



RESEARCH ARTICLE

RE-EXAMINING TRADITIONAL APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM (IGBA-BOI) AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVERS IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA FOR ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE: IMPLICATION TO SCHOOL MANAGERS

IKECHUKWU A. ODUM¹, CHARLES EKEADA²

^{1&2} Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri

ABSTRACT

This thoughtful but revolutionary paper sets out to re-examine the important place of Igba-boi traditional apprenticeship system in promoting economic self-reliance among secondary school leavers in South-East Nigeria. It is disheartening that there is a gross decline of the traditional apprenticeship practice in Igboland. The enterprising spirit of the Igbos tends to find practical expression when it is subjected to apprenticeship mentoring and this has proved to be the driver of economic revolution witnessed in southeastern Nigeria at the dawn of the 20th century. There is no doubt that globalization has indeed truncated many laudable cultural practices in Igboland which Igba-boi traditional apprenticeship is one by drifting away the amount of youngsters from such value-laden practice. This paper, therefore, undertakes thematic clarification on the meaning and nature of Igba-boi traditional apprenticeship system, the conceptualization of entrepreneurship in addition to re-examining the pragmatic ways through which this laudable system can be restored among secondary school youngsters. In carrying out this research, the historical survey design for data collection is adopted while document analysis/review is adopted for data analysis. Preliminary findings reveal that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has succeeded in shifting the attention of secondary school youngsters from engaging suitably in Igba-boi traditional apprenticeship system. Recommendation is given, among other things, that parents and guidance should closely examine their children to discover the ones who are naturally endowed with entrepreneurial or business potentials and make sure they channel them to apprenticeship system of training for economic self-reliance.

Keywords: Traditional apprenticeship system, economic self-reliance, (igba-boi), secondary school leavers, school managers.

Corresponding Author

Ikechukwu A. Odum

Email Address: lioniyke24@gmail.com

Telephone Number: +2348062991227

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of information and computer software technology have well succeeded in sweeping away objectivity of knowledge and replacing it with subjectivity of knowledge in the present 21st century world. The human race is constantly shrinking into one small global village at the same time and place where different civilizations and laudable human practices are being dissipated by the centripetal forces of globalization.

Historical evidence depicts that while the social dynamics were taking place, it becomes an interesting thing to observe keenly that most age-long valued civilizations of certain parts of the world which have stood the test of time and have served as springboards to the rising of human development, economic growth and social transformation are gradually going extinct. The foregoing position is on the paradoxical premise that the internationalization of information and communication technology is fast shrinking all civilizations/ cultures of the world into one entity and at the same time helping to implode cultures and civilizations of different parts of the world, which *igba-boi* Igbo apprenticeship system is one.

Igba-boi in Igbo cosmology is a highly esteemed cultural heritage in which a youngstar submits himself to an apprenticeship system where he or she is trained in certain entrepreneurial skills such as commodity trading, engine repairs and fabrication, carpentry, welding and metal fabrication, sewing and so on. It is a practice that plants the seed of greatness in the life of the young person for economic liberation and self-reliance.

At the beginning of the training, an official agreement is entered into to state the timeframe within which an individual would go through the apprenticeship process after which he or she would be given certain amount of money or equipment that will enable the graduate trainee/mentee to start up his or her own business. This cultural ingenuity found in the south eastern extraction of Nigeria has become a platform where latent enterprising spirit or potentials of the Igbos have found continuously practical expression. No doubt, this practice has proved to be the major driver of the economic revolution of south eastern Nigeria at the dawn of the 20th century.

Globalization brought on its, wake the internationalization of information and communication technology (ICT) for the improvement of human social relations in Industry, Production, Trade, Education, Hospitality, Sports and Science and Technology. However, it has succeeded in becoming an unmitigated evil and has indeed retarded human security, standard of living, as well as moral rectitude. It has swept off laudable cultural values and practices which *Igba-boi* traditional apprenticeship is one of them.

