

Gender Dynamics in the Igbo Apprenticeship System: Exploring Women's Participation in South East Nigeria.

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Abstract

The Igbo apprenticeship system has been a longstanding cultural practice in the Eastern Nigeria which have played major roles in the region's economic growth and development. This abstract examines the different gender dynamics within this apprenticeship system and explores the extent of women have been involved in this traditionally male-dominated practice over the years. The Igbo apprenticeship system was primarily initiated for young boys in the community whose parents cannot further their academic studies. They are taken in as apprentices to be mentored by established male artisans or traders in various fields such as blacksmithing, pottery, trading, and craftsmanship. This practice has provided valuable empowerment and entrepreneurial skills to young men, allowing them to establish their own businesses and contribute to the local economy. Recent socio-cultural changes and gender dynamics have resulted in an increase in the interest and involvement of women in the apprenticeship system in Igbo. This abstract examines the factors that influence women's entry into occupations traditionally dominated by men, as well as the obstacles they face in their quest for apprenticeship opportunities. Drawing on qualitative analytical methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, the study collected data from male and female apprentices and mentors, as well as community members. The aim of the study is to determine the motivations, experience, and results of women who have opted to participate in Igbo apprenticeship systems. The results suggest that women's participation in the apprenticeship scheme is driven by a mix of economic necessity, self-employment aspirations, and changing social norms. Some women struggle with resistance and gender bias within the system, while others have overcome these obstacles and established themselves as experienced artisans and entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Igbo apprenticeship system, gender dynamics, women's participation, entrepreneurship, economic empowerment.

Introduction

Igbo apprenticeships, also known as "Igba boi" or "Imu olu," are a traditional economic and social structure in southeast Nigeria that is popular among the Igbo people. It is a system whereby young people, usually males, are put under the instruction of seasoned artisans or traders to learn a trade or craft. Although historically the apprenticeship system has been dominated by men, there have recently been initiatives to investigate and support women's participation. Let's examine the changing position of women as we further explore the gender dynamics of the Igbo apprenticeship system.

The system of apprenticeship in Igbo originates from patriarchal traditions that kept women out of economic activities and restricted their role to housework. Therefore, women were largely excluded from apprenticeship system, which was seen as a man's domain. The primary purpose of apprenticeship system was to transfer skills, knowledge, and wealth from one generation to the next, which further contributed to the inequalities between men and women in terms of work and economic opportunity. However, due to social changes and increasing awareness of gender parity, the dynamics of apprenticeship system has changed. Today, women are questioning traditional norms and seeking economic opportunities outside of the home. They are motivated by reasons such as financial autonomy, family support and self-determining.

Although Igbo apprenticeships for women are still lower than apprenticeships for men, there are a number of promising women apprentices and entrepreneurs emerging. Women are starting to enter the trades that were traditionally male occupations, including tailors, hairstyling, catering, and fashion designing. These women apprentices face a lot of obstacles, including social stigma, limited resources, and insufficient support networks. However, their resilience and perseverance make them able to overcome these obstacles and find their niche within the apprenticeship system.

This same Igbo apprenticeship system needs the mainstreaming of gender issues. Numerous individuals and organizations are contributing. NGOs, surrounding communities, and the government are all working to advance female empowerment and support their participation in apprenticeship programs. A few of the things being done for female apprentices involve networking, training, mentorships, and access to credit. The Igbo community, in addition to outside assistance, is crucial to increasing the participation of women. The community's perception of women's importance to economic growth is going to cause a gradual shift in how it views female apprentices. Some artisanal professionals are now more willing to accept female apprentices and sharing their expertise.

It is important to note, however, that gender dynamics within the apprenticeship system in Igbo are complex and multi-faceted. Women's opportunities and challenges in their apprenticeship journey continue to be shaped by traditional beliefs, cultural norms and economic constraints. Achieving gender parity and full apprenticeship participation requires long-term commitment at both the personal and societal levels. This includes education, breaking down gender stereotypes, and ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources...

