

Innovations

Empirical Analysis of the Igbo Apprenticeship System: A Model for Effective Entrepreneurial and Skill Development

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Abstract: *This empirical study investigates the Igbo apprenticeship model, an indigenous framework deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the Igbo people of Nigeria, and its pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition. Amid multidimensional challenges of poverty, unemployment, and economic stagnation, the research underscores the critical importance of nurturing innovative entrepreneurial ecosystems and cultivating a skilled workforce. Adopting a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 287 business owners across the five states of the South East region - Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Rigorous measures ensured reliability and validity, including a four-point Likert scale and a response rate of 82.5%. The findings unveil the profound impact of the Igbo apprenticeship model. Regression analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between the model and entrepreneurship development ($\beta = 0.843$, $t = 11.015$, $p < 0.05$), with the model accounting for 61.3% of the variation. Similarly, a substantial positive effect was observed on skills acquisition ($\beta = 0.623$, $t = 9.956$, $p < 0.05$), explaining 46.5% of the variation. The study concludes that the Igbo apprenticeship model is a powerful indigenous framework for fostering entrepreneurship and skills development. While addressing challenges such as standardization, educational integration, and adaptability, key policy recommendations include establishing regulatory frameworks, fostering academic-industry collaborations, incorporating digital technologies, providing financial incentives, and promoting cross-cultural knowledge exchange.*

Keywords: *Igbo Apprenticeship Model; Entrepreneurship Development; Skills Acquisition; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Vocational Training.*

1.0 Introduction

The advancement of skills and entrepreneurship are essential drivers of the economy and society. Rapid technology breakthroughs and changing market

dynamics have made it necessary to develop creative business models and a trained workforce in this day and age (Adeola & Ozigbo, 2021; Nnonyelu et al., 2023). When it comes to entrepreneurship and vocational training, there are many different systems. However, one indigenous system stands out for its traditional practices and exceptional efficacy: the Igbo apprenticeship model, sometimes referred to as "Igba Boyi" or "Igba Bonyi." Because it can develop a skilled labor force and incubate successful businesses, this unique model which is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the Igbo people of Nigeria has attracted the attention of scholars, policymakers, and entrepreneurs alike (Agu & Nwachukwu, 2021; Igwe et al., 2018). The Igbo apprenticeship system is a multifaceted paradigm that transcends mere skill acquisition. It encompasses a holistic learning experience, where apprentices not only master technical proficiencies but also imbibe the cultural values, work ethics, and entrepreneurial mindset that have long characterized the Igbo people's prowess in trade and commerce (Nnonyelu et al., 2023b). This distinctive approach has been instrumental in fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, particularly in the informal sector, where Igbo entrepreneurs have established a formidable presence and demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of socioeconomic challenges (Meagher, as cited in the text).

At its core, the Igbo apprenticeship model operates through a mentorship framework, wherein seasoned entrepreneurs or master craftsmen take on apprentices, imparting their knowledge and expertise in a hands-on, practical setting. This experiential learning environment, deeply rooted in the Igbo cultural ethos of communal support and intergenerational knowledge transfer, fosters an organic exchange of skills, business acumen, and entrepreneurial spirit (Onu et al., 2023; Obunike, 2016). The apprentices, often drawn from the extended family or community, undergo a rigorous training process that extends beyond the confines of their chosen trade, encompassing a comprehensive understanding of market dynamics, customer relations, and the nuances of running a successful enterprise.

The Igbo apprenticeship model's efficacy is further bolstered by its ability to adapt to changing economic landscapes and evolving market demands. Throughout history, the system has proven its resilience, transforming and evolving to accommodate new industries and sectors, from traditional crafts to modern service-based enterprises (Ekekwe, 2021). This inherent flexibility has enabled the model to remain relevant and effective, equipping aspiring entrepreneurs with the agility and adaptability necessary to navigate the ever-changing business terrain.

