

# The Role of the Igbo Apprenticeship System in Entrepreneurship Development in Nigeria

Oreoluwa Oluwaseyi Familoni

*Department of Business Entrepreneurship and Executive Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.*

Corresponding author: [familonioreoluwa95@gmail.com](mailto:familonioreoluwa95@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

The growth of entrepreneurship is vital for Nigeria's economic development, with Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs) playing a key role. This study examines the impact of the Igbo Apprenticeship System on entrepreneurship development and youth employment in Nigeria. Through semi-structured interviews with 50 Igbo business owners at Dugbe market in Ibadan, Oyo State, a significant market in South-Western Nigeria, the research highlights the system's role in establishing small businesses and imparting entrepreneurial skills to apprentices. The study confirms that the apprenticeship system is well-established within the community, with all respondents familiar with it. It highlights the system's critical role in entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, noting that 98% of respondents have participated in the system, and over 60% have sustained their businesses for more than ten years. The system also positively impacts youth employment by providing young people with the skills necessary to start and run their own businesses. However, it shows limited success in empowering females, and challenges such as financial settlement issues and a hostile work environment persist. The study recommends restructuring the system to shift from an individualistic focus to one that promotes teamwork, collaboration, and mutual support, with a particular emphasis on enhancing inclusivity for women.

**Keywords:** Igbo Apprenticeship System, Entrepreneurship, Development, Youth Employment, Nigeria.

## Introduction

The increasing numbers of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) and large business enterprises have resulted in the growth of the Nigerian economy. The rise of entrepreneurship greatly benefits the economy. According to Tijani-Alawiye (2004), entrepreneurship development involves increasing the number of existing small, medium, and large enterprises in a country by creating and fostering capable entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are equipped to successfully manage innovative ventures, which are then nurtured to thrive and sustain, ultimately achieving broader socio-economic development objectives.

Given the generally held view that entrepreneurship development is the key to poverty eradication, employment generation, and rapid economic development, various governments in Nigeria have, over the past three decades, have implemented policies and programs to strengthen it (Idam, 2014). However, studies have identified several macro

factors that hinder entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. These include corruption (Ojeifo, 2012), unreliable power supply (Ayegba & Omole, 2016), insecurity (Okeke & Eme, 2014), infrastructural decay, maladministration (Ihugba, Odii, & Njoku, 2013), inadequate funding (Ofili, 2014), a shortage of well-trained instructors (Adekunle & David, 2014; Agu & Ayogu, 2015), poor sensitization, and ineffective monitoring and supervisory mechanisms (Ajibola et al., 2014). Additionally, a lack of knowledge in science and technology (Diyoke, 2014), as well as factors such as age (Agbim et al., 2013), parents' educational qualifications, family entrepreneurial experience, and students' socio-demographics (Siyanbola et al., 2009) also impact entrepreneurship development.

Entrepreneurship is an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing, markets, processes, and raw material through organizing efforts that previously had not existed (Venkataraman, 1997; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurship is the manifest ability and willingness of individuals, on their own, in teams, within and outside existing organizations, to: – perceive and create new economic opportunities (new products, new production methods, new organizational schemes and new product- market combinations) and to – introduce their ideas in the market, in the face of uncertainty and other obstacles, by making decisions on location, form and the use of resources and institutions. Entrepreneurship is “at the heart of national advantage” (Porter, 1990).

The link between entrepreneurship and favourable economic outcomes is well acknowledged (Xiong et al, 2018; Vracheva and Stoyneva, 2020). It is widely believed that entrepreneurship is beneficial for economic growth and development. Entrepreneurship has been remarkably resurgent over the past three decades in countries with substantial poverty reduction (Naude, 2013). Success in entrepreneurship has been linked to apprenticeship skill development.

According to history, apprenticeship is one of the oldest means of passing on skills and information. Put another way, it is defined as a mix of practical and theoretical knowledge. Ndubuisi Ekekwe (2022) mentioned in an article that, the Japanese have kaizen, China Confucius, Africa has Ubuntu and Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS).

This research aims to investigate the Igbo apprenticeship system to understand its impact on entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. Additionally, it seeks to determine how effectively the system contributes to youth employment within the country.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) states that Nigeria is ranked as the 27th largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$496.12 Billion. The Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME) sector, which is vital to major developed economies, plays a significant role in employment and economic growth. In 2022, SMEs contributed 46.3% to Nigeria's GDP, accounted for 6.21% of gross exports, and employed over 84% of the total workforce (PWC, 2024). Despite this, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported in 2023 that the youth unemployment rate

stands at 8.6%, with approximately 13.7% of youths classified as not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET).

Globally, SMEs are responsible for approximately 50% of employment, with 90% of registered businesses classified as SMEs. These enterprises play a crucial role in economic growth, particularly in high- and middle-income countries, where they support both employment and GDP. For instance, SMEs contribute 16% to GDP in low-income countries and 35% in middle-income countries, whereas high-income countries see a contribution of 51% (Adoyi and Agbo, 2009).

Therefore, without a proper entrepreneurship system that will enable and foster small businesses, the economy will not develop, and the unemployment rate will be high.

## Research Questions

The following are the research questions.

- i. Is the Igbo apprenticeship system aimed at entrepreneurship development in Nigeria?
- ii. Is there a relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and youth employment in Nigeria?
- iii. How effectively is the Igbo apprenticeship system tackling youth unemployment among males and females?

## Hypotheses

A research hypothesis was drawn for the research questions to be answered on a valid scientific basis.

**H<sub>1o</sub>** = There is a relationship between Nigeria's Igbo apprenticeship system and entrepreneurship development.

**H<sub>1<sub>1</sub></sub>** = There is no relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria.

**H<sub>2o</sub>** = There is a relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and youth employment in Nigeria.

**H<sub>2<sub>1</sub></sub>** = There is no relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and youth employment in Nigeria.

## Research Objectives

The broad objective of this research is to empirically investigate the Igbo apprenticeship system's role in Nigeria's entrepreneurship development. However, the specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the Igbo apprenticeship System.
- ii. Determine the impact of the Igbo apprenticeship system on youth unemployment in Nigeria.
- iii. Investigate the Igbo apprenticeship system's contribution to Nigeria's entrepreneurship development.

- iv. Evaluate the impact of entrepreneurship development on youth unemployment in Nigeria.
- v. Investigate the place of female empowerment in the Igbo apprenticeship system.

### **Significance of the Study**

Various research has been done to study the Igbo apprenticeship system but not on its impact on the economy with regards to youth unemployment. Also, studies available are focused on the male gender, but little or nothing has been done with regards to females under this Igbo apprenticeship system, how they have benefitted and can contribute to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. Therefore, this study aims to ascertain whether this successful apprenticeship program among the Igbo tribe of Nigeria aid in the growth of entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Igbo Apprenticeship System**

The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS), which originated in the country's South-East, is mostly used by the Igbo people, who comprise roughly 15.2% of all people in Nigeria, making them one of the largest ethnic groupings in Africa (Williams & Lizzie, 2008). It is a mix of legal and informal indentured arrangements between parties that support entrepreneurial groups among the Igbos. The system's main goal is to promote and boost economic growth, stability, and sustainable livelihood through funding and investing in human resources through vocational training. (Agozino et al., 2007)

The Igbos are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, and the IAS is an extension of that spirit as it inducts young boys into a venture. (Ejo-Orusa et al., 2019). The venture can be a trade, an enterprise or a vocation (Alike et al., 2019), or sometimes serving as domestic help. (Akinyele & Segun, 2019) This system is a repeated cycle because the bosses of these boys were once apprentices themselves, before resources were handed over to them to start their businesses (Alike et al., 2019). The learning is informal, and the training programmes are unstructured, but partakers learn and master the skills needed to embark on their enterprise. (Ejo-Orusa et al., 2019).

#### **History of Igbo Apprentice System**

The Igbos, in contrast to other ethnic groups, were exposed to entrepreneurship by their owners. They traded in commodities such as spices, sugar, tobacco, and cotton for export to America, Europe, and Asia. This culture among the Igbos dates back to the slave trade business from the 15th century (Ohadike & Don, 1998). These actions kindled the entrepreneurship spirit among the Igbo people and encouraged them to quickly venture into various forms of entrepreneurship during the pre-colonial era (Iwara et al., 2019). During the colonial era, the Igbos had become the leading exporters of palm oil and kernel, craftsmen, traders, merchants, and cottage industrialists. This entrepreneurial culture was

preserved through the apprenticeship framework until his current age (Ohadike & Don, 1998).

## **The Fundamental Principle of the Igbo Apprenticeship System**

There are three fundamental principles that shape the Igbo apprenticeship system. This includes:

### **Igbo social construction of reality**

Social construction of reality as defined by Kuhn (1970) "is the entire constellation of belief, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community". Oguejiofor (2010) articulated his understanding of worldview as encompassing beliefs about both material and spiritual realities, along with their relative significance. He also discussed the origin and destiny of humanity, the purpose of life, and what is necessary to achieve this purpose. This unitary conception of reality pervades the Igbos in a remarkable way. Therefore, an Igbo does not see himself or herself as an individual without noticing the need for the other. (Oguejiofor, 2010). This is reflected in their various proverbs that emphasize the importance of individuals caring for one another.