Despite the fact that the apprenticeship system in Igbo has traditionally been dominated by men, there is a continuous movement towards women's inclusion in the system. Women's participation in the apprenticeship system is increasing over time, but there are still challenges to overcome. Gender mainstreaming and women's economic empowerment efforts are helping to overcome these obstacles and open up opportunities for female apprentices. However, continued advocacy, support and changes in social attitudes are essential for women's participation to reach its full potential in the Igbos apprenticeship system.

Igbo Apprenticeship System

Before delving into Igbo apprenticeship, we will first of all have an understanding of what apprenticeship is all about. Darwinbox (2023) said that:

Apprenticeship is a training program for individuals who desire to become recognized in a specific trade or craft and do so in a way that adheres to the most current standards. The person completing the apprenticeship is known as an apprentice, and this individual learns the necessary skills of her or his chosen trade by carrying out common tasks for a predetermined length of time. Training is administered by a seasoned trade or craftsman. While an apprenticeship could be compared to classroom learning, apprentices receive pay while learning how to become experts in their trades. Examples of industries that offer apprenticeships include healthcare, food preparation / serving, manufacturing and public safety. The research Associate, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science (2023) defines it as: "the expression apprenticeship means any system by which an employer undertakes by contract to employ a young person and to train him [or her] or have him [or her] trained systematically for a trade for a period the duration of which has been fixed in advance and in the course of which the apprentice is bound to work in the employer's service."

Ryan et al (2010) defined it as "training programmes that combine vocational education with work-based learning for an intermediate occupational skill (i.e., more than routinised job training), and that are subject to externally imposed training standards, particularly for their workplace component." Things noted in all the definition offered above about apprenticeship:

- a. It is a training program for a particular skill.
- b. The apprentice learns the trade or skill from a master and later works for the master in return.

There is a reason that Igbo apprenticeship is well-known throughout the world. The distinction between this apprenticeship and others is the cause. It is something special and metaphysical that highlights the Igbo man's humanity. Ujah (brotherhood) is a characteristic of Igbos. When she stated that: "These are the reasons why African brotherhood, Igwebuiké, Ujah was established," Okpokwasili (2023) provided a detailed explanation of what she meant. This concept of Igwebuiké encourages the development of the awareness that everyone must work together for the common good of all while eschewing all forms of rivalry. Igbo apprenticeship served as a prime example of this African brotherhood. Heidegger (1927) emphasized the idea of "being-in-the-world" and the notion that a fundamental feature of human existence is practical interaction with the outside world.

Ezeajughu (2021) said that The Igbo Apprenticeship System is an "unpaid business apprenticeship/incubator model that allows people learn business from a master for a certain number of years depending and at the end of their apprenticeship tenure, get cash infusion and support to start their own business". Aristotle in his "Nicomachean Ethics" and "Politics" emphasized the importance of practical knowledge and experiential learning. His concept of "phronesis" or practical wisdom emphasizes the role of experience in developing virtuous action. Apprenticeship, with its focus on hands-on learning and skill development, aligns with Aristotle's emphasis on the practical application of knowledge. Again

The Igbo apprentice system, also known as "Igba boi," as culled from Njoku, Chinedu F (2012) and Uchendu, Victor C. (1985) is "a traditional system of apprenticeship that has been practiced by the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria for centuries. It is a cultural and economic institution that plays a crucial role in the socialization, skill development, and economic advancement of young individuals within the Igbo society". John Dewey, an American philosopher and educational reformer, highlighted the significance of learning through doing. In his "Experience and Education (1938), he emphasized on "experiential and democratic education, where students engage actively in their learning process". Dewey's ideas resonate with the notion of apprenticeship as a form of learning that involves active participation and practical experience.

The origin of the apprenticeship system can be traced back to pre-colonial Igbo trade and commerce. Pre-colonized Igbo communities were involved in a variety of inter- and intra-regional trade. Igbo culture of entrepreneurship dates back to the 15th century when slaves were traded in the slave trade. By the 1800s, thousands of slaves of Igbo origin were sold at Bonny and Calabar. This pattern of trade continued till slave trade era ended. Unlike most other African communities, slaves from Igbo origin were exposed to entrepreneurship through their owners trading commodities such as spice, sugar, tobacco and cotton for export into Europe, Asia and America. . The entrepreneurship of the slaves ignited the entrepreneurial spirit of the Igbos and this encouraged them to quickly engage in various forms of entrepreneurship in the pre-colonial period.