Moreover, the Igbo apprenticeship system extends beyond mere skill transfer; it fosters a profound sense of community and collective prosperity. Successful apprentices, upon establishing their own businesses, often maintain strong ties with their mentors and fellow apprentices, forming intricate networks of mutual support and collaboration (Igwe et al., 2018). This cooperative spirit reinforces the notion of shared success, fostering an environment where resources, knowledge, and

opportunities are readily exchanged, thereby propelling the entire ecosystem towards growth and prosperity (Madichie&Nkamnebe, 2010; Madichie&Ayasi, 2018; Madichie et al., 2022).

In light of the significant contributions of the Igbo apprenticeship model to entrepreneurial development and skill incubation, a comprehensive empirical analysis is warranted. By delving into the intricacies of this indigenous system, researchers can unravel the underlying factors that contribute to its success, identify best practices, and explore avenues for replication or adaptation in other contexts. Such an inquiry holds the potential to inform policy decisions, catalyze entrepreneurial initiatives, and ultimately contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable economic development and skill-based empowerment.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the remarkable achievements and potential of the Igbo apprenticeship system, its widespread adoption and integration into formal entrepreneurial and vocational training frameworks remain hampered by several critical challenges. The lack of comprehensive empirical data and academic research on the intricacies of this indigenous model poses a significant obstacle to its recognition and implementation on a larger scale. While anecdotal accounts and case studies have shed light on its successes, a dearth of rigorous empirical analysis has hindered a deeper understanding of the system's dynamics, best practices, and replicability across diverse socio-economic contexts.

Furthermore, the informal nature of the Igbo apprenticeship model raises concerns regarding standardization, quality control, and regulatory oversight (Onu et al., 2023). Unlike formal vocational training programs, the apprenticeship system operates largely through informal agreements and customary practices, which may vary across different trades, regions, and mentors. This lack of uniformity can lead to inconsistencies in the quality of training, assessment methodologies, and the recognition of acquired skills, potentially hindering the apprentices' mobility and employability in the formal labor market.

Another significant challenge lies in the integration of the Igbo apprenticeship model with modern educational and training frameworks. While the system excels in imparting practical skills and entrepreneurial mindsets, its alignment with theoretical and academic curricula remains a point of contention (Nnonyelu et al., 2023b). Bridging this gap is crucial to ensure that apprentices receive a well-rounded education that equips them with both theoretical knowledge and practical expertise, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy.

Moreover, the cultural and contextual specificity of the Igbo apprenticeship system poses challenges for its adaptation and replication in diverse sociocultural settings. The model's deep roots in Igbo cultural traditions, communal values, and social

structures raise questions about its transferability to other regions and ethnic groups with distinct cultural norms and practices (Madichie&Nkamnebe, 2010; Madichie & Ayasi, 2018; Madichie et al., 2022). Addressing these contextual nuances is essential to ensure the model's relevance and effectiveness in different environments, while preserving its core principles and strengths.

Hence, the sustainability and scalability of the Igbo apprenticeship model in the face of rapid urbanization, technological advancements, and evolving market dynamics remain critical concerns (Onu et al., 2023; Okoli & Agwu, 2018). As traditional trades and industries undergo transformations, the ability of the apprenticeship system to adapt and equip apprentices with the skills necessary to thrive in the modern economy becomes increasingly crucial. Addressing these challenges through innovative approaches, such as incorporating digital technologies, fostering cross-sectoral collaborations, and promoting continuous skill development, is paramount to ensuring the model's longevity and impact in an ever-changing global landscape.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine how Igbo apprenticeship model has aided entrepreneurial activities as well as skill incubation in South-East, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- Examine the role of Igbo apprenticeship model in entrepreneurship development in South-East, Nigeria
- Evaluate the role of Igbo apprenticeship model in skills acquisition in South-East, Nigeria

2.0 Literature Review

Igbo-speaking peoples, who make up the majority of the population in South East and portions of South-South Regions of Nigeria, have been described as inherently ambitious, hardworking, and clever in business and trade (Adeola &Ozigbo, 2021; Nnonyelu&Onyeizugbe, 2020). Kate Meagher offers additional insight into the widely recognized concept of Igbo inventiveness. She notes that although Igbo people have undoubtedly been systematically excluded from key positions in the state and formal economy, they have also experienced legendary success in the informal economy as traders, artisans, and business owners.

