

THE “OGA-BOY” SYNERGY: A SPRING BOARD FOR DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Igbo system of apprenticeship is a collaborative business model that involves established businesses nurturing and supporting the growth of other businesses. At present, there are substantial obstacles that are making it less attractive for unemployed young individuals, which could have serious consequences for reducing poverty, unemployment, and wealth generation. As the global community seeks to establish apprenticeship programs that promote greater inclusivity, fairness, and equity within economic systems, the conversation around institutionalizing such initiatives continues to grow. Fostering innovation and creation of employment are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal Eight (8), which is an effective measure that eliminates trafficking in persons, poverty, enslavement, and compelled labour. By 2030, full and productive jobs, in addition to acceptable jobs for all men and women are to be fulfilled. This study therefore investigates the effect of “Oga-Boy” synergy on the creation of credible employment and economic growth in South East Nigeria. This study utilizes the social exchange theory, mixed method of documented evidence and interview. Findings revealed that Igbo apprenticeship activities accounted for creation of employment in the South East, thereby reducing the incidence of poverty in the region. The study recommended that the Igbo apprenticeship system should be given legal recognition to make it more attractive among youths. This will promote a higher level of economic productivity, create decent work, and ameliorate the problem of youth unemployment, poverty and inequality in the South East.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Development, “Oga-Boy”, SDGs, Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Nigeria, which has a population of over 200 million people (51.9% of whom live in cities) and is growing at a rate of 2.6% annually, is presently experiencing serious social and economic issue. The population is growing at an alarming rate, thereby making these issues even worse. Regardless of the government's concerted attempts and initiatives aimed at boosting the prevalence and effectiveness of entrepreneurial activity in Nigeria, it has succeeded in having little to no impact on the accomplishments of business owners (Adesola, 2019). The Igbos believed they had lost everything as a result of the Biafra war, including their main source of revenue. Despite this, they created an entrepreneurial business model, creating a lot of SMEs and new businesses; this approach hasn't gained much recognition on an international or national scale. According to Juwon, Johnson, Tunde, and Akeem (2014), the Igbo people incline toward entrepreneurship rather than salaried employment because they generally view the world as a large market. In the same vein, Ukwueze (2021) reiterated that apprenticeship is a contract in which a child or an adult, male or female, agrees to serve and study for a certain amount of time from an authority who undertakes to teach the apprentice the skills of his or her trade. This is why Obunike (2016) opined that “the Igbo apprenticeship system has recorded high success rate, that most apprentice even start representing their business within 3 years of settlement”.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, where artisans or dealers adopt young people for apprenticeships, the Oga-Boy synergy has been practiced for a very long time. These trainees conduct their research based on actual experience, and they are ultimately prepared to launch their own businesses with seed money provided by their mentor. The creation and establishment of significant commercial distribution hierarchies and networks, built by the Igbos, was made possible by this practice, also known as "Igba boy". They now dominate trade in this region of the country. The Igbo apprenticeship system offers people the chance to learn a trade or business within a predetermined time frame (5-8), additionally; the apprentice receives funding support and help to start their own company at the conclusion of the period. Although no wages are made during the training period, the master does provide housing, meals, clothing and transportation. At the conclusion of his learning years, the youngster equals his master in skill. In other circumstances, the master instructs the apprentice graduate to annually return a specific amount in order to prevent him from utilizing the capital all at once. The circle is completed when the apprentice graduate trains his own sons or interns in the firm, who then apprentice under him.

According to Ikerionwu (2013) "Igba-odibo," has served as a means of support and a place where budding entrepreneurs can grow and get funding for their ventures. Therefore, the Igbos are gradually moving away from trade towards industry and factories without any help from the government, this has resulted in the creation of products like vehicles, motor components, motorcycle gadgets, materials for plastics, metal plaster casts, steel goods, clothing, footwear, electricity wiring, construction supplies, transmission lines, chemicals, etc. Significantly it boosted the economy of Nigeria. Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, (2017) contend that certain Asian business owners in nations like Korea, China, Japan, and the island of Taiwan, act as mentors and also have connections to these companies and factories. We therefore state that the central thrust of this paper is to critically examine the effect of "Oga-Boy" synergy on the creation of quality employment and the growth of the economy in South East Nigeria.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) and Apprenticeship: A conceptual insight

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS):