The minds of youngstars in secondary schools are corrupted with the belief that all aspects of life is moving and changing on a fast lane and therefore wealth acquisition should not be an exception. Pathological cultural variables have resulted from such inordinate and unhealthy thinking of youngstars in our today's world. Without doubt, such thinking pattern has led so many of the youngstars into internet fraud, ritual murder, kidnapping, armed robbery and dimensions of misrepresentation of personality (Odum, Ugwu-Isreal and Onyekuru, 2019).

Post-primary school students most especially in the South-East region, tend to prefer the "fast lane" route to self-reliance instead of sitting under tutors to be trained on entrepreneurial skill. The mind of



youngsters at this developmental stage is magnetic and can easily assimilate skills that would empower them economically. Acquisition of entrepreneurial skills at this level remains latent and irrevocable throughout an individual's lifetime (Odion, Alexius-Ugwulebo, Osunkwo and Nmomwu, 2021).

This thought-provoking paper is therefore perturbed at the speed rate at which the internationalization of all aspects of human activity has influenced the rate at which younger generation pursue after wealth generation. It decries the erosion of the esteemed virtues of humility, teachability, patience, respect and obedience needed for the *Igba-boi* mentorship system by the “get rich quick” syndrome through internet fraud popularly known as “Yahoo-Yahoo”.

2.0. CONCEPTUALIZATION

***Igba-boi* Traditional Apprenticeship**

Igba-boi is an age-long practice in the history of the Igbo race. It is a very important element of Igbo cosmology and history as a cultural heritage bequeathed to the south eastern region of Nigeria by their ancestry. *Igba-boi* in Igbo ancestry is generally acknowledged as a training and mentorship system where young boys between the age brackets of 10 – 15 years would offer services for a stipulated period of years, typically 5 – 7 years and in the same vein, would be trained sufficiently in a particular entrepreneurial skill or commodity trade. *Igba-boi* traditional apprenticeship can mean a time-bound entrepreneurial process and strategy to learning a trade, skills, or profession, where an individual (who is an apprentice) works under the tutelage of an experienced expert (master craftsman or mentor) to acquire practical skills and knowledge.

Odum, Chukwu, Osunkwo and Ekwuru (2022) submit that traditional apprenticeship is both along and short term process which requires clearer understanding when its key characteristics are explored, hence they outline them as follow;

1. **On-the-job training;** An employee or craftsman is usually exposed to higher skills which when he or she acquires it will be more efficient on the job thereby satisfying the expectation of the employer.
2. **Mentorship and guidance;** This characterizes trade or business tutorship where a mentee/trainee is guided consistently on a particular trade or vocation. Submissive followership remains the key element of mentorship and guidance.
3. **Hands-on learning;** Hand-on learning is a skill-building approach where the apprentice engages his or her hands in order to acquire hand work. Practical skill acquisition falls under this category. For example, sewing, Auto-mechanics, welding and iron fabrication and so on.
4. **Skill-Based Training;** This category still falls under entrepreneurial training in business, craft, production and packaging. The use of Brain (mental power) and brawn (physical energy) is involved in this category.
5. **Long-Term Commitment** (Typically 2-7 years): This involves timing of the apprenticeship programme in a manner that the skill being learnt will be acquired possibly within the stipulated time frame.



6. **Progressive Responsibilities:** The apprentice is required to be committed, serviceable and loyal to his or her mentor in order to always create stable emotional state for good mentor-mentee relation.
7. **Evaluation and feedback:** At the end of the apprenticeship programme, the apprentice is exposed to real life practical to ascertain the level of skill-building of the mentee/trainee.

3.0. Theoretical Framework

To provide focus and intellectual bearing for this paper, and to establish the need for the restoration of the *Igba-boi* apprenticeship system to the south eastern Nigeria, this paper is therefore hinged on the Human capacity theory. The Human capacity theory is the work of Yoram Ben-Porath (2006), an Israeli economist who originally developed this theory for skill acquisition and knowledge possession by man and the application of the skill and knowledge in production economics.