The most blatant example of Igbo ethnic entrepreneurial behavior is the apprenticeship program known as "igbaboyi," which is now getting some consideration in the scientific community (Nnonyelu et al., 2023; Adeola &Ozigbo, 2021; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2021; Igwe et al., 2018). The suffocating effects of multidimensional poverty, increased rates of unemployment, and the rise in criminal activity are some of the reasons behind the resurgence of interest concerning the Igbo apprenticeships program. The lack of white-collar or government positions (oluoyibo) has supplied the push for adopting the apprenticeship program. Given

that majority of Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing a similar problem, it is appropriate to support indigenous African entrepreneurial methods.

The large percentage of children not attending school, the outdated nature of skills, or an imbalance in abilities among those who have benefited from a Western education, all exacerbate the issue in Nigeria. Previously strongly condemned, idleness has become a common behavior, increasing the number of unemployed people. Relying on the nuclear and extended family's proprietary rights as well as the assistance they provide to one another can help you overcome these related difficulties. Igwe et al. (2018) note that Igbo business performance has been closely linked to familiness and family cohesiveness. This overall impact of family and community does not replace the generally exalted egalitarian, republican spirit as well as individualistic inclinations of the Igbo people; rather, it strengthens them. This is further supported by the development of Igbo commerce and enterprises across sub-ethnic along with communal identities, where various professions and trades are distinguished and controlled by certain Igbo groups (Madichie&Nkamnebe, 2010; Madichie&Ayasi, 2018; Madichie et al., 2022).

Igbo apprenticeship may be better understood by taking into account the sociocultural context, background, and setting. As Nnonyelu et al. (2023b) have accurately deduced, apprenticeship is a learning environment where world views, ethical engagements, and moral values, particularly those pertaining to work, work personal identities, class, gender, and the place alongside the role of skilled employees in society are shaped as part of the learning process. It goes beyond being a simple educational setting where students acquire technical skills.

Under the aegis of the Industrial Training Fund, the government recently organized a National Skill Summit with the goal of closing the knowledge gap between theory and practical training and lowering runaway unemployment in the context of the country's financial crisis and significant challenges in the country's socioeconomic environment. Following that summit, there has been a persistent notion that has persisted even in official government circles: the growing significance of indigenous entrepreneurship, which, in the case of the Igbo, is primarily driven by the igbaboyi apprenticeship system. The greatest business incubator in the world is said to be this apprenticeship program (Adeola &Ozigbo, 2021). Its indigeneous origination distinguishes it from other skills and entrepreneurial incubation centres such as Y combinator, 500 startups, TechStars, Silicon Valley based incubators, all in the USA, and Station F in France.

The Ndi Igbo culture is deeply ingrained with the Igbo apprenticeship paradigm. Beginning with the Ndi Igbo people's propensity for business (Obunike, 2016), venture capital (Chinweuba &Ezeugwu, 2017), and company incubation (Onu et al., 2023), these terms have generated conflicting interpretations. According to Onu et al. (2023), Igbo entrepreneurship is a mentoring system in which the apprentice is the mentee and the master is the mentor. Another variation is the apprenticeship

model of the master-servant relationship (Obunike, 2016). In both systems, people get instruction or mentoring from accomplished experts and professionals in a particular field.

The Igbo apprenticeship model was expanded upon by Ekekwe (2021) as a 'Communal Enterprising Framework', in which prosperous enterprises train others, eventually lending money and maybe even some of their clientele to the fledgling companies. He claims that this model is special because it allows a small number of enterprises to grow to be extremely dominant by continuously giving up market share, while simultaneously doing so, they achieve one goal: a fairly equitable society where everyone has chances, no matter how tiny. It is implied that the goal of the Igbo apprenticeship model is to create more just, egalitarian, and inclusive economic systems that benefit everyone, not just a select few. The apprenticeship system in Igbo land uses a variety of terms, such as: Okpu-uzunaNwa-uzu, which refers to a black smith and servant, involves workmanship; Oga naNwa-bonyi, which refers to a master and servant, involves apprenticeship. Based on the trade or kind of business, these names relate to the master-apprentice relationship.