The proclamation "Transforming Our World - the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" was adopted at the conclusion of a special summit of UN member states that took place from September 25 to 27 at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly to adopt the development agenda for the period following 2015. It is an unwavering global call to action for prosperity, harmony and cooperation for all living things on the world and humankind. In order to inspire collaborative, revolutionary action on an international level, the 2030 Agenda includes a set of 17 integrated, broadly applicable goals for sustainable development, together with 169 specific objectives and benchmarks. These objectives are officially known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight objectives that inspired international action from the year 2000 towards 2015 to end extreme destitution in each of its kinds were expanded upon by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs keep the MDGs' emphasis on ending impoverishment, but they also take a more all-encompassing approach to safeguarding human life on Earth and the development of the world. The SDGs provide a set of interconnected goals and indicators of progress, which are crucial for realizing the 2030 Agenda. They will oversee country developmental programmes and global collaboration of UN member states over the ensuing 15 years. The SDGs' Goal 8 which resonate the values of Igbo apprenticeship aspires to promote inclusive, sustainable economic development, full and profitable

employment, and secure employment for all. This goal explains the Igbo system of apprenticeship as a collaborative business model that earns the youth a decent living. It also involves established businesses nurturing and supporting the growth of other businesses.

Apprenticeship

According to the International Labor Organization in its Apprenticeship Recommendation (R60, 1939), they described apprenticeship as any system by which the business engages in through agreement to bring in a youth and to train him or have him trained diligently for a trade for a period of time of which has been fixed prior to commencement and in which the trainee is obligated to work in the employer's service. A number of new aspects of apprenticeship were discovered when the International Labor Organization, ILO, revised its definition in Vocational Training Recommendation (R117, 1962). This definition includes some of the essential characteristics of apprenticeship, including: it is situated at work and is overseen by a boss; it is designed for young people; it is fundamentally focused on helping them learn a trade; it is a 'systematic' situation, meaning it adheres to a defined plan and objective; apprenticeship is governed by a contract between apprentice and employer. In a different light, it can be viewed as systematic, lengthy training for a recognized profession that mostly occurs within an organization or under a freelance craftsman. It should be subject to a written contract and predetermined norms.

According to Ezeji and Nkajimeje (1986), apprenticeship is an agreement whereby a child or adult, male or female, bonds themselves to serve and learn within a set period from an expert who undertakes the task of teaching an apprentice his skills or vocation. Apprenticeship is a type of formal relationship-based vocational training between the master-craftsman (trainer) and apprentice (trainee), whereby the mutual duties and obligations of each are set by written or verbal agreement. In tracing the origin of the Igbo apprentice system, the innate entrepreneurial nature of the Igbo people was examined by Rufai, Assim, & Emmanuel (2021). He believed that colonialism had a positive effect on the Igbo people because it allowed for a demonstration of their business acumen in manufacturing, agriculture, and trading which they traded with the Europeans.

The typical Igbo person believes that entrepreneurship success is essential. The Igbo people are further encouraged to be entrepreneurial by their classic proverbs, which include “our own is our own but my own is my own,” “hard work yields wealth,” and “one need to explore other alternatives”. Additionally, this technique has assisted in lowering the danger posed by juvenile and teen inactivity. This strategy saved the Igbos from the effects of the war hunger, squalor, poverty, and hopelessness within the next two years after the war.

Literature Review

a. The Nature of Apprenticeship System in South East Nigeria

In examining the nature of apprenticeship in Southeast Nigeria Ezeajughu (2021) investigated the attitudes of Igbo males on apprenticeship and business growth. They assert that individuals from this ethnic minority group have become dominant and continue to thrive and excel above their counterparts from various ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria and abroad all thanks to an apprenticeship program known as Igba-boi or Nwaobi which we called “Oga-boy” synergy. Their review of analysis looked at situations and cases that are the driving force behind the Igbo people's rising socioeconomic performance.

According to the report, the Igbo people's business success is emphasized by their economic values and culture, which are deeply ingrained in their beliefs and customs.

Reimagining the "nwaboi" apprenticeship system: a platform for entrepreneurship promotion in Nigeria was evaluated by Ejo-Orusa in 2019. According to them, the "Nwaboi" learning system has a considerable impact on the growth and advancement of small, and medium-sized enterprises and is by certainly the most recognized and effective mechanism to foster entrepreneurship in Nigeria. They found that our so-called "OGA-BOY" synergy has the potential to significantly increase the degree of business breakdown, promote the establishment of new ventures, and act as a powerful platform for entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria. Also, Fajobi, Olatujoye, Amusa, & Adedoyin, (2017) made an effort to comprehend the importance of apprenticeship programme to Nigeria's development, the reasons behind the decreased rate of internship development, and the ramifications of young people who pick apprenticeship as a career path. Their findings demonstrated that the Nigerian economy cannot expand unless young people are encouraged to pursue apprenticeship.