This is the reason why it seems like Igbo's are mainly traders and they are occupying vast positions in major markets in Nigeria. Alaba international market is mainly occupied by Igbos

which has ignited several outrages from Lagosians in recent times. There is this general notion that an Igbo man will come to a foreign land with nothing other than the cloths on his body but in the next few years you will see him buying lands from the owners of the land themselves. An Igbo man has somewhat of a “survival spirit” inherent in him that can make him withstand any harsh economic condition around him. The Igbos are leading in the areas of manufacturing. In this group you will see our Nnewi traders like Innoson motors leading the group. We have so many other industrialists of Igbo origin doing so well in manufacturing, importation and exportation. They have even delved into clearing and forwarding of goods inside the country. This entrepreneurship culture of Igbos has been sustained until the present age by the apprenticeship framework. Young Igbo men and women are still sent out as apprentices in various trading centers within and outside their community. This apprenticeship system allowed experienced traders to impart skills, knowledge, and business acumen to younger generations.

The Igbo apprentice system is a form of indentured apprenticeship where young individuals, known as "Igba boi" are placed under the care and tutelage of a master or mistress, referred to as the “Oga” or “Madam”." The Oga or Madam could be a successful trader, artisan, or professional in a particular field. The apprentice lives with the Oga/Madam and learns the trade or craft through hands-on experience. The system serves multiple purposes within Igbo society. It acts as a means of education and skill acquisition, providing practical training and knowledge in various trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, weaving, trading, and farming. Apprenticeship is also seen as a rite of passage, fostering discipline, work ethic, and the development of a strong moral character.

The duration of apprenticeship varies depending on the trade and the agreement between the apprentice and the Oga/Madam. It typically lasts for a period of three to seven years, during which the apprentice receives training, room, and board from the Oga//Madam. In return, the apprentice provides labor and assistance in the daily operations of the trade. At the end of the apprenticeship period, the apprentice undergoes a "freedom ceremony" called "Idu nwa boi" marking their transition from apprentice to a skilled individual who can establish their own business or practice their craft independently. The apprentice will receive some form of capital or resources from the Oga/Madam to start their own venture.

The Igbo apprenticeship system is rooted in the cultural and philosophical values of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. It embodies several key philosophical principles that underpin its existence and significance within the Igbo society. Here are some of the main philosophical ideas behind the Igbo apprenticeship system:

- a. Igbo culture is based on the principle of Communalism, which emphasizes the interdependence and inter-connectivity of people within the community. This is reflected in the apprenticeship system, which encourages the exchange of knowledge, skills and resources from masters to apprentices for the common good of the community. This reflects the notion that individual success is linked to the overall success and development of the community.

- b. The Igbo people have a deep respect for their ancestors. They consider them to be important spiritual beings and a source of wisdom. The apprenticeship system is a way for the Igbo people to pass down their knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next. Through the apprenticeship system, skills, crafts and cultural practices are passed down from generation to generation. This way, the Igbo people preserve their ancestral wisdom and strengthen their spiritual and cultural identity.
- c. Igbo apprenticeship is based on the philosophy that “practical knowledge” and “experiential learning” are more important than “formal education” or “formal training”. Practical knowledge refers to being able to do things on the spot and directly involved in a particular trade or craft, whereas “formal” education is limited to theoretical knowledge. This philosophy recognizes that the best way to develop skills and expertise is through hands-on experience, mentoring, and observation. This way, apprentices can gain a deeper understanding of the trade or craft they are interested in.
- d. The work ethic and discipline of apprentices are instilled in the apprenticeship system. The apprenticeship system teaches hard work, dedication and perseverance. The apprentices are expected to take part in the day-to-day work of the trade, help their masters, and contribute to the development of the business. The work ethic and discipline instilled in apprentices are based on a responsibility-driven, self-disciplined, and high-achieving philosophy.
- e. Igbo apprenticeship system promotes entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency. The apprentices learn a trade or craft but also develop the skills and knowledge needed to set up their own business in the future. The apprenticeship system promotes self-sufficiency and independence, enabling them to play an active role in the economic growth and development of their communities.