2.2 Underpinning Theory

The Experiential Learning Theory

The spread of information and the transferring of abilities from one person to another are central to the entire concept of apprenticeship, indeed to its very essence. The theoretical arguments that will clarify the idea of apprenticeship will be placed within this framework. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is one of the pertinent theories. As they say often, experience makes the finest teacher. In businesses that have expanded over time, the expertise of the owner or master, which is reflected in the degree of knowledge they possess, is crucial and serves as a beacon of guidance for the apprentice learner. It was Kolb's emphasis on the incremental knowledge one builds upon while making judgments is what further reinforces experience. Training for apprentices has been shown to progress through imitation, trial and error, and observation before determining the optimal practice based on experiential demonstrations (Cope, 2005). In a similar vein, Bandura (1977) offered a sharp theoretical argument that predates Kolb's Experiential Theory. According to Bandura (1977), in a learning environment, people can pick up new learning patterns by watching other people or by having direct experience.

3.0 Materials and Method

The empirical study employed a robust methodology to investigate the Igbo apprenticeship model's impact on entrepreneurial and skill development. The research was conducted across the five states that constitute the South East region of Nigeria – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo – to capture the breadth and

diversity of the Igbo entrepreneurial landscape. The study adopted a quantitative approach, with data collected through a meticulously designed questionnaire. The research sample comprised 287 business owners, carefully selected to represent the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The questionnaires were distributed to these business owners, serving as the primary data collection instrument.

To ensure reliability and validity, the survey instrument was thoughtfully crafted. Responses were captured using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strong disagreement) to 4 (strong agreement), allowing for granular and nuanced insights. Out of the 287 questionnaires distributed, 244 were returned, with 237 deemed properly completed and usable, representing an impressive 82.5% response rate. Rigorous measures were implemented to uphold construct and face validity. The research instrument's face validity was assessed and validated by impartial expert evaluators with extensive experience in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess the validity of each research item, ensuring that the instrument accurately captured the intended constructs.

To establish the internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, a test-retest approach was adopted. The questionnaire was administered twice to a selected sample of 41 business owners from the Alaba International Market in Ojo, Lagos State, at different time intervals. The results of the initial and subsequent pilot tests demonstrated a positive correlation, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.74 for the Igbo apprenticeship model, 0.81 for skills acquisition, and 0.77 for entrepreneurship development. According to Pandey and Pandey's (2021) proposition, these coefficients are considered highly satisfactory, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability.

3.1 Model Specification

The model specification was based on experiential learning theory; it is envisaged in the apriori expectations that there will be an interaction between Igbo apprenticeship model and entrepreneurship development as well as skills acquisition.

Model 1

$$ED = (IAM) \dots (1)$$

$$ED = (IAM) \dots (2)$$

$$ED = \beta_0 + \beta_1(IAM) + \mu_i$$

Where ;

ED= Entrepreneurship Development

IAM = Igbo Apprenticeship Model

μ = Error Term

β_0 is the constant

β_1 is the coefficient estimators

Anchored on the preceding discourse, it is anticipated that the incorporation of Igbo apprenticeship model would exhibit a favourable correlation with entrepreneurship development. Hence, in the apriori, a positive interaction between Igbo apprenticeship model and entrepreneurship development is envisaged.

Model 2

$$SA = (IAM) \dots (1)$$

$$SA = (IAM) \dots (2)$$

$$SA = \beta_0 + \beta_1(IAM) + \mu_i$$

Where ;

SA= Skill Acquisition

IAM = Igbo Apprenticeship Model

μ = Error Term

β_0 is the constant

β_1 is the coefficient estimators

Anchored on the preceding discourse, it is anticipated that the incorporation of Igbo apprenticeship model would exhibit a favourable correlation with skill acquisition. Hence, in the apriori, a positive interaction between Igbo apprenticeship model and skill acquisition is envisaged.