Similarly in southeast Nigeria, Anigbogu, Onwuteaka, and Okoli, (2019) investigated "the perspectives of Igbo males on apprenticeship and business development". The three coefficients (Igbo man perspective of factors influencing entrepreneurial development, challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system, and Igbo entrepreneurs' motivations for apprenticeship) all significantly affect business development in southeast Nigeria, according to the regression results. The analysis suggests that as a strategy for the growth of African entrepreneurship, the government of Nigeria and, by extension, Africa, should adopt the Igbo man apprenticeship system and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria. This is due to its longevity in the development of SMEs and the decrease of poverty among the Igbo ethnic community in Nigeria, among other things.

With a focus on identifying the causes of the general decline in Igbo youth interest in apprenticeship in South East Nigeria, Nkemdili, (2020) examined the practice and direction of Igbo apprenticeship. The results show that the much-discussed Igbo apprenticeship is encountering substantial difficulties, and a number of variables have come together to demarket Igbo apprenticeship, making it less enticing to young people without jobs. The significant ramifications for young unemployment, income generation, and impoverishments is obvious.

Adoga and Ohajionu (2021) investigated the Igbo Apprenticeship System, which is based on the Theory of Experiential Learning (TEL), and how it can improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurial practice in Nigeria and other developing countries. The suggested adapted IAS reduces the rate of startup failures greatly, raises the rate of firm beginnings, and, ultimately, facilitates national economic growth and development. These conclusions are founded not only on visible evidence of the IAS's socioeconomic influence on the Igbo ethnic group, but also on grounded learning theory (Experiential Learning Theory) and developing data from empirical research in entrepreneurship education and practice. The entrepreneurs worked in the informal and formal sectors and represented various age ranges. The 70-year-old herbalist who ran the business in the first case study had no formal education and worked in a rural location. The second businessman, who was in his forties and quite intelligent, worked in the agricultural industry as a hydroponic farmer. In a suburban location, he produced tomatoes and sold a lot of them to customers. Similar to the first entrepreneur, the third scenario was a woodcarver entrepreneur in his forties who worked in a rural area and had no formal education but a wealth of expertise. The choice was made to show how apprenticeship functions in various circumstances, including those involving different industries, social backgrounds, and age groups.

Through successful replication of learning (knowledge transfer and adaptation), the study substantiated good apprenticeship results, resulting in the sustainability of initiatives throughout time. The application of the native practice of apprenticeship as a means of efficiently disseminating entrepreneurship skills is its contribution to knowledge in this field. This study used the same research methodology, oral interviews, but it focused on the entrepreneurial process that results in business sustainability in different circumstances.

b. Youth Unemployment and Apprenticeship in South East Nigeria

The Anambra state Igbo apprenticeship plan was examined by Okeke and Osang (2021). According to them, the primary drivers behind the program's creation of jobs for the state are the seed money and mentorship provided to the apprentices at the conclusion of their servitude. However, it appears that the scheme's effectiveness is decreasing. Therefore, the study uses the observational approach in unofficial workplaces and trading sites dispersed throughout the state to investigate the perceived loss in the potency of the plan. The study found that the main causes of the scheme's fall in effectiveness were young men's reluctance to take over their fathers' companies, study programmes that will foster their development, and the apprentices' willful theft of their master's money. Consequently, the study advised young men to pursue careers in family businesses in order to support the tradition of business sustainability being passed down from generation to generation. In order to safeguard the scheme's intention to create jobs, the masters and the intended apprentices should enter into a written contract rather than an informal one.

Adesola (2019) examined the connections between Igbo businessmen's employment generation practices and compensation-tied apprenticeship practices among Igbo businessmen in Osun state related to one another. According to the study's findings, the majority (92% of individuals trained under this form of revenue-tied apprenticeship remained in the company they learned in, compared to only 24% of those trained under other types of apprenticeship). The fact that remuneration type apprenticeships are more effective and viable in lowering unemployment rates in the research area was demonstrated by the p-value of 0.0001 as opposed to P-value of 0.00062. The conclusion was that apprenticeship programmes that are related to remuneration would lower unemployment if given enough attention. Emejulu, Idigo, and Onyekwelu (2020) also researched the issue of apprenticeship reduction in the Southeastern part of Nigeria and proposed some solutions. The study focused on Southeast Nigeria and five of its states. The study stated that the exceptional lack of jobs in Nigeria will only worsen as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, emphasizing the importance of encouraging youths to embrace apprenticeship as a feasible path ahead.