### **Igbo philosophy of resilience**

The Igbo people hold the belief that life is fraught with challenges from birth through adulthood. This perspective profoundly shapes their attitude toward life, emphasizing resilience and perseverance (Oguejiofor, 2010). Igbo people are inherently resilient, a trait attributed to their strong communal system that supports them in overcoming various challenges. They are known for their assertiveness and pride in their accomplishments, and they instill a mindset of success in their children, encouraging them to overcome obstacles and excel in life (Okwuosa et al., 2021). Basden (1966) captures the essence of the Igbo spirit. Regardless of the circumstances, Igbo immigrants adapt to their new environments and quickly make their presence known in the communities where they settle.

### **The Igbo think-home philosophy**

The Igbo people have a strong sense of attachment to their homelands, often encapsulated in the saying "wealth must always reach home". This explains why, regardless of where an Igbo man lives, he visit his hometown periodically, often with the intention of establishing or building something there. In Igbo culture, a man is not considered complete unless he has a home of his own in his native land (Anazodo et al, 2023). Consequently, the Igbo diaspora frequently gathers to discuss the challenges facing their homelands and to contribute to its development (Kanu, 2019). This collective effort has resulted in an infusion of over six trillion naira in investments within the Southeast (Anazodo et al., 2023).

### **Elements of the Igbo Apprentice System**

During the course of this apprenticeship training, a wide range of skills are imbibed, including technical, management and interpersonal abilities. These skills encompass

forecasting, human relationship management, inventory control and analysis, opportunity recognition and utilization, supply chain management, quality control, bookkeeping and accounting, oral communication, linguistics, planning and goal setting, monitoring, marketing, leadership, listening, networking, negotiation, entrepreneurship, coaching, customer relationship management, and teamwork (Onuoha, 2010). Such training is evident in the extensive involvement of the Igbo people across various industries and sectors, including transportation, construction, manufacturing, real estate, commerce (import and export), and mercantile trading (Ile, 2001).

### **Phases of the Igbo apprenticeship training system**

This apprenticeship system is a rational economic decision that makes use of cheap labour to build up human resources, while creating the opportunity of developing self-employed individuals (Ejo-Orusa, 2019). This system has three main phases:

- **Talent Identification**

This process begins within the household, where family members identify potential entrepreneurial skills among the younger generation. Once a skill is recognized, the search for a suitable mentor starts. After a mentor is found, a traditional handing-over ceremony is conducted, during which the parents provide guidance on the virtues and expectations of the apprenticeship. The ceremony includes a detailed agreement outlining the responsibilities and commitments of all parties involved, with everyone required to consent to the terms (Iwara, 2019).

- **Scholarship**

During this phase, the mentee is offered boarding and is expected to perform household chores as part of the training program. It is at this phase that the ways of living according to the mentor's preference are initiated, after which the mentee is taken to the enterprise location to start the induction into entrepreneurship. Some entrepreneurial skills are also learned at this phase and the mentee is privileged to see day-to-day interaction with a customer. (Iwara, 2019; Ezeajughu, 2021).

- **Graduation**

After the pre-agreed period, the mentor offers the mentee capital for start-up, depending on the mentee's efficiency and commitment during the scholarship, and also based on the financial capacity of the mentor. This is usually done in the presence of the mentee's people who host a small gathering to mark the occasion. (Iwara, 2019; Ezeajughu, 2021).

This phase sums up the whole learning process and begins the innovation process. The settlement also helps to initiate potential entrepreneurs into the entrepreneurship journey. They establish a venture with the rewards under the custody of their mentor. Some entrepreneurs also use this approach to achieve market penetration, after which they gradually delve and diversify their innovation in a perfect competitive market. Some

mentors create extension outlets for their mentees under a close watch while they operate others. These methods have brought about major entrepreneurial skills in Nigeria, and the cycle continues (Eze, 2023; Umemezia & Ojukwu, 2023).

## **Types of Apprenticeship System Around the World**

Apprenticeship is an effective method for individuals from various backgrounds to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for occupational preparation (Smith, 2019). The types of apprenticeship system around the world include:

- **Apprenticeship that is independent of formal education**

This type of apprenticeship is usually pioneered by the company, and it works with people who are interested in obtaining a recognized certificate for their training, but not necessarily interested in undergoing a formal education (Smith, 2019; Cerdin & Sharma, 2020).

- **Apprenticeship that is fused with formal education**

Here, apprenticeship is part of the educational curriculum. Apprentices are usually referred to as students. This method of apprenticeship is most common in developed countries, and can be implemented in different ways, depending on the academic level of the apprenticeship learning (Billett, 2016).

- **Informal apprenticeship or trainee**

It is more common in developing countries that have a large number of informal employments that the training takes place outside a formal educational setting. Knowledge is usually passed on through family, community, and the agreement is usually between the business owner and the trainee. This type of apprenticeship is not part of the educational system and does not lead to a certificate. (Hofmann et al., 2022). The Igbo apprenticeship system falls under this category.

## **Methodology**

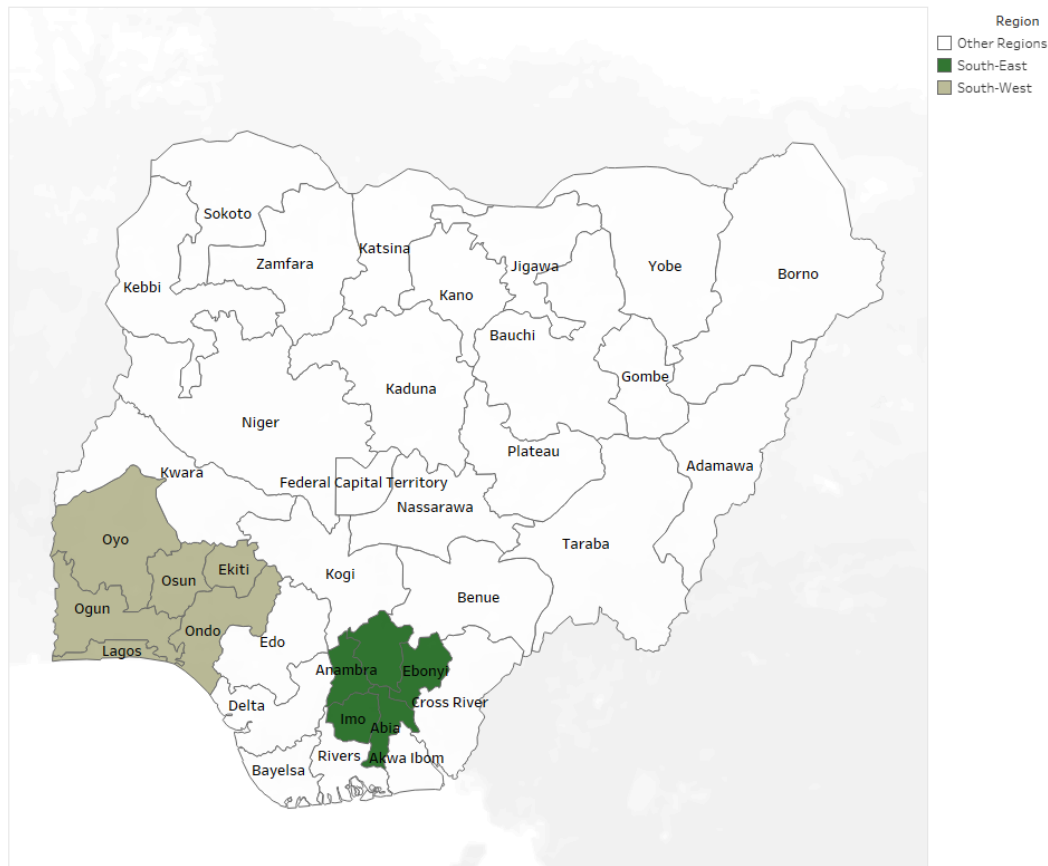
### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to collect data. Respondents were asked a mix of carefully crafted open-ended and a few closed-ended questions to obtain detailed and relevant information regarding the topic of interest.

### **Study Population**

The study was carried out among Igbo business owners in Dugbe market, Oyo State, South-West Nigeria. The Dugbe market is one of the largest markets located in Ibadan, which is situated in the North-West local government area in Oyo state. As at the 2006 Census, it

had a population of 152,834 with an area of 26 km<sup>2</sup>. According to an Igbo Market leader that was interviewed, there are more than 1,500 Igbo traders in the Dugbe cluster.



**Figure 1:** Map of Nigeria Highlighting the South-East and South-West Regions

**Source:** Constructed by the author using Tableau.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employed a simple random sampling method. Respondents were asked a carefully selected mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions to collect relevant information on the topic of interest.

