprenticeship system, focusing on the opportunities and difficulties it currently faces.¹

THE SUSTENANCE OF WEALTH THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP

The apprenticeship system primarily relies on experience and observation for learning. The apprentice watches while the master succeeds in business, makes money, and also watches when he makes poor business judgments and suffers losses. He then notes what he learns about the dos and don'ts. The apprentice acquires experience by participating in the day-to-day operations of the firm; he makes his own mistakes and is disciplined; when he meets goals, he is congratulated and occasionally given rewards; and he learns a lot in the process. Therefore, the master is expected to settle and establish the apprentice at the conclusion of the apprenticeship program by either providing him with some money to start up his own business or by starting the business for him by stocking a shop. A master has thus been able to replicate himself through this procedure by establishing and coaching a younger individual to launch another wealth-generating enterprise.² This is the reason why there are concentrations of wealthy individuals in

different communities throughout Igbo land, where the apprenticeship system is predominant, as most businessmen do not look outside of their family or at most their community to take boys for an apprenticeship. This is brought about by the apprenticeship system, which is how businessmen continue to procreate and maintain riches in their families and communities. This is likewise true of Onitsha's apprenticeship program.

In the truest sense, this apprenticeship training is a program. This is due to the fact that, depending on the available resources, these businesspeople act as masters and continually enlist the young boys as apprentices, either one after the other or in batches. Each participant or batch completes the three stages of the program, after which they are released into the corporate world to launch a wealth-generating endeavour. This program, which was largely successful, merits further consideration by the proper government bodies to determine how it may be implemented into the educational system because it has the potential to revitalize Nigeria's educational system and make it more useful and empowering.³ Additionally, it has the potential to revive Nigeria's economy. It's important to remember that the most crucial period of the apprenticeship system is not when the master settles and establishes the apprentice, but rather during the stages (particularly the first and second stages) when the apprentice absorbs the various virtues, abilities, skills, and business principles. Because that is what the training is all about, these are the necessities. When a master fails to settle and establish an apprentice for one reason or another, a trained person can sometimes start a business nearly from scratch. The unestablished and unsettled apprentice who has received the proper training may wander for a short time during which he might be able to obtain a loan or raise some money by helping a friend in his shop with his marketing and haggling abilities, acquired during the apprenticeship program, and with that, start up his own business.⁴ And thanks to his training, he can truly take the company from its

infancy to a successful enterprise. Therefore, training rather than the amount of money a person is given as a settlement is what makes an apprentice into a master.

Therefore, if the apprenticeship system used primarily by the Onitsha people were closely investigated, it would be clear that it functions as a type of entrepreneurship program or school for young Onitsha guys. This is accurate when taking into account the calibre of the knowledge, abilities, and experiences to which they are exposed. The training is actually highly effective since it involves both practical real-life experience while they are learning on the job and classroom instruction. It is a unique school since it teaches boys the fundamentals of business and prepares them to become financially independent and stable adults who can contribute positively to society. Again, in terms of time invested, the apprenticeship program is highly advantageous for the apprentice.⁵ If a boy enters the apprenticeship program at the age of seven, his master would have settled him by the time he was twenty-one, and by the time he was thirty-one, he would be able to stable and begin handling significant responsibilities in his family and community. However, a young man who received formal education at that similar age might still be having trouble adjusting. Therefore, this is the justification for the Onitsha/Igbo land apprenticeship system. Both the apprentice and the parents that send their sons for the apprenticeship program typically find it to be time and money efficient.

THE CHALLENGES FACING THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM IN ONITSHA

Sadly, Onitsha's apprenticeship program has all but disappeared. This regrettable development has a lot of causes. The first was that formal education was becoming considered as being not just the standard but also necessary for a successful business enterprise.