Obunike (2016) researched the success of microbusinesses and Igbo entrepreneurs at the Household Equipment Line in Onitsha, Nigeria. The goal of this study was to support the "Igba-odibo" (Traditional Business School) notion as a viable business approach. The findings indicated a high correlation between the success of businesses and the apprenticeship system. According to this research, the majority of traders went through the apprenticeship system, and 60% of the respondents either did not attend any school at all or dropped out during their secondary education. The age distribution of everyone surveyed is crucial because it reveals that these entrepreneurs started their enterprises while they were young, frequently before the age of 30. This was demonstrated by their dropping out of school or by the passing on of the family company. She suggested that other tribes use this component of Igbo culture as a model in order to combat unemployment, one of Nigeria's biggest problems.

Theoretical Framework

The social exchange theory (SET), which Homans (1961, p. 13) described as the exchange of activity between two people or more that is either tangible or intangible, more or less rewarding, or costly, serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. The options or alternate activities that the involved actors passed up were extensively used to define cost. Social exchange theory (SET) is one valuable conceptual framework for understanding behavior at work. Despite the fact that many viewpoints on social exchange have developed, proponents agree that it involves a succession of contacts that lead to obligations. (Emerson, 1976).

Within the context of SET is a relationship of interdependent and dependent actions of another person that are typically viewed (Blau, 1964). The potential for these interdependent interactions to produce valuable connections is another point made by social exchange theory. One of the core tenets of SET is that connections develop into commitments that are reliable, enduring and reciprocal. To accomplish this, Parties must adhere to specific "rules" of exchange in order to achieve this. Exchange regulations function as a "normative definition of the situation that forms among or is adopted by the participants in an exchange relation" (Emerson, 1976: 351). To understand dependency, a party can assume one of at least three postures toward another person (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961):

- a. independence (where results are solely dependent on one's own efforts);
- b. dependence (where results are solely dependent on the efforts of others); and
- c. interdependence (where results are combined from the efforts of all parties).

An abstraction from the theory is the “Oga-Boy synergy”, in which the Oga and Boy trade tangible and intangible activities in exchange for the Oga's provision of a platform for the Boy to learn his desired skill and the Boy's performance of services, errands, and chores on behalf of the Oga. Social exchange theory (SET), which exposes the tenets of reciprocity as interdependent exchanges that led to the growth of a business concern involving an Oga and Boy, and the amount of seed capital the apprentice will receive from his Oga at the end of his apprenticeship, were also supported by the series of interactions of duties and responsibilities by both the Oga and the apprentice as spelled out orally in their agreement and that result in obligations (Emerson, 1976). Social exchange is dependent on the interdependence of the two of them (Oga and Boy), which is a two-way transaction.

Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods of data collection. We were able to gather and evaluate both quantitative and qualitative data using a variety of data collection methods, including primary sources like interviews as well as secondary sources such as documentary data sets. The study adopted “unstructured interview” which is more like everyday conversation. It enabled us to explore informal and free-flowing information from our respondents regarding the relationship between the apprenticeship system and creation of decent jobs cum enhancing economic growth in the South East. In order to generate an all-encompassing dataset, we interviewed some young adults who are directly involved in the apprenticeship system. On the other hand, secondary data used in this study were generated from journal articles, media reports, books, official publications, among others that are relevant to the crux of the study. We utilized qualitative analysis methods to descriptively analyze the generated data, allowing us to present and discuss the study's results in a detailed and thorough manner.

Discussions and Findings

Juxtaposition of Apprenticeship system and Sustainable Development goals

Apprenticeship system creates a structure upon which key visions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) can be actualized. The realisation that apprenticeship, if properly harnessed, may be the seedbed of an innovative sense of enterprise and entrepreneurial behaviour that will mitigate the twin problems of soaring unemployment and ravaging poverty, seems to be the cause of the growing interest in apprenticeship in general. (UNESCO – UNEVOC, 2015). Apprenticeship system is along-standing custom that involves taking away young people from their households to give them hands-on experience in a particular vocation or given profession.