The survey was carried out within one week, from Thursday, May 12, 2022, to Thursday, May 19, 2022. It was conducted in various locations around Dugbe, Ibadan, including Salvation Army, Queen Cinema, and Ekotedo. All survey respondents were male. During fieldwork, it was observed that females do not typically participate in the Igbo apprenticeship system, unlike their male counterparts. This observation is further discussed in subsection 4.4.

The decision to conduct this study within the Dugbe market in Oyo State is justified by several factors. Firstly, Dugbe market hosts the largest cluster of Igbo businessmen and women (the target group) conducting their business activities there. Additionally, it is the largest market in the Ibadan North-West local government area and is centrally situated in



the heart of the Ibadan business district. These factors make Dugbe market an ideal location for this study.

## **Sample Size**

50 Igbo business owners were interviewed, following the questions in the interview guide developed for the study.

## **Research Instrument**

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews. Business owners were approached randomly and invited to participate. Upon acceptance, participants were given an informed consent form to sign.

Each interview commenced with a greeting and a series of warm-up questions covering biographical and demographic information. Following this, the interview proceeded according to a semi-structured interview guideline, which included 15 questions.

The criteria used for randomly selecting the respondents were as follows:

## **Inclusion criteria**

- Must belong to the Igbo ethnic group
- Must be a shop owner
- Must have been through the Igbo apprenticeship system

## **Exclusion criteria**

- From other ethnic groups
- Did not undergo the Igbo apprenticeship system

## **Method of Data Analysis**

The responses from the interviews were analysed using thematic interpretations. Data gotten from the interviews were transcribed and analysed using the thematic framework approach for qualitative analysis.

## **Limitations and Bias**

This study is subject to limitations inherent in qualitative research. The sample, while representative of the Igbo business community in the Dugbe market, may not be fully representative of the entire Igbo entrepreneurial landscape. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce potential biases. To mitigate potential biases, several measures were taken;

- To ensure a representative sample, data were collected from various areas within the Dugbe market.
- Efforts were also made to establish rapport with participants to encourage open and honest responses.

- To ensure confidentiality and minimize social desirability bias, participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous.

### Ethical Issues

- **Voluntariness and Respect for person**

Participation in this research was voluntary, and no one was cajoled or forced to participate.

- **Opportunity to decline**

The participants of the study were informed that they could decline or withdraw from the study at any time without any form of repercussion.

- **Informed Consent**

Informed consent, both verbal and signatory, were sought from all the participants after a detailed explanation of the research purpose and procedure had been made.

- **Confidentiality**

All the information received from the participants were kept confidential and prevented from the view of third parties.

### Results and Discussion

This section presents the data analysis and discussion of findings from the open-ended and closed-ended questions answered by Igbo business owners in Dugbe market, Oyo State, South-West Nigeria. The study's results are also discussed in relation to the overall goal of the research: to investigate the contribution of the Igbo apprenticeship system to the growth of entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

### Socio-Economic Analysis

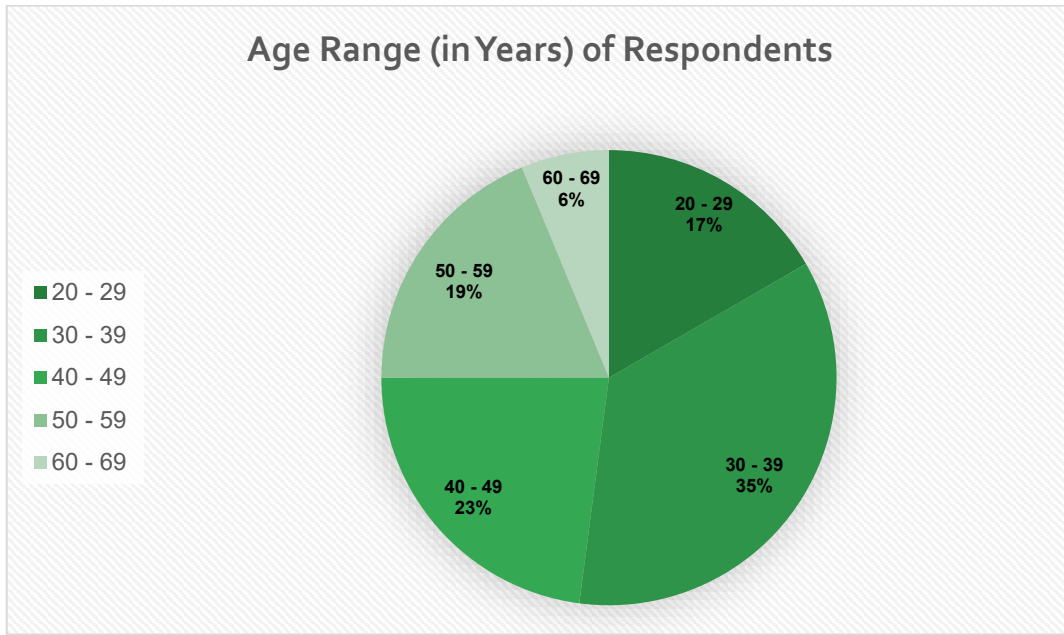
A total of fifty (50) respondents were interviewed, with ages ranging from 20 to 70 years. Upon analysis, the oldest respondent was 65 years old, while the youngest was 21 years old. The largest age group in the research sample was between 30 and 39 years, comprising approximately 35% of the respondents. This was followed by the 40 to 49-year age group, which made up 23% of the sample, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Additionally, 19% of the respondents fell within the 50 to 59-year age range, 17% were aged 20 to 29, and only 6% were between 60 and 69 years old, as shown in the figure below.

**Table 1:** Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range (in Years)	Percentage
20 – 29	17%
30 – 39	35%
40 – 49	23%
50 – 59	19%
60 – 69	6%

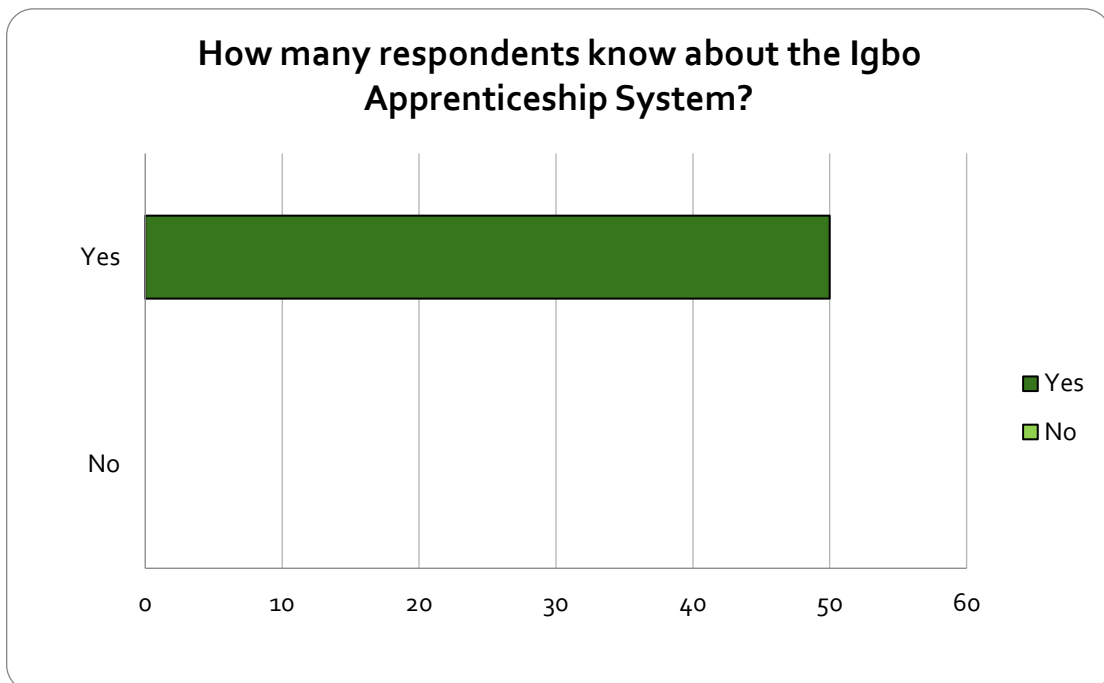
**Source:** Data extracted from the field survey.