The philosophical roots of the apprenticeship systems are rooted in the Igbo people’s cultural values and aspirations for community growth, cultural preservation and individual empowerment. The apprenticeship system continues to play an important role in the economic, social and cultural development of the Igbo society. Despite modernization and urbanization, the apprenticeship system is still present in many Igbo communities. It continues to provide practical skills and knowledge to those who may not be able to attend formal education. The system also promotes social unity and intergenerational solidarity by ensuring the transfer of traditional values, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge.

Gender Dynamics

Gender dynamics according to Mauela& Lorena (2019) is the: “connections and communications between boys, girls, men and women; contingent upon how they are revealed, gender dynamics can strengthen or contest existing norms”. Brady 2022) noted that: “gender is dynamic because our lives are dynamic”; it is not simply a matter of inner self-perception, but also of affinity with others” (Ricks: 2019) and of “responsiveness to the context(s) we find ourselves in” (Cobert: 2008). An Igbo apprenticeship is a process in which young people (both

men and women) learn a trade or craft under the mentorship and guidance of an experienced artisan or tradesperson. The apprenticeship lasts for several years and the apprentice learns the craft, skills, and business practices related to the trade. The apprenticeship system is highly respected in Igbo society because it is a means of economic empowerment and knowledge transfer from one generation to the next. When it comes to gender dynamics in Igbo apprenticeships, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- a. In the Igbo society, there was a traditional division of labor. This meant that certain trades were mainly done by men, while others were mainly done by women. For example, blacksmiths, carvers, and other labor-intensive trades were mostly done by men. Women, on the other hand, were mainly involved in textile weavers, potters, and traders. This traditional division of labor had an impact on the apprenticeship types offered to people depending on their gender.
- b. Igbo apprenticeship has seen a change in gender roles in recent years. Women are becoming more involved in trades that have traditionally been dominated by men, including carpentry, electronics and auto repairs. This is due to changing societal attitudes and women's desire for economic independence.
- c. Gendered socialization influences the types of apprenticeships that people choose to pursue. Cultural norms and expectations can influence parents' decisions to enroll children in certain apprenticeships on the basis of their gender. For instance, parents may choose to enroll their sons in apprenticeships that are traditionally considered more prestigious or more financially advantageous.
- d. Society's perceptions and expectations can have a significant impact on the experiences of both male and female apprentices. For example, female apprentices may face gender-specific biases or stereotypes in their chosen trades. However, there are also examples of female apprentices receiving strong support from mentors and communities, which can help to create a more inclusive and empowered environment.

All in all, Igbo apprenticeship continues to reflect traditional gender roles, but it's slowly changing to reflect more gender dynamics. As women's roles change in apprenticeships, there's a growing appreciation of their skills and a push towards gender parity within these economic structures.

Women's Participation

The traditional apprenticeship system was based on the idea of passing skills and knowledge down from generation to generation within certain trades, such as blacksmiths, potters, carvers, traders, basket weaving and many other occupations. The apprenticeship system worked on a hierarchical system, with apprentices learning from masters and gaining experience until they were able to start their own business. Women did not participate in the traditional apprenticeship system, and were often confined to domestic roles. They were expected to

acquire skills related to housework, child-raising, and agriculture. This gender-based division of labor limited women's access to economic opportunity and entrepreneurship.

Women apprenticeship in recent times has been converted to "Imu Olu aka". It has become a trend that young female school graduates who have no money to further her education usually engage herself in learning a skill. Hardly you will see a young Igbo lady who is not in the university roaming the streets. Where you see them will be in their madam's shop learning one skill or the other. At the expiration of the training, the apprentice will be set free by the madam and given a certificate that certifies that she participated in the training for the said duration. It is not only young and unmarried girls that engage in the said training but young married women also engage in such training. Many factors could be attributed to this growing trend. However, we will mention few of them below and they are:

- a. As a result of changing societal norms, gendered roles and expectations have changed over the years in Igbo society. There has been a gradual shift in attitudes towards the empowerment of women and their economic independence. People are beginning to recognize that women can do things that men can only do in the home.
- b. The role of education and awareness in broadening women's perspectives the role of education in broadening women's perspectives increased access to education External influences in women's lives Empowerment through education Challenge traditional norms Non-traditional careers Participation in apprenticeship system.
- c. In light of the economic situation and the need to earn money for the family, some women have started to look for economic opportunities outside of traditional occupations. In Igbo, the apprenticeship system is a great way for women to gain skills, become financially independent, and support their families.
- d. Women's Groups, Cooperatives, and Associations have created a network of support for women who want to join the apprenticeship program. These networks provide mentorship, education, and tools to help women succeed in the apprenticeship program and in various trades. Although women's participation in the Igbo apprenticeship system has increased, challenges and gender disparities persist. Some of these challenges include:
- e. Some trades are still dominated by men, and women often face obstacles when trying to enter these areas. Traditional beliefs and prejudices still hold sway in some areas, which limit women's access to apprenticeship programs in certain trades.
- f. Mentorship and networking opportunities for women apprentices may be limited. Women apprentices may find it difficult to find female mentors and network with women in their fields of expertise. Lack of role models and networks for women apprentices can make it harder for women to succeed in the apprenticeship process

- g. Women often struggle to find a balance between family duties and apprenticeship education. Household duties, child care, and social pressures can make it difficult for women to fully immerse themselves in apprenticeship programs.

Women's Apprenticeships in Eastern Nigeria Women's apprenticeships in Eastern Nigeria is available in a variety of sectors. These apprenticeships involve hands-on learning and the development of practical skills in a particular trade or occupation. Apprenticeships vary depending on the region and industry, but here are some of the areas where women can take up apprenticeships in East Nigeria:

- a. **Apprenticeships in Fashion and Tailoring:** The fashion industry provides apprenticeships for women who want to learn how to construct, pattern-make, and design garments. Women can work with skilled tailors and fashion designers to learn how to make traditional Nigerian clothing or modern fashion.
- b. **Beauty and Cosmetology:** Women who want to learn about beauty and cosmetology can do so by taking an apprenticeship in a beauty salon, a spa, or a cosmetic shop where they can learn about hairdressing techniques, makeup arts, and skincare and other skills related to beauty.
- c. **Catering and Culinary Arts:** Apprenticeships in the culinary industry are open to women who want to learn how to cook, bake, or work in a restaurant, hotel, or catering business. Women can gain hands-on experience in various culinary skills and food preparation.
- d. **Arts and Crafts:** If you're a woman looking to get into arts and crafts, Eastern Nigeria is a great place to start! You can get an apprenticeship in pottery, beads, weaving, or any other traditional craft. Plus, you'll get to work with experienced artisans and learn how to make unique pieces with traditional techniques.
- e. **Agriculture and Farming:** Agriculture is an integral part of the economy of Eastern Nigeria. Women can take up apprenticeships in the fields of agriculture, poultry, fishing, and horticulture, learning about crop growing, animal husbandry, and sustainable agriculture.
- f. **Trade and Commerce:** Apprenticeships are also available for women in a range of trades and commercial fields, including retail and merchandising apprenticeships and small business management apprenticeships. Women can gain hands-on experience in business management, customer service and marketing.

Apprenticeship opportunities can be found through local trade associations, community organizations or directly by contacting professionals in your field. Networking, asking questions about available apprenticeships and showing enthusiasm and commitment will increase your chances of getting an apprenticeship position. Efforts are ongoing to overcome these obstacles and ensure greater gender balance within the Igbos apprenticeship system. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), government initiatives and advocacy groups are providing mentorship, training and support specifically for women apprentices. Awareness

campaigns and education programs are also being implemented to break gender stereotypes and promote a more inclusive apprenticeship approach.

It is worthy to note that in recent times, Igbo women has cut across so many barriers and are doing so well not only in skills but as owners of businesses themselves. As culled from LinkedIn list of richest Igbo women and their sources of wealth.