The theory holds that man's capacity to perform various labour tasks is based on the entrepreneurial and knowledge potential innate in him together with external factors such as apprenticeship and educational training given to man to develop the potentials built in him from cradle. The theory is suitable and relevant to the present paper in the sense that *Igba-boi* traditional apprenticeship is an approach directed towards skill acquisition and human capacity development for a specified period of time. Little wonder the Marxists' thesis on the concept of development is human capacity-building. In their position, development is ascertained when it springs from the human dimension.

3.0. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In carrying out this research, secondary data were sourced from historical documents review and online materials while content analysis/review of documents was adopted for data analysis.

4.0. CONTENT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Spotlight on Personality Products of *Igba-boi* Traditional Apprenticeship

Sir Lois Odumegwu Ojukwu

At the age of twenty years, Sir Lois Odumegwu Ojukwu moved to Lagos in 1929 with nothing, but ten years later he was already the chief executive officer of his own chain of businesses which included; Ojukwu stores, Ojukwu Textile and Ojukwu Transport Company. In 1950, Ojukwu Transport company had over 200 trucks in its fleets (Chibecan, 2019). Sir Lois Ojukwu was known to be one of the foremost business entrepreneurs of the 20th century who adopted the mentorship practice of *Igba-boi* in the south east and south west. He is reputed to be the first Nigerian billionaire. He later travelled from Lagos to Onitsha and established his first business empire called "Ojukwu Stores" and he took one of his relatives to oversee it.

Through the practice of *Igba-boi*, Sir Lois was able to train the relative in textile trading and returned to Lagos and started sending down textile through lorries to his shop in Onitsha, while he was still an employee at John Holt (Chibecan, 2019). Sir Lois Ojukwu's fleets of business within the south east and south west contributed in no small measure to the economic revolution witnessed in the south east at the time.



Innocent Chukwuma

Innocent Chukwuma is a Nigerian entrepreneur, industrialist and philanthropist from Anambra state. He is a founder and Chairman of Innocent Group, a Conglomerate with interest in Automobile manufacturing (Innoson Motors), plastics and chemicals (Innoson plastic Industries), Energy (Innoson Oil and Gas), Agriculture (Innoson Farms), Real Estate Innoson properties). He was born on October 1, 1966 in Nnewi, Anambra state, Nigeria. He graduated from Imo State University (1994) with a degree in industrial chemistry. Chief Innocent Chukwuma started as a trader in motorcycle spare parts in 1986 and founded Innoson plastics in 1997. He established Innoson motors in 2007. Chief Innocent Chukwuma is passionate about entrepreneurship, innovation, and nation-building.

Cosmos Mmaduka

Cosmos Mmaduka is a Nigerian entrepreneur, businessman and philanthropist. He was born on April 14, 1956, in Ovim, Abia State, the Cosmo Group, a diversified conglomerate with interests in' Automobile sales and services (cosmos motors), Real Estate development (Cosmos Properties), oil and Gas (Cosmos energy), Agriculture (cosmos farms), Hospitality (Cosmos Hotels).

The success stories of these entrepreneurs serve as sources of inspiration for young people who want to make a difference in the world of business and entrepreneurship. These individuals and many more like them in the south have put south eastern region on the path to economic revolution. The ingenuity of the Igbos if subjected to the system of apprenticeship will definitely bring about the economic revolution of the south east region as well as granting opportunity for self-reliance among the youths.