**Figure 2:** Age of Respondents

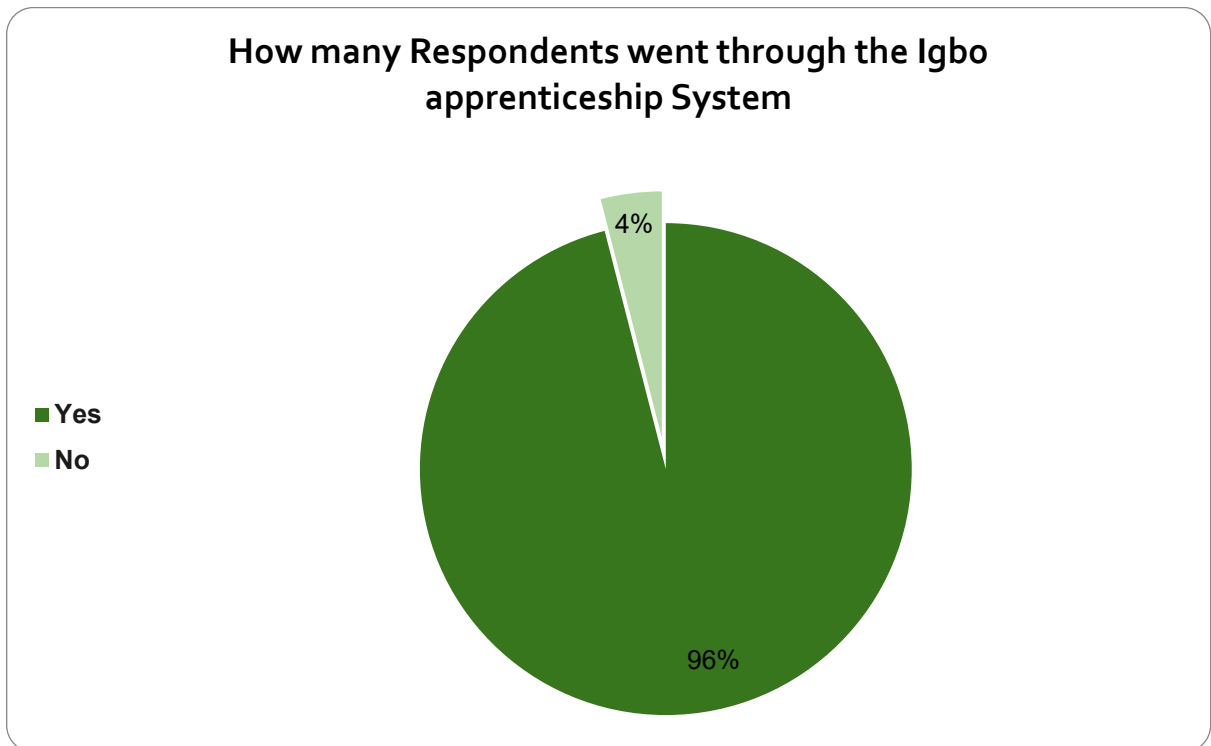
**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

During the survey, participants were asked if they were familiar with the Igbo apprenticeship system, and 100% of them confirmed that they were. This is indicative of the fact that this apprenticeship system is a renowned system amongst the Igbo tribe.



**Figure 3:** Number of respondents who know about the Igbo Apprenticeship System

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from field survey.



**Figure 4:** Percentage of respondents that went through the Igbo Apprenticeship System

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

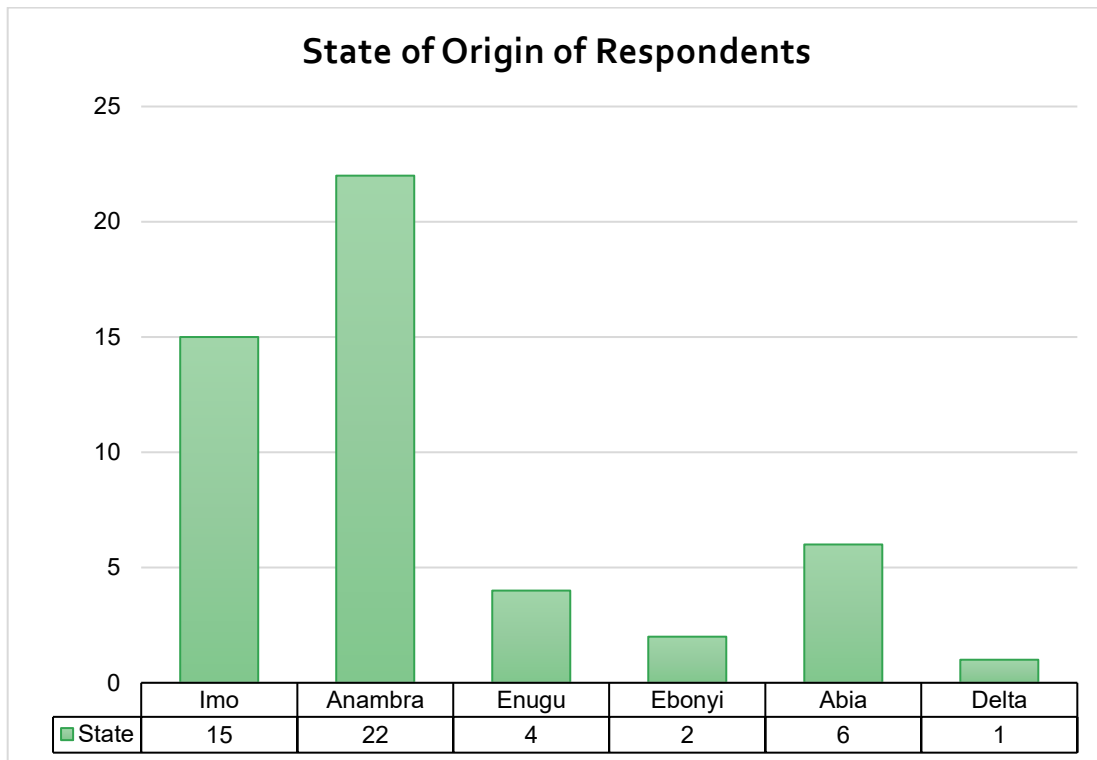
The interview took place in the Dugbe market district, Ibadan Oyo State, South-West of Nigeria. The responses from the respondents provided some insight into the Igbo trade cluster, which showed diversity with regard to the states from which they originated from.

**Table 2:** Geographical Distribution for State of Origin of Respondents

State of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Imo	30
Anambra	44
Enugu	8
Abia	12
Delta	2

**Source:** Data extracted from the field survey.

The majority of the respondents are from the following Eastern states, Anambra (44%), Imo (30%), Abia (12%), Enugu (8%), Ebonyi (4%) and Delta (2%) as shown in the Figure 5 below. It was also observed that the physical distribution of respondents from the same state of origin was randomly dispersed across the geographical location of the study.



**Figure 5:** State of Origin of Respondents

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

The Igbos have always had a strong entrepreneurial spirit and this spirit has been deep-seated in its people. Igbo traders have dominated many industries and have proliferated major trades such as clothing and textile, building materials, spare parts, computer accessories, photography, electrical, electronics, automobile, and logistics.

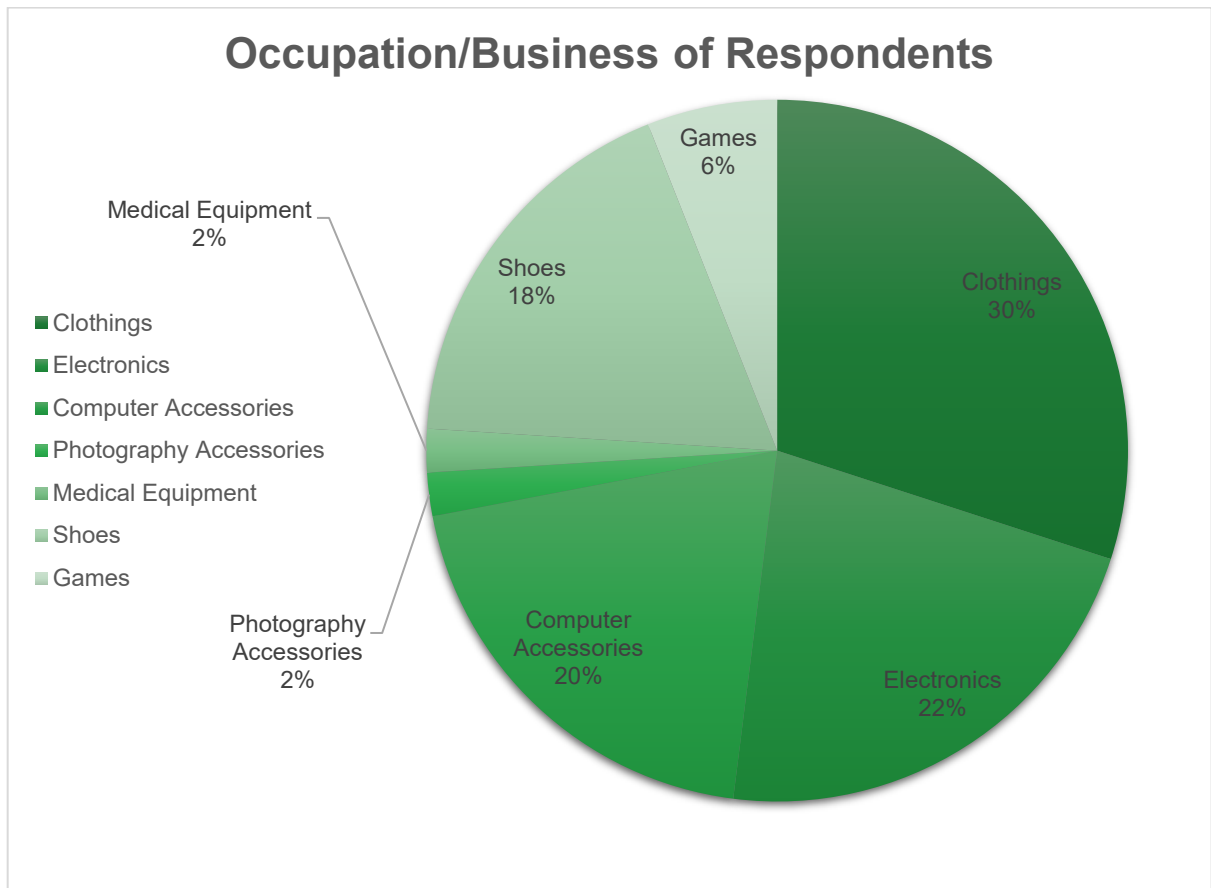
Most respondents in this study, within the geographical location, have their line of business or occupation predominantly in the clothing industry. They are popularly called 'Okrika', a Nigerian slang used to refer to affordable second-hand clothes and clothing items. This constituted 30% of the total sample, followed by electronics (22%) and computer accessories (20%). The lowest was in the medical equipment and photography accessories section, with only 2% of the respondents, as shown in Figure 5.