According to Olulu and Udeorah, (2018), apprenticeship is regarded as a means of educating people to learn a trade or craft for their means of subsistence. Apprenticeship system works better when there is a synergy between the “Oga and Boy”. This is why it's a dual sided process and indeed a time-honored tradition that has been passed down through generations. This system offers a unique opportunity for young people to gain hands-on experience in their chosen profession while also learning from experienced mentors and industry veterans. Many successful professionals today started their careers as apprentices, and the system is still widely used across a variety of industries all over the world. Again, it has been said that apprenticeships are a useful tool for helping young people make the transition from school to the workplace smoothly. The Sustainable Development Goals serve as a road map for building a better, more sustainable future for everybody. They address the issues that the entire world is facing, such as those pertaining to climate change, environmental degradation, joblessness, economic hardship, and inequity. We must complete all 17 Goals by 2030 because they are interrelated and are necessary to ensure that no one is left behind (United Nations, 2023a).

Enhancing apprenticeship systems can lead to higher productivity and earnings for young individuals. Through the apprenticeship system, Micro and small enterprises (including informal ones) that are responsible for the majority of employment in developing countries can experience positive impacts and enhance poverty reduction. According to Premand and Pela (2023) the enhancement of traditional apprenticeship has received renewed policy attention in recent years, but still attracts relatively limited investments and this could slow down the achievement of SDG goal eight (8) by 2023. SDG goal 8 is This is consistent with the goal of establishing the apprenticeship system and seeks to promote full and productive employment, inclusive economic growth, and equal opportunity for all.

The third major target of SDG goal eight (8) which deals with facilitating the formalization and expansion of micro, small, and medium-sized firms, especially through access to financial services, and development-oriented policies that support productive activities, the creation of decent employment opportunities, entrepreneurial activity, innovation, and invention bolsters the philosophy behind the apprenticeship system (United Nations, 2023b). However, challenges abound in achieving these goals, difficulties provide chances to explore fresh markets and establish new business possibilities. Only successful and sustainable businesses can contribute to the development and prosperity of nations and the global community (The Global Voice of Business, 2016). In order to move the global development agenda forward, the private sector must be a vital partner. In emerging nations, private sector activities account for, on average, 60% of GDP while producing 90% of all jobs and 80% of capital inflows (OECD). The private sector contributes significantly to development by offering necessary goods and services, financing social and economic programmes through taxes, and developing innovative approaches to deal with developmental problems. In order to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that consist of 169 ambitious targets, innovation in the private sector is essential on a global scale.

Without SMEs and social companies, such as those found in the apprenticeship system, it is impossible to unleash the private sector's revolutionary potential for growth. For example, Over 50% of formal jobs are created by SMEs globally, and both SMEs and start-ups have seen significant innovation jumps (World Bank,2023). The apprenticeship system offers huge opportunities to unlock new markets and create new business prospects. This aligns with the perspective of Obi and Agha (2012) compelling argument that the apprenticeship system generates new companies, and new companies generate new jobs, thereby escalating competition and raising productivity.

In juxtaposing the apprenticeship system with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS), findings show that the “OGA-BOY” synergy also known as the apprenticeship system can play a relevant role in achieving sustainable development goals. It can provide hands-on training to young individuals and help them acquire valuable skills, knowledge, and experience necessary for sustainable economic growth. By promoting apprenticeship system, we can help bridge the skills gap, reduce youth unemployment, and contribute to the development of a skilled workforce, which is crucial for achieving sustainable development goals. Moreover, apprenticeships can promote inclusive economic growth and reduce inequalities by providing equal opportunities for young people from all backgrounds. Through this system, young people can acquire skills and knowledge necessary for decent employment, entrepreneurial ventures and contribute to the development of local communities.

Creation of Decent Jobs and Economic Growth in South East Nigeria through Igbo Apprenticeship

The “Oga-Boy” apprenticeship system, also known as "Igbaboi" or "Imuahia," has played a significant role in the creation of legitimate employment and economic growth all-over South-East region of Nigeria. According to Chief John Alumona cited in Okoli,et.al 2020,A sustainable raw initiation, development, and instruction investment system known as apprenticeship developed in Igbo land and is still in use as the only means of subsistence throughout the entire eastern region. This insured the Igbos' existence. This ancient system, which is strongly ingrained in Igbo culture, has encouraged entrepreneurship, skill development, and intergenerational knowledge and wealth transmission. The Igbo apprenticeship system operates on the principle of mentorship and practical learning, where young individuals (apprentices) are placed under the guidance of experienced and successful business owners (masters). The apprenticeship typically lasts for a specific period, during which the apprentice learns the trade, gains practical experience, and acquires the necessary skills and knowledge.

