Apprenticeship System and Skill AQU in Africa: A Study of IGBO Youth Apprentices in Auto-Motobile at Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examines the influence of apprent--iceship practices on employment generation and socio-economic development among Igbo youths in Awka metropolis, Nigeria, with a focus on the auto-mechanic workshops at Awka. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from 208 Igbo auto-mechanic apprentices through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The results indicate that apprenticeship significantly enhances skills acquisition, professional specialization, reputation, and mentorship. However, the sector faces challenges such as limited support from families and government, declining youth interest due to socio-cultural perceptions and technological distractions, and financial constraints. The study found out the importa--nce of post-primary education in improving auto-mechanic competencies and highlights the socio-economic benefits of sustained apprenticeship engagement, including urban development and increased business activity. It therefore recommend that the sustainability of the apprenticeship system depends on policy support, societal re-orientation, and infrastructural improvements.
It also recommends that there is need for government involvement, formal vocational education, integration, gender inclusivity, and modernization of training to foster employment and economic growth.

Keywords:
Apprenticeship System, Auto-mechanic industry,Igbo Youth , Skills acquis--ition, Anambra State,Nigeria.

Introduction
There has been a long standing interest in Igbo apprenticeship in Africa , especially Nigeria, which sustained the race both in the pre-colonial era and after the Nigeria civil war. This interest was intensified with the discovery that many youth now indulge in all sorts of crime due to poverty and lack of employment.
It has been asserted in literature that sustainable skills development is the key to poverty eradication, employment generation and rapid economic development globally. In 2020, the unemployment rate in Nigeria hit a record of 33.3 percent. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, this means 23.19 million Nigerians were unemployed (Sahara Reporters, 2021). Nigeria has seen a rise in both inflation and unemployment, leading the country to have one of the highest number of unemployed people in the world. In spite of all the efforts, poverty level in Nigeria has remained one of the highest in the world behind India coupled with high unemployment rate.
To tackle unemployment, Nigeria could leverage on the entrepreneurial skills develop--ment potential of the Igbo apprenticeship system as a way of acquiring and transferring saleable skills and knowledge for the younger generation (Ariyo, 2022).
Outcome of studies have shown that the Igbo Youth apprenticeship system could have provided employment to the young able bodied boys and girls wasting their energy in search of jobs and subsequently learning evil things like gambling, drug addiction and so on. Normally the Igbo apprentices work from morning to night with much energy as their

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masters dish out instructions upon instructions which they obey without questioning. After a long period of time, these young teenagers grow in rank to handle auto-mechanic repairs and thereafter become their own boss later in life.

In Nigeria, apprenticeship practices existed during the pre-colonial era. Clans and families jealously guarded their lineal skills through customs, family lineage, and rituals. Skills were passed on within the family by training young people on family trades, crafts and skills. Over the years, Igbos have been transferring skills from one generation to another in some form of apprenticeship training. The contributions of apprenticeship to job creation and skills acquisition in Africa, especially in Nigeria, has long been appreciated by countries eager to promote their economic growth (Elechi, 2019).

According to Nneji (2020), the apprenticeship system was brought to the limelight in Nigeria after the Nigerian-Biafran war. Many parents who were left with nothing after the war were forced to send their children with mean age of 8- 20 years to learn the trading business under their kinsmen, uncles, friends etc. This was how Igbo settlers after the war rebuilt Awka,Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, Enugu and developed other parts of Nigeria like most parts of Lagos such as Oshodi, Yaba, Mile 2 and Alaba international market. In the apprenticeship system, the master (Oga) and apprentice ('Nwaboyi') enter into agreement for a period ranging of time ranging from 4-7 years within which the apprentice will serve and learn from the master at the end of which the master will settle the apprentice.

Apprenticeship involves the exchange of labour and sometimes money for training given on the job. Apprenticeship still remains the vehicle for skills training. There are different enterprises that engage in apprenticeship practices, which include; wielding, mechanics, auto mechanics, auto-electricians, tailoring, generator repairing, mobile phone repairing, carpentry, furniture making, catering, manicure/pedicure, and plumbing. These trades are recognized as a means of absorbing and training unemployed youths through manpower development and economic empowerment (Ariyo, 2021). The Nigerian economic environment is, yearning for entrepreneurs who would through apprenticeship practices exhibit creative and innovative abilities laced with the willingness to create enterprises that the unemployed will be willing to offer their services since, the demand for white collar jobs has increased more than the possible available job and this has created unexpected unemployment and hence, poverty (Aminu, 2018).