**Table 3:** Businesses of Respondents

Business of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Computer Accessories	20
Electronics	22
Clothing	30
Medical Equipment	2
Photography Accessories	2

**Source:** Data extracted from the field survey.

**Figure 6:** Occupation of Respondents



Source: Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

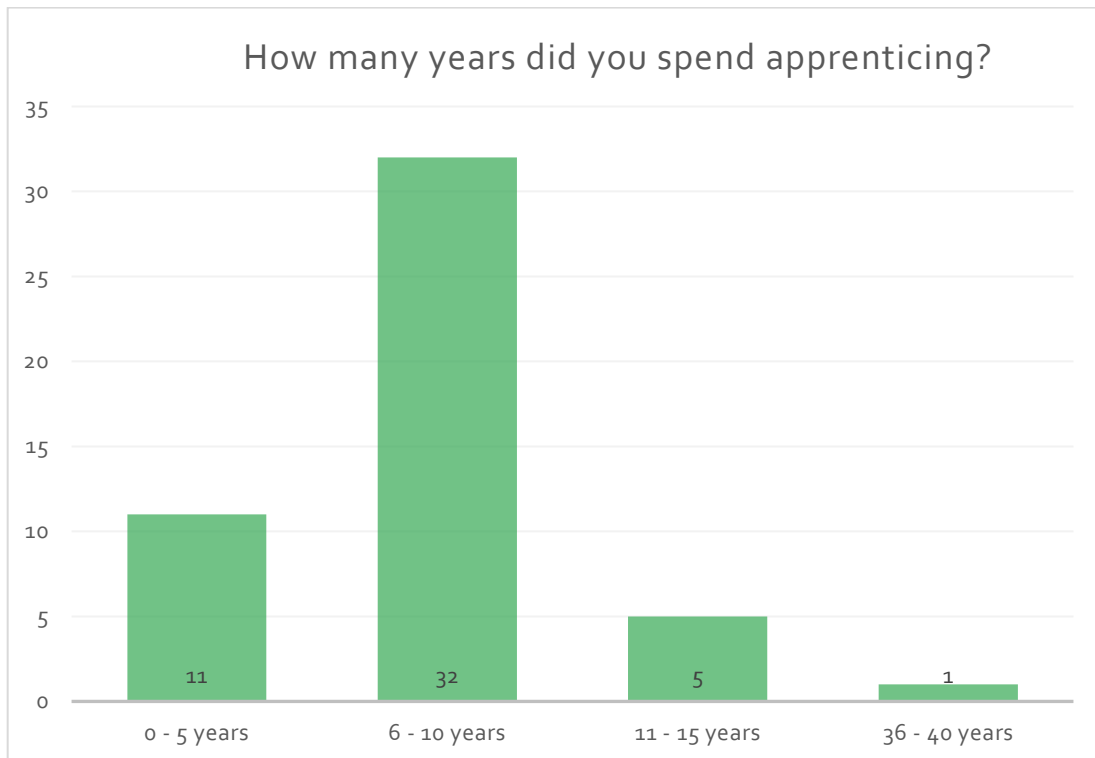
### Nigeria's Igbo Apprenticeship System and Entrepreneurship Development

The impact of Nigeria's Igbo Apprenticeship System on entrepreneurship development can be seen in the following ways:

#### 1. Business Establishment:

The Igbo apprenticeship system has been instrumental in the establishment of small businesses in the community. It provides young people with the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become successful entrepreneurs. In the process of learning the trade, apprentices are exposed to the various aspects of running a business, including marketing, financial management, and customer service. This exposure equips them with the practical knowledge and experience needed to start their own businesses and become self-employed.

100% (50 out of 50) of the respondents know about the Igbo Apprenticeship System. However, only 49 out of 50 (98%) went through the system, with more than half of the survey respondents spending over five years in the apprenticeship system (Figure 7). This led to the establishment of businesses that involved the sales of different items such as clothing, electronics, computer accessories, games, shoes, medical equipment, and photography accessories (See Figure 6).



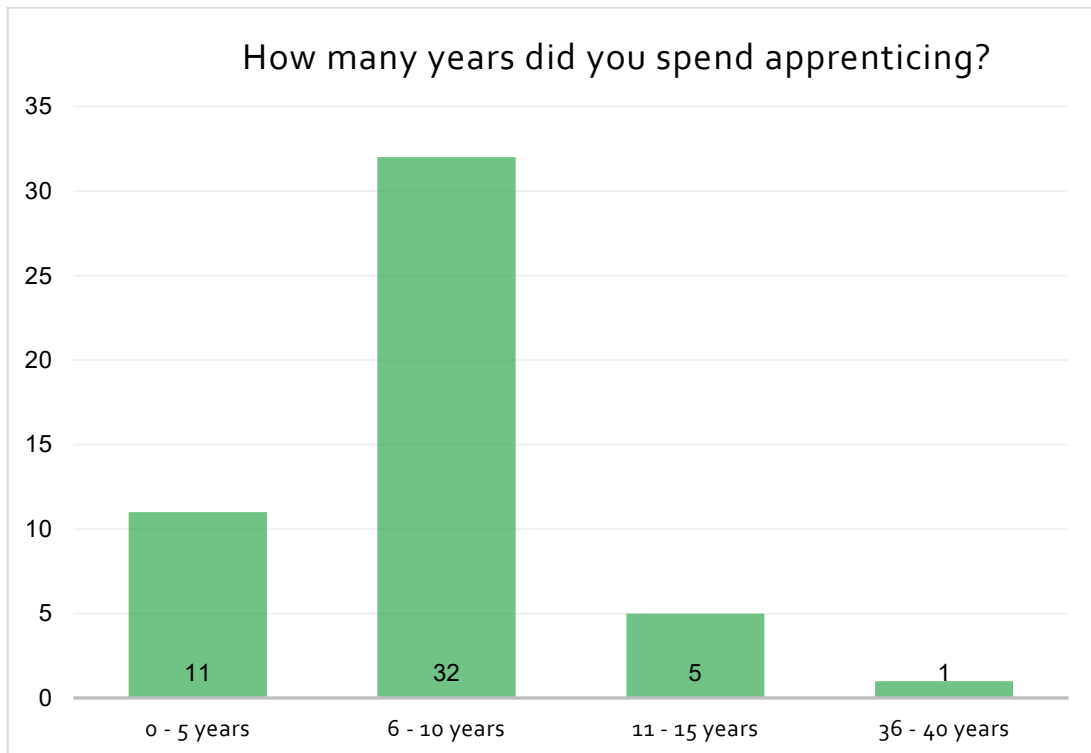
**Figure 7:** Number of Years Spent in Apprenticeship

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

**2. Sustainability:**

The transfer of skills and knowledge from master to apprentice ensures the sustainability of the trade and helps to preserve traditional skills and trades. This is particularly important in communities where certain trades are an integral part of the local culture and economy. By preserving these skills and trades, the community can continue to thrive and maintain its unique identity.

From Figure 8, over sixty percent of the respondents have been in their current occupation for over 10 years. This shows that the Igbo apprenticeship system has empowered individuals to be able to build sustainable businesses over the years that have generated income for themselves and their family.