Therefore, even individuals who desire to start a business would first complete their secondary education—some even go so far as to complete their university education—before starting a business. The difficulties those who complete the apprenticeship program encounter when they start their own businesses led to this development.⁶ They have trouble reading, writing, comprehending some concepts, and executing some business calculations because they did not receive a formal education. They eventually turned to hiring and depending on people with formal education for help in these areas so they could run their rapidly expanding business empires. However, the people they rely on frequently prey on their ignorance and exploit them severely. For this reason, young boys who want to become businessmen must complete formal education before entering the business sector. This led to the development of another apprenticeship system variant. The apprentice must complete his formal education before beginning the program, so if it is to begin after secondary school, they would begin it in the latter part of their adolescence or early twenties, and if it is to begin after university education, they would begin it in their mid-twenties. This variation is still the apprenticeship system but with many modifications. Because the apprentice is still young and primarily focused on learning rather than serving, the master only bears a portion of the cost of maintaining him; the apprentice's family is responsible for the majority of that cost. The length of the apprenticeship program is therefore significantly cut to between one year and six months and three years, and at its conclusion, it is the apprentice's family, not the master, who is responsible for settling and establishing the apprentice.⁷

It is sufficient to say that the efficiency of the apprenticeship system was significantly diminished by this adjustment. The main component of the training program, which is almost completely gone, is service because that is how an apprentice genuinely learns. The influence on

the apprentice at the end of the program is therefore far smaller than what it used to be during the entire apprenticeship program because the apprentice only does stay, observes, and asks questions for a short period of time. The fundamental goal of the apprenticeship system, which is the maintenance of wealth through capacity development and economic empowerment, is thus no longer fully realized as a result of this adjustment.⁸

The quick money syndrome is another factor in Onitsha's apprenticeship system's demise. The majority of young guys nowadays desire to succeed quickly instead of going through the rigorous mentorship and learning process, which gives them the chance to build their business abilities. They no longer have the patience to submit to authority for a protracted period of apprenticeship; instead, they now prefer to turn to internet fraud and other shady business operations to get rapid money. Because riches obtained through illicit methods cannot be maintained, this development is rather undesirable and detrimental to progress. Additionally, businesspeople now favor hiring sales females over enrolling young boys in an apprenticeship program. This proved to be more cost-effective for them given that under the full apprenticeship system, the master is solely responsible for covering all of the apprentice's upbringing expenses, including food, clothing, and housing, from the time the apprentice is a young child until the time he is to be settled. The apprentice would eventually need to be settled and established by the master. Realizing the gravity of their situation, the merchants have since turned to hire sales ladies, whom they pay between N10,000 and N20,000 each month. As a result, in order to make up for the services provided by the apprentices, the businessmen are now more involved in the day-to-day operations of the company.⁹

The absence of reading and coursework during the early stages of the Igbo apprenticeship program presents difficulties. So, despite the course being successfully completed, no certificates

are given out. Igbo Apprenticeship Scheme occasionally accepts mavericks and rejects them in an effort to provide them with a future. One significant issue with the Igbo apprenticeship program is that it is sometimes thought to be intended for those who struggle in the formal educational system or whose parents cannot afford to pay for their education. It is challenging to recruit recent graduates and young people who are still in school into the system because of this specific issue. People who are in an apprenticeship are thought to be "never-do-wells," and they are not treated with the same respect as their peers in the formal educational system.

The abrupt dismissal of an apprentice after several years for unethical motives. Examples include blaming their actions on stealing, extramarital affairs with the master's wife, or disobedience. This could be quite distressing for an apprentice from a low-income home because they might find it difficult to find initial funding to finance their dream business. Due to the verbal nature of the contract, it will be challenging for the apprentice to bring a claim against his master. As a result, the Onitsha apprenticeship scheme faces a glaring problem regarding how to settle the apprentice at the conclusion of his indenture, which encourages masters to abuse their power and neglect their obligations. This, therefore, serves as the foundation for the legal system that will appropriately safeguard the contract between the master (Oga) and the apprentice (Boi).¹⁰