In 2021, “Entrepreneurs.ng” reported that the fact that we import foreign economic models to employ domestically is just one of the numerous issues with the Nigerian economy. These economic models typically function in other climates, but because they are not designed for the local environment, they do not apply here. The Igbo apprenticeship programme, on the other hand, offers a local strategy that helps build strong businesses in spite of difficult circumstances. If properly utilized, it also takes into account the socioeconomic conditions of the Igbo people and the entire country. it provides an avenue for individuals, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to acquire vocational skills and enter the workforce. This system enables apprentices to learn various trades such as trading, manufacturing, craftsmanship, and services. By learning from experienced masters, apprentices gain practical skills that can be applied to start their own businesses or secure employment (Entrepreneurs.ng, 2021).

The Igbo apprenticeship system promotes entrepreneurship and self-employment. Apprentices gain in-depth knowledge of the technical parts of their craft as well as the complexities of running a business, including financial management, customer relations, and marketing tactics, through close mentoring.

After completing their apprenticeships, apprentices will be prepared with the skills and knowledge needed to launch their own businesses thanks to this extensive training. As a result, new companies are founded and employment opportunities are generated in the area.

Moreover, Okwuowulu (2022) investigated that the Igbo apprenticeship system promotes economic growth through wealth creation and wealth distribution. The system emphasizes the accumulation of capital over the apprenticeship period, whereby apprentices save a portion of their earnings to establish their businesses at the end of the training. This practice enables the generation of capital within the community and facilitates the expansion of enterprises of all kinds which are vital contributors to economic growth. The system also fosters social cohesion and community development. Apprenticeship relationships often extend beyond the professional realm, as masters become mentors, role models, and even surrogate parents to their apprentices. This bonding and sense of communal support contribute to a strong network of business relationships, cooperation, and mutual assistance within the Igbo community. This collaboration further strengthens the economic fabric of the region and stimulates growth.

In a nutshell, the South Eastern Nigerian region has experienced economic progress and the creation of respectable jobs as a result of the Igbo apprenticeship system. By imparting vocational skills, promoting entrepreneurship, and facilitating the establishment of small businesses, the system empowers individuals, stimulates wealth creation, and fosters community development. As a result, the Igbo apprenticeship system continues to contribute significantly to the economic prosperity of the region.

Results

The views of our respondents during the unstructured interview sessions are in unanimity with our proposition that “Oga-Boy” synergy could be a spring board for decent work and economic growth in South East Nigeria. In an interactive session with Arinze Christopher aged 24, an apprentice from Anambra state engaged in shoe sales business, he revealed that:

“If Oga settles his Nwa boy, he has settled his problem of unemployment but its left for the Nwa boy to handle his new business well so as to get establish adequately. However, it's good to have a formal written agreement on the period of time the Oga will settle his Nwa boy. This agreement doesn't involve a given amount money because money can lose its value by the end of the apprenticeship”

Another respondent aged 32 years who had served as an apprentice in a computer business center stated that:

“During my apprenticeship in the computer business center, I learnt how to print, laminate, photocopy, bind, scan and do internet services as well as teach students the art of computer operation. It once helped me gain employment in a computer center and has enabled me setup my own computer firm”.

In an interview with another respondent Chukwunonso Chielo aged 22 years based in Enugu learning spare-part sales, he stated that:

“If a boss settles an apprentice, he can start his own business. But an apprentice must not be disrespectful or lazy, and must be accountable if he would progress in the apprenticeship journey”.

Conclusion

The "Oga-boy" synergy in the South East is a shrewd economic choice that employs affordable labor to develop human resources and opens up opportunities for self-employment. It has helped foster an entrepreneurial mindset in a region that once otherwise relied on government. By preserving traditional skills, fostering entrepreneurship, promoting specialization, and providing cost-effective education, the apprenticeship system has contributed to the development of a skilled workforce, thriving industries, and sustainable economic growth.

Recommendations

To fully leverage the potential of Igbo apprenticeship for decent work and economic growth, there are a few areas that can be addressed:

1. **Modernization and Diversification:** While Igbo apprenticeship is deeply ingrained in tradition, there is a need to adapt it to modern realities. Incorporating new technologies, expanding the range of trades and professions, and embracing emerging sectors such as technology and renewable energy can enhance the relevance and competitiveness of apprenticeship programs.
2. **Policy Support and Recognition:** Governments at various levels can recognize the importance of Igbo apprenticeship and provide policy support to strengthen the system. This can include creating a supportive regulatory environment, offering tax incentives, establishing vocational training centers, and incorporating apprenticeship programs into formal education curricula.

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