Entrepreneurial development has helped in shaping the economy of most of the advanced and developed nations for over a century now. The phenomenal concept has been a topical issue in both developed and developing economies because of the significant and critical roles entrepreneurship has played in building most of the advanced and emerging countries . It has been asserted that entrepreneurship play critical role by contributing to economic growth, job creation, and national income and hence to national prosperity and competitiveness. Great business minded people view entrepreneurship as self-employment of any sort, which bothers on continuously identifying, evaluating and taking advantage of business opportunities and initiating sustainable action to ensure success. Indeed, every entrepreneurial endeavour, for the creative ones, is understood as a search for profit based on innovation, creativity and efficient utilization of resources in a consistent Igbo cultural pattern, which is filled with vision and enthusiasm and is result driven. The entrepreneurial exploits of the Igbo people for instance are founded on the apprenticeship institution which is generally guarded by customs, lineage and brotherhood (Okorie, 2021).

Automobile mechanic trade is one of the courses offered in technical colleges to equip students with salable skills. The real value of creating an enterprise is not in having the finished product in hand; rather, the value lies in the process of researching and thinking about your business in a systematic way. The act of management principles helps to think things through thoroughly, study and research if you are not sure of the facts, and look at your ideas critically. It takes time , but helps to avoids costly, perhaps disastrous, mistakes later (Solomom, 2020).

According to Akram and Syed (2017), automobile mechanic craftsman who possesses adequate management skills and competent in diagnosing and repair of automobile can become an entrepreneur in auto body repair, auto engine repair, auto electrician, auto parts

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merchandise and auto tyre vulcanizing. Automobile mechanic trade is one of the trades that are included in the National Board for Technical Examination (NBTE 2017) curriculum for technical colleges in Nigeria to enable the young minds to be self-reliance.

The indigenous apprenticeship system is one of the strategies for developing the entrepreneurial skills necessary for efficient management of their businesses and ensuring trans-generational survival of these businesses. The auto-maintenance mechanics presents an appropriateplatformto examine the relationship between the apprenticeship practices and entrepreneurial skills development among the youths. The Motor Vehicle Mechanic enterprise ought to be managed by an artisan with practical skills, mechanical knowledge and the ability to diagnose and carryout repair works and maintenance of motor vehicles, acquired through apprenticeship in a designated MVM skill acquisition centre. However, the prospects of establishing and running standard motor vehicle mechanic enterprises by graduates of apprenticeship programmes are in doubt by many researchers. Thomas (2019) stated that greater proportion of the graduates of apprenticeship programme who established motor vehicle mechanic enterprises are unable to service the carburetor, fuel lift pump, fuel pipes and are unskilled in their respective area of specification considering the low-quality instruction, teaching and training they received while on the training. According to Abuda (2023) an average motor vehicle mechanic operating an enterprise lacked the requisite mechanical skills to diagnose, maintain and repair the ignition system, carburetor, aligning and balancing of wheels of motor vehicle.

This situation had adversely affected vehicle owners and transportation system in Awka metropolis based on declining maintenance operational standard, non-application of technical skills, poorly equipped workshop, and non-functional motor vehicle enterprises in the area. It is against this backdrop therefore, this study deemed it necessary to unravel the mystery behind apprenticeship and Youth employment in Igbo Land.

Concept of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is defined by Hamilton and Hamilton (2022), as the process of involving someone under the guidance and teaching of an expert, in order to best learn an art, skill, or trade through practical experience. This is known as the traditional business-learning school (Olarewaju, 2019). ILO (2012) defines apprenticeship as a period when an apprentice learns the techniques, terminologies and strategies as well as tools and equipment used for a particular business. Traditionally, apprenticeship training is a period of gathering all the necessary skills, knowledge and techniques of a particular job that will help one to be established and get involved in the creation of wealth. Apprenticeship practices during the colonial age involved mostly males while the female children were usually trained in the kitchen on how to cook by their mothers, recently, women also engage in apprenticeship in whatever vocation they desire (Ekpe and Razak, 2016).