4.2. Human Potential and Economic Self-Reliance

It is pertinent at this segment to explain the dynamics that are at play within the human potential, apprenticeship, wealth creation and economic self-reliance;

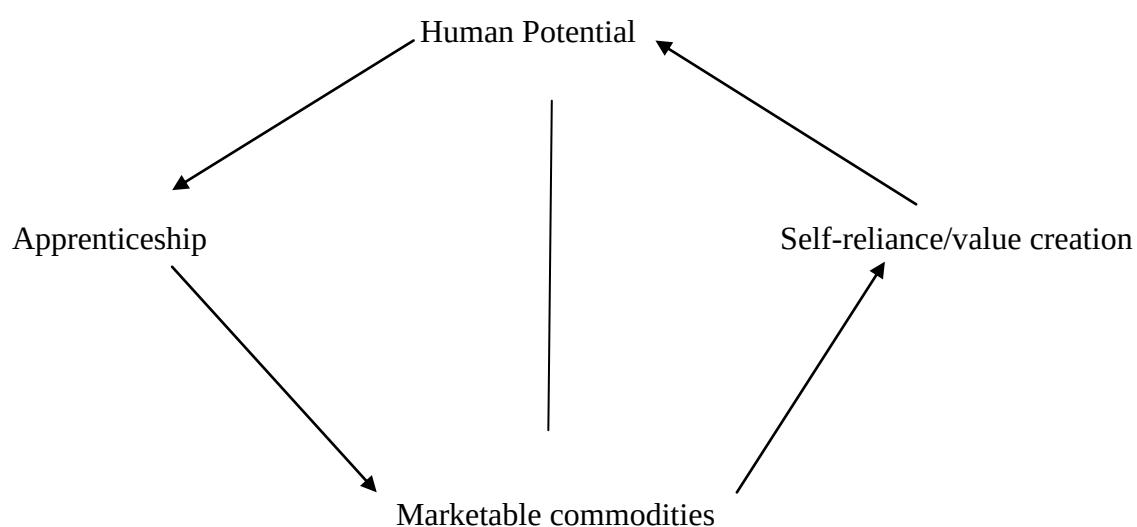


Figure 1: The Quadruple Dimensions of Apprenticeship (Adapted from Stokes, Wilson and Mador, 2002).



Economy is innate inside man. Economy is a seed of providence that is situate inside all mortals. Every man is born with the seed of economy. This is to say that man is the ultimate source of his material condition (Ake, 1981). Every man is born with a potential which represents the seed of economic welfare. The ability of the industrialized regions of the world to harness and tap into the bounties of their immediate environment to better their livelihood makes foregoing assertions unquestionable. Their ingenuity enables them to understand nature, produce instruments with which they harness nature and manufacture machines such as aircrafts, rockets, submarine warships, nuclear weapons, highly calibrated automobiles and other technological equipment (Odum, Chukwu, Osunkwo and Ekwuru, 2022).

Man and his environment become barren of material conditions, when there is situation where most people fail to discover their potentials. Similarly, when an individual succeeds in discovering his potentials and at the same time fails to put them under apprenticeship training, it becomes still a challenge. Onuekwusi (2015) submits that an individual will be able to discover and utilize his potentials to generate wealth when such individual undergoes training under the tutelage of an accomplished entrepreneur. It is becomes evident therefore, that without training, or apprenticeship, one cannot create his material conditions necessary for his subsistence. Odum et al (2022) reiterate categorically that training is what gives rise to reigning in the entire adventure of greatness and success.

According to Maxwell (2007), possessing potential is not enough, but discovering the choices that will take you beyond your potential to creating marketable products of high value is what makes one a successful entrepreneur. To him, without a product, potential remains latent and dormant, but when training enables an individual to transform potentials to marketable products, that individual is set on a route to economic self-reliance. At this point therefore he or she becomes a wealth creator. The level of economic success one is capable of attaining with a trained skill cannot be compared with working for remuneration in modern bureaucracy.

4.3. Educational Implications

The traditional apprenticeship system (Igba-boi) in the contemporary southeastern Nigeria demands that managers/administrators of schools reposition post-primary education from certificate-based school to skill-oriented and economically responsive education. In furtherance to the foregoing, create structured links between formal education and entrepreneurial apprenticeship opportunities. This is necessary for the realization of sustainable self-reliance for secondary school leavers. However, critical policies that balance formal education and apprenticeship must be put in place by education policy makers. This is to ensure that secondary schools produce graduates that are academically sound, practically skilled and economically self-reliant. It will promote the era of separating literal knowledge from productive, industrial and technological works that are supportive of young school leavers' development of self-reliant skills.