4. Analysis and Discussions

The results of the goodness of fit analysis, as shown in Table 1, provide strong evidence for the validity and reliability of the measurement models used in the study. Across various fit indices, the values for the Igbo Apprenticeship Model, Entrepreneurship Development, and Skills Acquisition constructs all met or exceeded the recommended thresholds. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) values of 0.06, 0.03, and 0.04, respectively, were well below the recommended cutoff of 0.08, indicating a good fit. Similarly, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values of 0.04, 0.05, and 0.06 were within the acceptable range of less than 0.08. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI/RNI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI/NNFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) all met or surpassed the recommended thresholds, further reinforcing the models' goodness of fit. Additionally, the Chi-square/degree of freedom ratios of 2.97, 1.85, and 2.44 were within the acceptable range of less than 5.00, indicating a satisfactory model fit. Hence, the Igbo apprenticeship model index, entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition all meet the suggested standards, according to Hair et al. (2021).

Table 1: Goodness of Fit

Goodness of Fit Model	Values Recommended	Igbo Apprenticeship Model	Entrepreneurship Development	Skills Acquisition
Standardised RMR	$\leq .08$.06	.03	.04
RMSEA	$\leq .08$.04	.05	0.6
CFI/RNI	$\geq .90$	0.97	0.94	0.98
TLI/NNFI	$\geq .90$	0.93	0.91	0.97
NFI	$\geq .90$	0.95	0.93	0.92
AGFI	$\geq .80$	0.88	0.90	0.89
GFI	$\geq .90$	0.98	0.95	0.92
Chi-square/degree of freedom	≤ 5.00	2.97	1.85	2.44

Hypothesis Testing 1**Table 2:** Igbo apprenticeship model significantly affects entrepreneurship development in South East, Nigeria

Model	B	Sig.	T	ANOVA (Sig.)	R	R²	F-stat
(Constant)	1.433	0.00	6.099	0.000 ^b	0.921 ^a	0.613	98.056
Entrepreneurship Development	0.843	0.00	11.015				

The regression analysis result for the Igbo apprenticeship model influence on the entrepreneurship development of South East, Nigeria indicates that Igbo apprenticeship model influences entrepreneurship development in South East, Nigeria, with coefficient ($\beta = 0.843$, $t = 11.015$, $p < 0.05$), which had a positive and significant effect on the entrepreneurship development of South East, Nigeria. This was further corroborated by a R-value of 0.921, suggesting that there was a substantial positive link between Igbo apprenticeship model and entrepreneurship development in South East, Nigeria. The coefficient of determination, with R^2 value of 0.613 suggest that Igbo apprenticeship model accounts for 61.3% variation in the entrepreneurship development in South East, Nigeria, while the remaining 38.7% is accounted for by other variables that are not captured in this study.

Hypothesis Testing 2

Table 3: Igbo apprenticeship model significantly affects skills acquisition in South East, Nigeria

Model	B	Sig.	T	ANOVA (Sig.)	R	R ²	F-stat
(Constant)	1.099	0.00	8.846	0.000 ^b	0.874 ^a	0.465	80.964
Skills Acquisition	0.623	0.00	9.956				

The regression analysis result for the Igbo apprenticeship model influence on the skills acquisition of South East, Nigeria indicates that Igbo apprenticeship model influences skills acquisition in South East, Nigeria, with coefficient ($\beta = 0.623$, $t = 9.956$, $p < 0.05$), which had a positive and significant effect on skills acquisition in South East, Nigeria. This was further corroborated by a R-value of 0.874, suggesting that there was a substantial positive link between Igbo apprenticeship model and skills acquisition in South East, Nigeria. The coefficient of determination, with R^2 value of 0.465 suggest that Igbo apprenticeship model accounts for 46.5% variation in the skills acquisition in South East, Nigeria, while the remaining 53.5% is accounted for by other variables that are not captured in this study.