Apprenticeship practices and area of specialization

The Igbo apprenticeship practice, also known as the Igbo trade apprenticeship system and commonly referred to as *'Igba-Odibo (Being a servant)* is a framework of formal and informal agreements between parties that ultimatelyfacilitateentrepreneurialdevelopment among the Igbos. Once a ward is under the tutelage of his master/mistress, he/she becomes a servant "Odibo" (servant). The "Igba-odibo" in this context therefore refers to someone who is being trained to acquire the skills of trading (buying and selling), craft or a vocation. It is a process whereby a family gives out their child to live with, serve and learn from the already established entrepreneurs in the society. According to Adeola and Ozigbo (2021), the Igbo apprenticeship system represents a socio-economic model of empowerment rooted in the cultural values of the Igbo people—particularly shared prosperity, communality, and brotherhood. This model seeks to foster economic equality through the generation, distribution, and redistribution of wealth. It operates through successful entrepreneurs who mentor, train, and support their relatives or community members, with the overarching aim of building a mutual aid economy. This economy is sustained by locally sourced venture capital and is characterized by continuous replication of entrepreneurial success. Adeola and Ozigbo further describe

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the system as not only a model of economic empowerment but also a powerful tool for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship development in Southeastern Nigeria, offering young people the opportunity to gain skills and entrepreneurial competencies.

Methodology

208 male participants, of Igbo youths apprentices aged 20-35years were purposively selected from thirty auto-mobile workshops in Awka and questionnaire administered to them. Another 20 more senior apprentices were interviewed. Awka was purposely chosen because of its high population of Igbo youth.

Mix method of survey research design was adopted for this study. This method involves the collection of data using quantitative and qualitative method selected from the population which could relate to people or items of interest to the researcher to gather sufficient data on the subject under investigation.

Method of Data Analysis

The research questions were used to analyze responses to the questionnaire items. The researcher used statistical package for the social science (SPSS) in processing and analyzing the data from the questionnaire. Also, the data collected was analyzed suing frequency tables and simple percentages.

Result

The result showed that there is considerable contributions of apprenticeship practice to individual skill acquisition and professional growth in the auto-mechanic sector. 80% of the respondents assert that they sustain their families from the proceed of auto-mobile repairs. 90% of the respondents agreed that apprenticeship facilitates adequate knowledge acquisition in automobile repair, fosters a good reputation, promotes prosperity, and provides mentorship opportunities for incoming apprentices.

124 respondents or 59.6% of the respondents strongly agree that apprenticeship practice contributes to adequate knowledge in auto-mechanics, while 78 respondents or 37.5% agree with this. Only 6 respondents or 2.9% disagreed. In addition, 90 respondents or 43.3% strongly agree that apprenticeship need government and non governmental assistance to enhances its operation and reputation, while 102 respondents or 49% agree that Table 4.5 above shows clearly that 124 respondents or 59.6% of the respondents strongly agree that apprenticeship practice contributes to adequate knowledge in auto-mechanics, while 78 respondents or 37.5% agree with this. Only 6 respondents or 2.9% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. In addition, 90 respondents or 43.3% strongly agree that apprenticeship enhances good reputation, while 102 respondents or 49% agree. There were 16 respondents or 7.7% who disagreed with this and none who strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 86 respondents or 41.3% strongly agree that apprenticeship practice brings prosperity, while 98 respondents or 47.1% agree. There were also 24 respondents or 11.6% who disagreed and none who strongly disagreed. Finally, 130 respondents or 62.5% strongly agree that apprenticeship encourages mentorship of a prospective apprentice in auto-mechanics, while 70 respondents or 33.7% agree. There were only 8 respondents or 3.8% who disagreed, and none who strongly disagreed with this statement.