In specific terms, the educational implications of traditional apprenticeship system (Igba-boi) among secondary school leavers in southeastern Nigeria for economic self-reliance are all-encompassing. School managers such as principals, vice principals, administrators, education policy makers, education supervisors and guidance and counsellors have sensitive roles to play in the development of self-reliant skills among school leavers, that promotes their functionality and survival in a competitive



economy. The principals have a responsibility to establish cordial relationships with local business owners, craftsmen and other entrepreneurship outlets to help expose their students to legitimate entrepreneurship and enterprise opportunities. School administrators should promote functional curriculum implementation that is believed to stimulate effective academic learning with entrepreneurship and vocational education. Specifically, this is aimed at preparing school leavers for practical work-life that is rooted in functional skill application for their survival.

School managers should institutionalize career guidance services aimed at strengthening students to make well-informed decisions regarding apprenticeship, which is based on interest and labour market vagaries. Principals should integrate experiential approaches in teaching and learning in their schools. This is achievable through the use of teaching methods that lay more emphasis on industrial visit, field exposure and project-based learning among others. It is more so realizing that *igba-boi* aligns with experiential educational principle of learning by doing. There is de-emphasizing intellectualism as the most credible pathway to success. Hence, there is a need for collaboration among teachers and school administrators to encourage respect for vocational and entrepreneurial skill development of students while they are schooling.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Conclusion

The natural ingenuity required to transform the economic fortunes of the south-eastern Nigeria is in the youngstars. Cultural imperialism is the clog in the wheels of the potentials of young people most especially in the south eastern region of Nigeria. *Igba-boi* traditional apprenticeship approach to economic self-reliance remains the gateway to self-sufficiency among the youths in the south east. *Igba-boi* must be restored through a decisive economic policy by the government and parents.

Maxwell (2007) further reiterates that potential or natural talent is not enough to turn a person to a successful entrepreneur, but the willingness to go through apprenticeship practice to hone the potential is what does. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between a man's effectiveness in skill and his intelligence his imagination, or his knowledge. This reveals that one's intelligence, imagination and knowledge are essential requisites for developing entrepreneurial opportunity, but only apprenticeship practice can eventually convert those resources to economic products thereby leading to economic self-reliance.

According to Odum and Ezekwe (2015), the following apprenticeship skills among others are gateways to economic self-reliance: Information Technology solutions and services, software development, cybersecurity, automobile dealership, real estate development, oil and gas dealership Agricultural production initiative, Garment making/fashion designing, computer repairs, shoe production, catering services and event management, welding and metal fabrication, electrical installations etc.

5.2. Recommendations

In consideration of findings reached and conclusion drawn, this study recommends the following:



(a). Re-orientation of Young Apprentices: A drastic re-orientation is needed among young people and parents to be able to resist the current wave of internationalization of information technology and imbibe the wisdom of apprenticeship. Government must initiate an economic policy mandating every student in secondary and tertiary institutions to enroll and complete apprenticeship training in a skill before their graduation. This paper also lends voice to the truth that economic self-reliance can only be achieved when individuals begin to look inwards into their potentials and submitting same to apprenticeship system.

(b). Promotion of Entrepreneurial Education: It is imperative for school managers to promote entrepreneurial orientation among school leavers through establishment of entrepreneurship clubs, organizing business seminars, career talks as well as mentorship programmes periodically. These are targeted at preparing students for self-reliance than their much dependence on certificate acquisition and white collar jobs. Above all, school managers as a necessity should collaborate with government and industrialists in their effort to develop and sustain relevant entrepreneurship/vocational skills in their students. These among others serve as silent educational implications of traditional apprenticeship system (Igba-boi) to school managers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this manuscript.

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