5. Discussions of Findings

The empirical analysis of the Igbo apprenticeship model's influence on entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition in the South East region of Nigeria yielded compelling results. As evidenced by the hypothesis testing, a significant and positive relationship exists between the Igbo apprenticeship model and entrepreneurship development ($\beta = 0.843$, $t = 11.015$, $p < 0.05$). This finding aligns with the notion that the Igbo apprenticeship system fosters an entrepreneurial mindset and equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to establish and operate successful businesses (Adeola & Ozigbo, 2021; Nnonyelu et al., 2023). The strong positive correlation ($R = 0.921$) between the Igbo apprenticeship model and entrepreneurship development further substantiates the system's efficacy in nurturing an entrepreneurial ecosystem. This resonates with Kate Meagher's observations about the legendary success of Igbo entrepreneurs in the informal economy, despite their systematic exclusion from key positions in the formal sector (as cited in the text). The Igbo apprenticeship model's ability to account for 61.3% of the variation in entrepreneurship development ($R^2 = 0.613$) underscores its paramount importance as a driving force behind the region's entrepreneurial landscape.

Furthermore, the study revealed a significant and positive relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship model and skills acquisition ($\beta = 0.623$, $t = 9.956$, $p < 0.05$). This finding resonates with the assertion by Nnonyelu et al. (2023b) that the apprenticeship system extends beyond mere technical skill acquisition; it serves as a learning environment where worldviews, ethical engagement, and moral values related to work, personal identities, and the role of skilled labor in society are shaped. The substantial positive correlation ($R = 0.874$) between the Igbo apprenticeship model and skills acquisition reinforces the system's holistic approach to vocational training. Notably, the Igbo apprenticeship model accounts for 46.5% of the variation in skills acquisition ($R^2 = 0.465$), highlighting its significant contribution to the development of a skilled workforce in the region. This finding aligns with the assertions by Onu et al. (2023) and Obunike (2016), who describe the Igbo entrepreneurship model as a mentorship system where apprentices receive instruction and guidance from accomplished experts and professionals in their respective fields. The practical, hands-on nature of the apprenticeship system facilitates the effective transfer of skills and knowledge, equipping apprentices with the necessary competencies to thrive in their chosen trades or professions.

The study's findings also corroborate Ekekwe's (2021) characterization of the Igbo apprenticeship model as a 'Communal Enterprising Framework,' wherein successful enterprises train and support emerging businesses, fostering a cycle of entrepreneurial growth and economic inclusion. The cooperative spirit and resource-sharing inherent in the Igbo apprenticeship system (as noted by Igwe et al., 2018; Madichie&Nkamnebe, 2010; Madichie&Ayasi, 2018; Madichie et al., 2022) contribute to the development of a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem and the acquisition of diverse skills, enabling individuals to navigate the evolving business landscape effectively. While the Igbo apprenticeship model has demonstrated its efficacy in driving entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges and limitations highlighted in the study. Factors such as the need for standardization, quality control, and regulatory oversight (Onu et al., 2023), as well as the integration of the system with modern educational frameworks (Nnonyelu et al., 2023b), must be addressed to ensure the model's widespread adoption and sustainability. Furthermore, addressing the cultural and contextual specificity of the Igbo apprenticeship system (Madichie&Nkamnebe, 2010; Madichie&Ayasi, 2018; Madichie et al., 2022) and its adaptability to rapid urbanization and technological advancements (Onu et al., 2023; Okoli & Agwu, 2018) will be crucial for its successful replication and scalability in diverse socio-economic environments.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The empirical analysis of the Igbo apprenticeship model has unveiled a powerful indigenous framework for fostering entrepreneurship and cultivating a skilled

workforce. The findings resoundingly affirm the model's significant and positive impact on entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition in the South East region of Nigeria. Beyond merely imparting technical knowledge, the Igbo apprenticeship system holistically shapes worldviews, ethical values, and entrepreneurial mindsets, enabling individuals to thrive in the dynamic business landscape. The study's outcomes highlight the Igbo apprenticeship model's remarkable ability to nurture a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem and develop a skilled labor force, attributes that are crucial for driving economic growth and societal progress. The strong correlations and substantial explanatory power demonstrated by the model underscore its potential as a viable solution to address multidimensional challenges such as unemployment, skills mismatch, and economic stagnation, not only in the South East region but also in broader contexts.