Apprentice should have basic education before apprenticeship. There were 16 respondents or 7.7% who assert that the apprentices should be exposed to modern technological training in order to be globally competitive. Furthermore, 86 respondents or 41.3% strongly agree that apprenticeship practice brings prosperity, while 98 respondents or 47.1% agree that apprenticeship is necessary not only to sustain the individual but for developing the Nation. There were also 24 respondents or 11.6% who strongly assert that the problems of rising wave of crime in Nigeria result from the neglect of apprenticeship. Finally, 130 respondents or 62.5% strongly agree that apprenticeship encourages mentorship of a prospective apprentice in auto-mechanics, and that no graduate can equal them, while 70 respondents or 33.7% agree that Igbo apprenticeship should be revived with adequate incentive from all the stake holders.

Discussion

This results underscore the fact that though apprenticeship serves as an important function,it cannot be an alternative to formal education for many individuals in the metropolis. This is necessary for equipping them with both technical expertise and life

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skills that enhance employability and self-reliance. Furthermore, the findings highlight the vital role of mentorship in sustaining skill transmission across generations, ensuring continuity and the preservation of professional standards.

However, the study also identified several reasons for the declining interest in apprenticeship among youths in the study area. These include the prevailing get-rich-quick mentality, the influence of peers who often discourage long-term skill acquisition, the effects of poor societal re-orientation on the value of manual labor, and laziness intensified by technological distractions. Many young people are increasingly attracted to quicker financial gains through informal or non-technical ventures, leading to a gradual erosion of the apprenticeship tradition. This challenge is compounded by societal trends that prioritize white-collar jobs over vocational training, despite the latter's potential to provide stable and sustainable livelihoods.

Another important finding is the role of post-primary school education in enhancing the effectiveness of auto-mechanic apprentices. Respondents agreed that having at least a secondary school education significantly improves an apprentice's comprehension of technical procedures, communication skills, versatility in handling tasks, and human relations within the trade. This implies that educational attainment contributes to better service delivery, customer satisfaction, and adaptability in a fast-changing automotive industry.

The impact of apprenticeship on socio-economic development was also highlighted in the findings. Participants affirmed that consistent engagement in the trade, particularly six days a week, contributes to urban development through the establishment of repair clusters that attract customers and centralize business activities. This not only enhances the visibility and popularity of the practitioners but also boosts community-level economic activity. The concentration of skilled mechanics within the city fosters commercial vibrancy, encourages infrastructural improvements, and attracts investment to the area, all of which contribute to the broader economic development of the Awka metropolis.

Conclusion

Igbo apprenticeship is very important for developing countries like Nigeria as it is a reliable means of employment for the productive Igbo youths.Despite its importance, the apprenticeship system in Awka faces serious challenges that limit its potential impact. These include a lack of support from both families and government, low interest among the younger generation in skill acquisition, and an increasing desire for overseas migration in search of better opportunities. Poverty, coupled with the unreliability of some apprentices, further undermines the sector. Without deliberate policy interventions and community support, these challenges could erode the sustainability of the apprenticeship tradition.

This study concludes that auto-mechanic apprenticeship in Awka metropolis plays a significant role in both skill development and socio-economic growth. The trade remains male-dominated, attracts mostly individuals in their productive years, and benefits greatly from a moderate level of formal education. In order to control current moral decadence , drug addiction, armed robbery and other vices, Igho apprenticeship system should not only be revived but supported by all and sundry.

Recommendation

The study recommends that there is need for formal vocational education programs in secondary and tertiary institutions to complement apprenticeship learning, as well as collaboration between auto-mechanic workshops and technical schools for practical skill development.

The study also recommend Awareness and Re-orientation Campaigns, that will involve public enlightenment campaigns to change negative societal perceptions about apprenticeship, especially among youths. That will also promote success stories of auto-mechanic professionals as role models to inspire interest. It also recommend the inclusion **of** more female participation in the trade through targeted recruitment, scholarships, and training opportunities and training apprentices on modern automobile technologies to keep them competitive in an evolving industry.The study strongly recommends that integrating more formal learning opportunities into apprenticeship programs could yield better-trained and more competitive practitioners.

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It also recommends that addressing those challenges will require collaborative efforts involving stakeholders, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, and community leaders, re-oriented societal attitudes, provision of financial and infrastructural support, as well as making vocational training more attractive to young people.

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