The Onitsha apprenticeship program frequently results in wrongdoing on both sides. As a result, some cruel Mentors occasionally abuse their Inductees at home, while others neglect to settle their own at the conclusion of the service. This places the inductee in a difficult and regretful situation, especially given that Igbo culture's communalism, which would have allowed the inductee to rely on his kin, is progressively eroding and giving way to Western individualism. Even worse, there have been reports of Inductees selling off their Mentors and

throwing their money into the trash. The lack of the majority of Igbo entrepreneurs, who could use their entrepreneurial impulses to further the development of the Igbo nation, is one of the most notable and enduring flaws of Onitsha entrepreneurship. Because of this, much of the money made by Igbo businesspeople is not invested in Igbo territory, but rather in other regions of Nigeria, such as Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Jos, and other places.¹¹

The Onitsha apprenticeship system faces a number of difficulties, but the most significant one may be an insufficient legal framework to guide the institution. Although the Labour Act of 2004 governs the Contract of Apprenticeship in Nigeria, it has been argued that the system falls short of what is available in other nations in terms of method of operation, regulation, rewards, structure, and execution. In fact, the general consensus is that the Nigerian Labour Act, which includes the rules and regulations of the apprenticeship program, is woefully deficient and does little to support young graduates and youngsters in the development of skills and craftsmanship. The public, masters, and apprentices have not been made aware of the Law Act through any program, and there are no punishments in place for those whose activities violate the letter of the Law Act. The articles of the Labour Act that govern apprenticeship in Nigeria are, at best, only well-intentioned; as a result, the established norms are never followed or put into practice. As a result, the Labour Act's efforts to establish order and formalization were merely a facade, and Nigeria continues to run an unstructured, unregulated, and largely informal apprenticeship system with no established vocational profile or framework.¹²

The lack of interest among young men in taking over their fathers' enterprises and in enrolling in university courses will help their fathers' firms develop and advance. Combined with the malicious taking of the Oga's money by the Boi(s) through different means, such as:

- (a) Intentionally removing money from the cash drawer without documenting it in any company transaction books, making it impossible for Oga to determine the reason for such cash movements.
- (b) Failing to disclose the proceeds of transactions, particularly those involving "Oso-afia"—goods delivered to a consumer from a dealer's store that is obviously not owned by the Oga.
- (c) Intentionally choosing to supply items to a consumer with the goal of making a profit.
- (d) Intentionally disclosing to your Oga's competitors' information about his sources of supply and clients with the goal of making money from it.

However, it must be highlighted that the apprenticeship system does not imply that the maintenance of riches has vanished. Instead, the loss of the apprentice system has decreased the family level's ability to sustain wealth at the community/kindred level. A businessman may hire an apprentice through the apprenticeship system from anywhere in his town, and some even hired from beyond their village as long as the youngster was Igbo. However, with the demise of the apprentice system, businesspeople now primarily concentrate on their own families, making sure that one or two of their male children are prepared to join the business and eventually lead it without their father. This nevertheless allows for the transfer and maintenance of wealth from an elder to a younger generation.¹³

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land, with a case study of Onitsha, is a unique and longstanding socio-economic institution that has played a crucial role in shaping the region's economy, culture, and social fabric. This system has its roots in precolonial times and continues to have relevance in modern times. The apprenticeship system in Igbo land has its origins in the pre-colonial era when communities were organized around extended families and clans. In these societies, skills, knowledge, and trades were passed down through generations within families. Apprenticeship served as a means of transmitting these skills from experienced craftsmen to younger individuals, ensuring the preservation and continuity of traditional trades and professions.¹

Onitsha, a prominent trading and commercial hub located on the eastern bank of the Niger River, has historically been a significant center for an apprenticeship. Its strategic location made it a convergence point for traders from various parts of Igbo land and beyond. As trade flourished, the need for skilled artisans and craftsmen grew, leading to the establishment and expansion of the apprenticeship system in the region. The apprenticeship system in Onitsha, as in other parts of Igbo land, was characterized by several key features:

1. **Master-Apprentice Relationship:** The system operated on a master-apprentice model, where an experienced craftsman or trader (the master) would take on a young apprentice. The apprentice would live and work with the master, learning the trade through hands-on experience.²

2. Skill Transfer: The primary goal of apprenticeship was skill transfer. Apprentices learned the techniques, traditions, and secrets of their chosen trade under the guidance of their master.
3. Economic Arrangements: Apprenticeships often involve economic arrangements. Apprentices would work for their masters without direct monetary compensation. Instead, they received room, board, and training. In some cases, apprentices might receive a lump sum payment known as "Owu" upon completing their training.³
4. Duration: The duration of apprenticeships varied based on the complexity of the trade. It could range from several years to a decade or more.
5. Cultural Significance: The apprenticeship system was deeply embedded in Igbo culture. It played a vital role in passing down cultural values, traditions, and knowledge from one generation to another.

Over time, the apprenticeship system in Onitsha, like elsewhere, evolved to adapt to changing economic and social dynamics. The colonial period introduced new influences, including the introduction of formal education and European-style commerce. These changes posed challenges to the traditional system, but apprenticeship persisted as an essential component of the local economy. In contemporary times, the apprenticeship system in Onitsha continues to hold significance, although it has undergone further transformations. While traditional trades remain, the system has also expanded to include modern professions and trades.⁴ As Onitsha and the surrounding Igbo communities have experienced urbanization, globalization, and technological advancements, the apprenticeship system has continued to evolve. Some apprenticeships have transitioned from traditional crafts to more modern

professions, such as technology, business, and healthcare. This adaptation reflects the changing demands of the local and global economies.⁵

While the apprenticeship system has proven its resilience, it has also faced challenges. One significant challenge is the shift in societal values, with more young people pursuing formal education and seeking white-collar jobs. This has led to a decline in interest in traditional apprenticeships, which require a significant time commitment. Additionally, the system's reliance on non-monetary compensation has sometimes resulted in debates about fair treatment and exploitation of apprentices. In response to these challenges, some masters have introduced more flexible arrangements, allowing apprentices to balance their training with formal education. Others have incorporated monetary compensation or additional benefits to attract and retain apprentices.⁶

Despite the changing landscape, the apprenticeship system remains a vital cultural institution. It serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage, including language, values, and traditions. The master-apprentice relationship fosters a sense of mentorship and community, providing apprentices with not only practical skills but also a deeper understanding of their cultural identity. The apprenticeship system continues to contribute to the local economy. Skilled artisans and professionals trained through apprenticeships play crucial roles in various sectors, from commerce to construction. The system contributes to job creation, the availability of specialized services, and overall economic development. Recognizing the importance of the apprenticeship system, both the Nigerian government and local institutions have taken steps to support and regulate it. Efforts have been made to ensure fair treatment of apprentices, provide legal protections, and promote the integration of traditional skills into contemporary industries.

The apprenticeship system in Onitsha and Igbo land at large remains an enduring cultural institution with a rich history and ongoing relevance. Its ability to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining its core values is a testament to its importance in shaping both the economy and the cultural fabric of the region. As Onitsha continues to grow and modernize, the apprenticeship system will likely continue to find ways to thrive while preserving its essential contributions to Igbo heritage.⁷

ENDNOTE

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Name of Informant	Age	Relationship with the Research	Place of Interview	Date
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Elder Moses Ifechuckwu Obiora	64	Trader	Ladipo, Lagos	23/08/2023
Mr. Kingsley Umeghalu	60	Trader	Onitsha	15/08/2023
Okay Sunday Okafor	29	Apprentice	Onitsha	15/08/2023
Gilbert Chinwuba Omeghalu	66	Trader	Onitsha	17/08/2023

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