While the Igbo apprenticeship model has proven its efficacy, the research also underscores the need to address certain challenges and limitations. Aspects such as standardization, quality control, integration with formal educational frameworks, cultural and contextual adaptability, and responsiveness to technological advancements must be addressed to ensure the model's widespread adoption, sustainability, and scalability. By addressing these challenges through innovative strategies and collaborative efforts, the Igbo apprenticeship model can be further strengthened and positioned as a globally relevant paradigm for entrepreneurial and skill development.

Policy Recommendations:

Based on the study's findings and the identified challenges, several policy recommendations can be proposed to harness the full potential of the Igbo apprenticeship model:

- There is the need to establish a regulatory framework and quality assurance mechanisms to standardize the apprenticeship process, assessment criteria, and certification procedures. This will enhance the recognition and transferability of skills acquired through the system, facilitating seamless integration into the formal labor market.
- It is important to foster collaborations between traditional apprenticeship programs and formal educational institutions, enabling the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skill development. This can be achieved through the development of hybrid curricula, industry-academia partnerships, and the establishment of vocational training centers that leverage the strengths of both systems.
- The adoption of digital technologies and innovative teaching methodologies within the apprenticeship model should be encouraged to ensure its relevance and adaptability in the face of rapid technological advancements and changing

market demands. This could involve the incorporation of e-learning platforms, virtual simulations, and industry-specific software tools into the training process.

- It is necessary to implement financial incentives and support mechanisms, such as tax credits, grants, or subsidies, to encourage successful entrepreneurs and businesses to actively participate in the apprenticeship system as mentors and trainers. This will not only strengthen the model's sustainability but also foster an environment of knowledge-sharing and collective prosperity.
- There is the need to promote cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations to facilitate the adaptation of the Igbo apprenticeship model in diverse socio-cultural contexts. This can be achieved through international partnerships, knowledge-sharing platforms, and the development of culturally-sensitive training programs that respect local norms and practices while preserving the core principles of the model.

By implementing these policy recommendations, policymakers and stakeholders can leverage the strengths of the Igbo apprenticeship model, addressing its limitations and fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurial growth, skill development, and inclusive economic progress.

7. Contributions to knowledge and Suggestions for Further Studies

This empirical study on the Igbo apprenticeship model contributes to the existing body of knowledge in several significant ways. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive and data-driven analysis of an indigenous entrepreneurial and skill development framework that has long been shrouded in anecdotal accounts and case studies. By rigorously investigating the model's impact on entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition, the study offers empirical evidence that validates the efficacy of this time-honored tradition, paving the way for its broader recognition and potential replication in diverse contexts.

Moreover, the study's findings contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable economic development and skill-based empowerment. By highlighting the Igbo apprenticeship model's ability to foster entrepreneurial mindsets, nurture vibrant business ecosystems, and cultivate a skilled workforce, the research underscores the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems and culturally-rooted practices into formal development strategies. This perspective challenges the traditionally top-down and Western-centric approaches to economic development, advocating for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach that harnesses the rich tapestry of local knowledge and practices.

While this study provides valuable insights into the Igbo apprenticeship model, further research is necessary to address specific aspects and broaden the understanding of this indigenous framework. Future studies could delve into the model's adaptability and replicability across diverse cultural and socio-economic

contexts, exploring the challenges and opportunities associated with cross-cultural knowledge transfer. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impacts of the apprenticeship system on entrepreneurial success, economic growth, and skill development could yield valuable insights for policymakers and development practitioners. Furthermore, comparative analyses between the Igbo apprenticeship model and other indigenous or formal entrepreneurial and vocational training frameworks could shed light on best practices and potential areas for synergy and integration.

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