**Figure 8:** Years Spent in Occupation

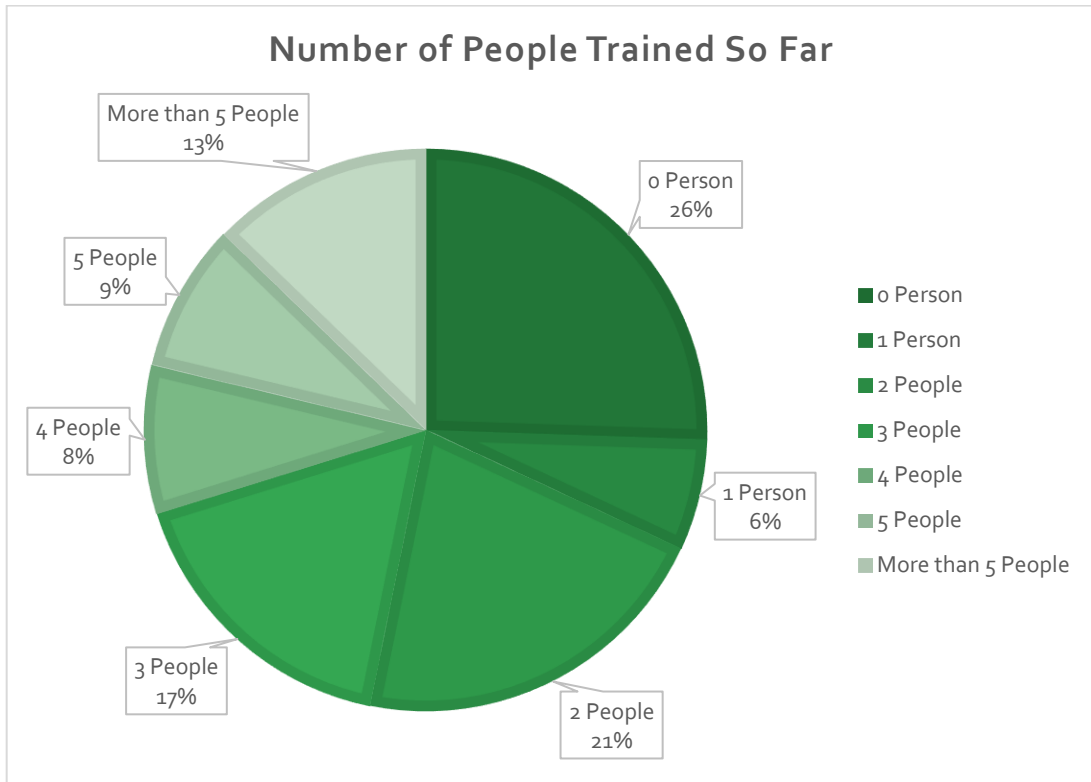
**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

### 3. Mentorship and Training:

The apprenticeship system provides a structured and personalized approach to training that is not found in traditional educational settings. Apprentices receive one-on-one mentorship and guidance from experienced professionals, allowing them to receive individualized attention and support as they learn the trade. This personalized approach to training has proven to be effective in developing the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in business.

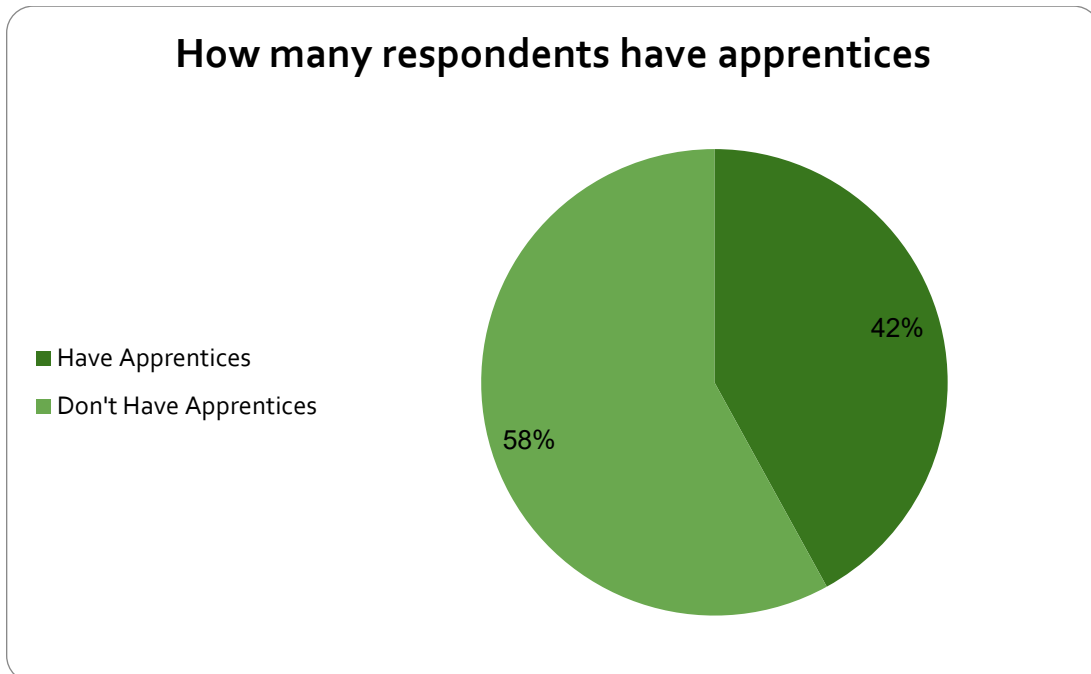
As of the time of the study, 42% of the respondents have apprentices. Out of those with an apprentice, 65% have one apprentice, 20% have 2 apprentices, 10% have 4 apprentices, and 5% have 1 apprentice. Also, the majority of businessmen have been involved in training in the past with 13% who have trained more than five individuals, as shown in Figure 9. This shows a ripple effect of the Igbo apprenticeship system where those that have been trained by the system see the need to do the same for others.





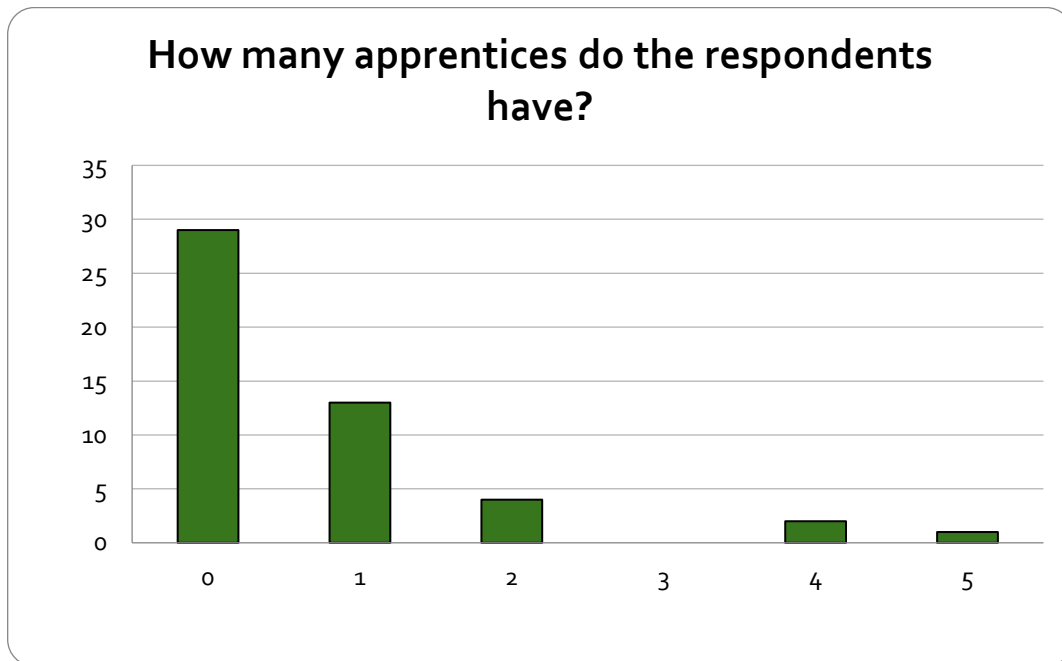
**Figure 9:** Numbers of People Trained

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.



**Figure 10:** Percentage of Respondents that have Apprentices

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.



**Figure 11:** Number of Apprentices Respondents Have

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

#### 4. Financial Development and Asset Building:

The Igbo apprenticeship system provides young people with the opportunity to earn a steady income and build assets, as they work and learn from experienced tradespeople. This financial stability allows apprentices to save money, invest in their businesses, and plan for the future. As apprentices gain experience and become skilled in their trade, they can command higher wages and build their own businesses, further increasing their financial stability and asset-building opportunities.

It plays a major role in the lives of these apprentices, facilitating financial development, asset building and wealth creation that has enabled them to have successful businesses. Some of the comments made by the individuals is that the apprenticeship system taught them patience, the value of money, discipline, responsibility, organisation, hard work, strength, and money management. It is proof that the Igbo system does not follow any conventionally organized curriculum, rather it focuses on personal development through self-discipline and hard work. A boy who would work under his or her master for the number of years he serves is adequately refined by the system, before becoming independent enough to set up his or her own business.

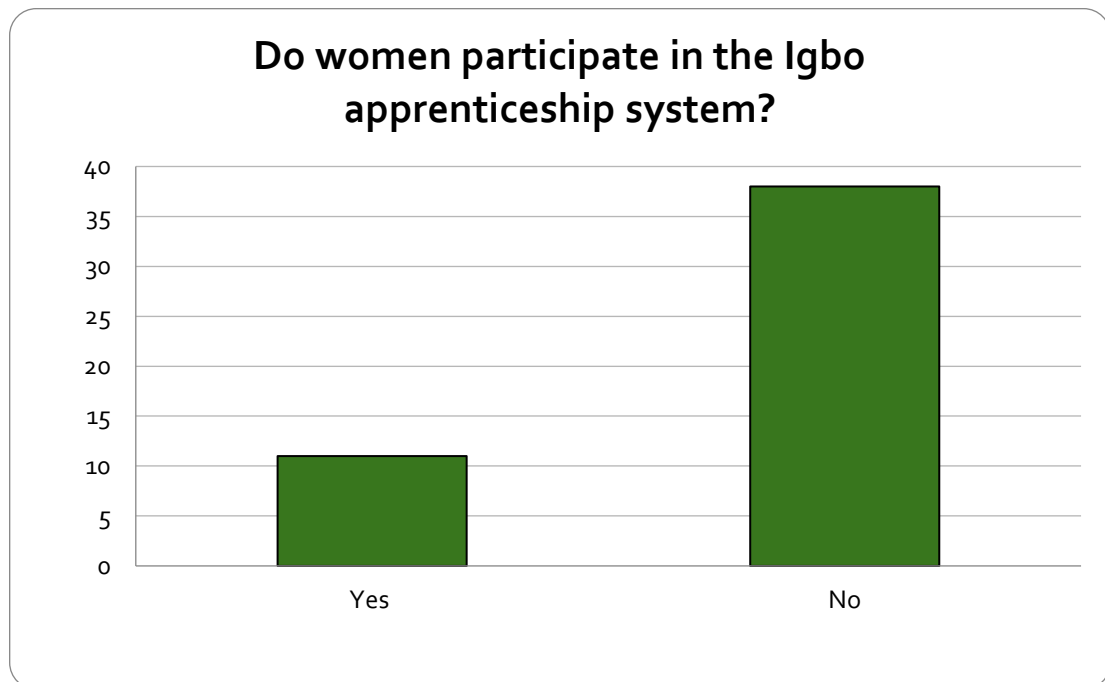
#### Female Empowerment in the Igbo Apprenticeship System

From the inception of the system, the Igbo apprenticeship was designed to employ and empower young men with skills in order to perpetuate a trade and also to become financially sufficient. As mentioned in subsection 4.2, the Igbo apprenticeship system is dominated by the male gender. All of the respondents were male.

In these times of gender equality, where the female gender is no longer barred from participating in seemingly male dominated industries, the study sought to ascertain their level of involvement in the Igbo apprenticeship system. As part of the interview questions, the respondents were asked about the participation of women in the Igbo apprenticeship system and if the system has established women in business.

From their responses, 78% of the respondents mentioned that women do not participate in the Igbo apprenticeship system while 22% said women participated in the system. After answering the first question in this category, a follow-up questions about whether the system has established women in business was asked. The majority commented that although women do not serve masters or mistresses like the male gender does for years, their level of involvement is limited to learning a trade or working as salesgirls.

Studies have shown that the system could work for women because over the years, the impact has been shown in the women being a partner to their husband, thereby giving most credit to their husband (Ndubuisi, 2022). Therefore, through the apprenticeship system, women have the opportunity to learn a trade and gain the skills and knowledge needed to start their own businesses and become self-employed. This will provide them with financial independence and the ability to support themselves and their families. However, the Igbo apprenticeship system still has a long way to go in female empowerment.



**Figure 12:** Women Participating in Igbo Apprenticeship System

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

**The Igbo Apprenticeship System and Youth Employment in Nigeria**

The Igbo apprenticeship system has played a significant role in addressing the issue of youth employment in Nigeria. The system provides young people with the opportunity to

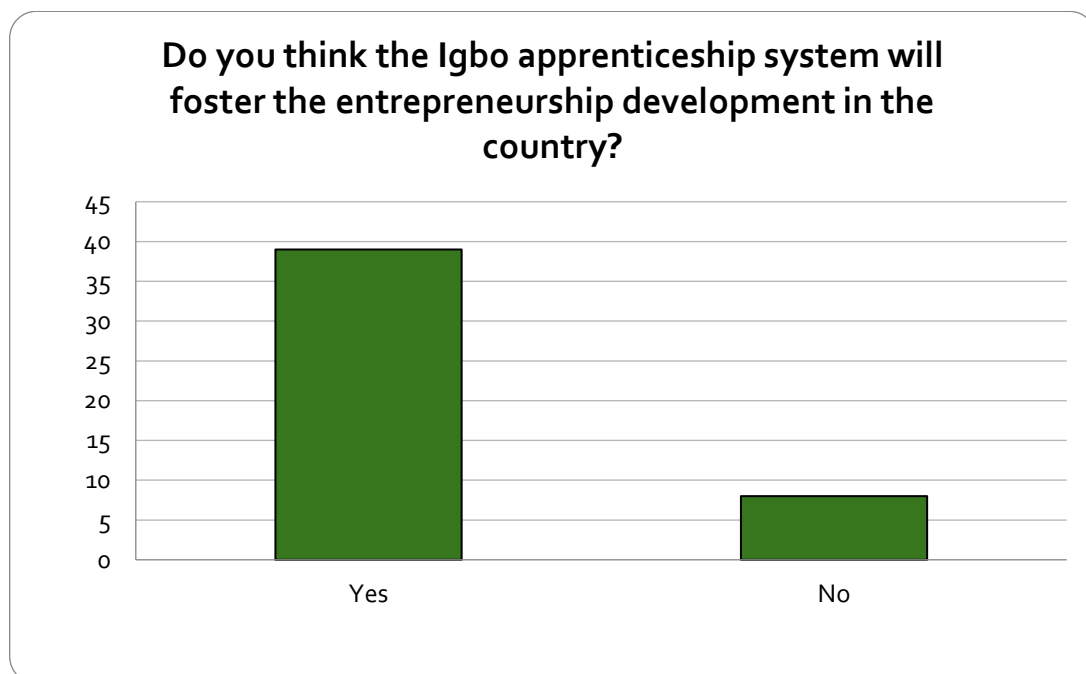
learn a trade and gain the skills and knowledge needed to start their own businesses and become self-employed. This can help to reduce unemployment and improve the economic prospects of young people in the community.

In Nigeria, youth unemployment is a major challenge, with many young people facing limited job opportunities and high levels of poverty. However, through the apprenticeship system, young people are able to acquire practical skills and knowledge that can help them to become successful entrepreneurs and create their own job opportunities.

Additionally, the apprenticeship system provides young people with access to mentorship and support, allowing them to develop their skills and knowledge in a supportive and encouraging environment. This can help to build their confidence and resilience, which are important qualities for success in business.

The financial independence and opportunities for self-employment provided by the apprenticeship system can also help to improve the overall economic prospects of young people in the community. By becoming successful entrepreneurs, young people are able to support themselves and their families and contribute to the economic growth and development of the community.

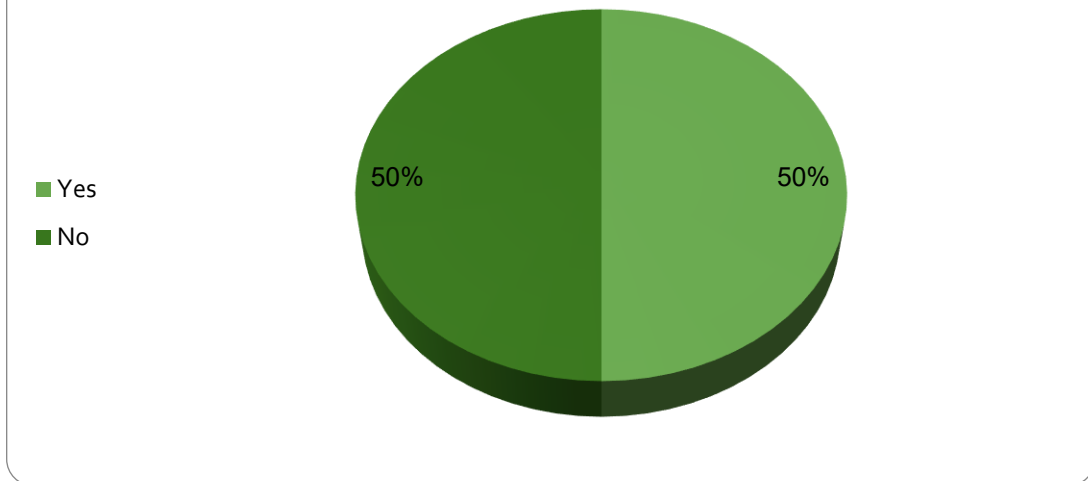
As quoted by different respondents, the Igbo Apprenticeship System helped in the creation of jobs for the youth. Through the apprenticeship system, the youths are taught how to manage funds, be independent, acquire new skills, and start their own business. This could reduce crime rates and the number of young people involved in social vices as they are busy and not left idle due to the high unemployment in the country.



**Figure 13:** Responses of the Impact of the Igbo Apprenticeship System

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

### Do you think the government should generally implement the Igbo apprenticeship system?



**Figure 14:** Percentage of respondents that think the government should implement the Igbo apprenticeship system

**Source:** Constructed by the author using data from the field survey.

#### Problems and Challenges of the Igbo Apprenticeship System

The Igbo apprenticeship system has proven to be effective and has indeed raised a sizeable number of successful, financially viable and prosperous enterprises. However, it is not without its unique problems and challenges.

The respondents identified the following as the top three challenges:

- a. **Masters not settling their apprentices-** One of the challenges of the Igbo apprenticeship system highlighted by Mpi (2019) and Ezeajughu (2021) is the failure to settle apprentices after the agreed-upon period. The terms of settlement after completing the apprenticeship are often not clearly defined. When a boy is enrolled in the system and taken from his family, the exact conditions for his settlement at the end of the apprenticeship are typically only discussed verbally, focusing mainly on the duration of the apprenticeship. These discussions often exclude the specifics of any financial settlement.

This has led to inconsistent and arbitrary monetary settlements offered to the boys at the end of their apprenticeship. This gap has been exploited by some unscrupulous Igbo business owners, who either unjustly underpay their apprentices or abruptly terminate their service just before they complete their tenure.

- b. **Abusive and wicked Masters-** Another recurring issue that dominated the responses of the interviewees was the abusive nature of some masters. The respondents even referred to these kinds of people as “wicked masters”.

Some Igbo business owners exploit the unstructured nature of the apprenticeship system and leverage it as a means of acquiring manual labour. When they take in these boys as apprentices, they begin to use them for manual labour and maltreat them. It was highlighted that some of these masters allow their wives and immediate households maltreat the boys.

- c. **Dishonest Apprentices-** Some of the respondents expressed concerns that the youths suffer from the get-rich-quick syndrome and a lack of patience for learning necessary skills. They claim that the decline of principles like integrity, self-control, diligence, and hard effort has resulted in a pursuit for wealth at any costs. This has led some of the young apprentices to be dealt dishonestly with their masters. They sell goods without remitting the proceeds or gains to their master's business. At other times they would steal goods and cash proceeds, which impacts negatively on the profitability of their master's business. In some cases, some businesses have collapsed due to this issue.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The Igbo apprenticeship system appears to have a significant impact on the growth of entrepreneurship in Nigeria through its effects on business establishment, creating sustainable enterprises, mentorship and training, and character development. Also, it has been able to impact youth employment through the acquisition of essential skills that enables young people to start their businesses. However, as discussed in subsection 4.4, the system has not been able to lead to the start of female-led businesses as much as it has impacted male-led businesses.

### **Relationship Between the Igbo Apprenticeship System and Entrepreneurship Development**

The findings from the study provide strong evidence that the Igbo apprenticeship system plays a vital role in entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. As shown in section 4.3, the system has been instrumental in the establishment of small businesses. The data revealed that 98% of the respondents underwent the apprenticeship system, and over 60% have sustained their businesses for more than ten years. This suggests that the apprenticeship system not only equips young people with the skills and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship but also supports the creation of sustainable enterprises. Also, Eze (2023) notes that the apprenticeship system accelerates the career progression of potential entrepreneurs, as the skills acquired during training are crucial for achieving success. Therefore, these findings from this study support the hypothesis that there is a relationship between Nigeria's Igbo apprenticeship system and entrepreneurship development.

### **Relationship Between the Igbo Apprenticeship System and Youth Employment**

The study also highlights the significant impact of the Igbo apprenticeship system on youth employment. As detailed in section 4.5, the system has provided young people with the

skills needed to establish their own businesses, thereby addressing the issue of youth unemployment. The study's results show that the apprenticeship system has effectively engaged youth in productive activities, reducing the potential for unemployment-related social vices (Mpi, 2019). According to Umemezia & Ojukwu (2023), this system plays a crucial role in closing the unemployment gap in the country. These findings corroborate the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and youth employment in Nigeria.

### **Gender Disparities**

The Igbo apprenticeship system has been highly effective in addressing youth unemployment among males. However, the findings in section 4.4 indicate that its impact on female empowerment has been limited. The study found that only 22% of respondents mentioned female participation in the system, and even then, it was largely restricted to supportive roles rather than full apprenticeships. This disparity suggests that, while the system has been successful in reducing unemployment among males, it has not yet achieved the same level of success for females. This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance the inclusivity of the apprenticeship system, particularly for women. to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of the Igbo apprenticeship system in entrepreneurship development and youth employment, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. First the focus on Dugbe market limits the generalizability of the results to other regions in Nigeria, as the apprenticeship system may operate differently in other areas. Second, the reliance on self-reported data from business owners may introduce biases in the responses, as participants may have overstated the positive aspects of the apprenticeship system or underreported challenges due to social desirability bias. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the apprenticeship system, its outcomes and its impact on entrepreneurship.

## **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

The findings from the interviews demonstrate that the Igbo apprenticeship system has significantly contributed to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. The system has facilitated the establishment of numerous small businesses, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship among the Igbo people. By providing mentorship, training, and practical experience, the apprenticeship model has equipped apprentices with the skills and knowledge necessary to become successful entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the system has not only addressed youth unemployment but also has broader implications for the Nigerian economy. Offering a pathway to self-employment has contributed to reducing reliance on formal employment and mitigating crime rates and

social issues associated with unemployment. The creation of sustainable enterprises through the apprenticeship system has greater implications for the Nigerian economy, as it shows the importance of entrepreneurship in driving economic growth and reducing dependence on government support.

### Recommendations

The challenges identified, such as the lack of formal agreements between masters and apprentices and issues of abuse and dishonesty, indicate areas where policy intervention is needed. Formalizing the apprenticeship process, including clear guidelines for settlement and addressing issues of exploitation, could enhance the system's effectiveness and protect the rights of apprentices. Additionally, introducing oversight mechanisms or support services could help mitigate the risks associated with the unstructured nature of the apprenticeship system.

Despite the numerous impacts of the Igbo Apprenticeship System, there is still room for improvement to increase its overall impact on society. It is therefore imperative that the Nigerian government pay necessary attention to the challenges this indigenous incubator program is facing in order to improve it further and in turn, its products. This will mean that at the state and municipal government levels, the government should establish a regulatory body overseeing the relationship between mentor and mentee and other mentoring programs. This was done to guarantee that the apprentices receive sufficient mentoring on the fundamental ideas that drive the Igbo apprenticeship system.

Many of the businesses owned by the entrepreneurs were able to thrive through the seed capital disbursed by their Master (that is, the individual that mentored them through their apprenticeship). Financial capital is one of the basic elements of any successful business. Therefore, organizations can support by awarding seed capital to individuals who have gone through the system. Also, the government can enact policies, such as tax exemption, that would favour such start-up businesses.

Many of the businessmen made comments about the ill-treatment of some mentors to their mentees or how some apprenticeships could be disloyal and dishonest. This could taint the good image that the Igbo Apprenticeship System has built over the years. Therefore, to alleviate this, a proper structure that includes a fixed term of apprenticeship and a legally binding agreement should be made between the mentor and the apprentice.

The way forward is to improve the apprenticeship system. This means changing from an individualistic culture that stresses self-reliance to one that promotes teamwork, collaboration, and mutual support.

To address the apparent gender disparities in the Igbo apprenticeship system, targeted interventions are necessary to empower women and facilitate their integration into the apprenticeship framework. Such interventions should focus on:

- **Mentorship and Role Models:** Providing mentorship opportunities for women aspiring to enter the apprenticeship system can foster a supportive environment



and facilitate knowledge transfer. Identifying successful female entrepreneurs who can be role models can inspire and motivate other women.

- **Skill Development and Training:** Tailored training programs can equip women with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in the entrepreneurial landscape. This includes business acumen, technical skills relevant to specific trades, and financial literacy.

Implementing these strategies will make it possible to create a more inclusive and equitable apprenticeship system that empowers women to contribute fully to Nigeria's economic growth.

### Suggestions for Further Studies

Investigating the impact of the Igbo Apprenticeship System on entrepreneurship development and youth employment has enabled this research study to contribute to the body of knowledge. However, there is still so much to learn about this system. Here are some proposals to be considered for future research. This study only considered a fraction of the available population of Igbo business owners in Ibadan, Oyo State. Other market clusters such as other states in the South-West region of Nigeria can be considered in order to capture a wider array of responses. Additionally, future research should investigate how does seed capital given by mentors influence the growth of businesses under the Igbo Apprenticeship System.

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