- Dr. Stella Okoli who hails from Nnewi, Anambra State, is the founder and manager of Emzor Pharmaceuticals, which produces and distributes over 30 drugs across Africa. **She has an estimated net worth of 800 million U.S dollars.**
- Pearlana Igbokwe is the Chairman of Universal Studio Group, a division of NBC Universal. She was in charge of creative development, casting, and production which produced wonderful series like "The Good Place", "New Amsterdam, and Russian Doll". She also produced top-rated programs like "The Blacklist", "Blindspot", and "This Is Us". **She has an estimated net worth of 50 million dollars.**
- Arunma Oteh. A native of Abia State, she is a prominent woman in the business world, and one of the richest Igbo women in Nigeria. She was the Treasurer and Vice President of the World Bank, and she served as the Director-General of the Securities and Exchange Commission, (SEC) in Nigeria. She has also worked for the Havard Institute for International Development, and the Centre Point Investments Limited in Nigeria. She was recognized on the Powerlist 2020 for the most influential people in the U.K of African/African-Caribbean heritage. Her exact net worth is yet to be known
- Linda Ikeji can best be described as the "Queen of Blogging". She is the founder of "lindaikeji's blog", the most recognized blog in Africa. She is also an entrepreneur and writer. She is a public figure from Nkwerre, Imo State. Forbes describes her as a powerful and influential woman. She is also considered the 17th most powerful woman in Journalism. **She has an estimated net worth of 40 million U.S dollars.**
- Genevive Nnaji. She is a well-known Nigerian actress that has appeared in over 100 movies. She comes from Mbaise, Imo State. She was the First Lady to win an award from Africa Movie Academy Awards and City People Awards for best Nigerian actress. She was reportedly paid 3.8 million dollars by Netflix for the movie, "Lionheart"
- Diezani Alison. Madueke is a Nigerian female politician and the first woman to head OPEC as its President. She was also the First Female Minister for Transportation and Petroleum Resources. **According to Forbes, she has an estimated net worth of 500 million U.S dollars.**
- **Stella Oduah** is a Nigerian Senator and a native of Anambra state. She served as one-time Minister for Aviation and the Director of Finance and Administration during former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's Campaign. **She has an estimated net worth of 600 million U.S dollars.**

Women's participation in apprenticeship varies across South East Nigeria depending on the region, culture, and social norms. Traditionally, women have participated in apprenticeships in some trades, but there are still considerable gender gaps in terms of access and opportunities. Nnewi women are an important group of women from the Southeast region of Nigeria. They are well-known for their hard work, enterprise, and contribution to the economical and social growth of their society. Nnewi is the capital of Anambra state, which is located in the southeast part of the country. Women have played an important role in the development of the economy of the state, especially in trade, manufacturing and commerce. Women in Nnewi are well-versed in business and have achieved success in various business activities, such as trading in fabrics and jewelry, food and consumer goods.

Nnewi women have built successful businesses and are active in both domestic and foreign trade. They are known for their resilience, diligence, and ability to adjust to changing market circumstances. Some women have gone into manufacturing industries, including automobile spare parts, plastic, and electronics, which have contributed to the town's industrial development. Women are also active in community development and philanthropic activities. They have established various women's organizations and associations to deal with issues that affect their community, including education, health, and women's empowerment. These groups provide mentorship and support to younger women, who are encouraged to pursue education and business. Nnewi women are also active in the sale of consumer goods.

Nnewi women not only contribute to the economy but also play an active role in the social and cultural life of the community. Nnewi women take part in the traditional ceremonies, festivals and cultural events to preserve and promote the culture of the Igbo nation. All in all, the South East Nnewi women have proven to be a force to be reckoned with in terms of strength, resilience and determination. They have played an important role in the economic, social and cultural development of their communities and continue to be a source of inspiration for future generations of women across Nigeria.

Apprenticeship is an integral part of South East Nigeria's culture and economy. It is a way for people to gain professional skills and knowledge. Traditionally, apprenticeships have been mainly for men, and some trades have been seen as more appropriate for women. This is especially true of tailoring, hairstyling, cooking, ceramics, and traditional handicrafts. In recent years, however, women's involvement in apprenticeship has become increasingly important. Governments, NGOs, and community-based initiatives have been working to improve gender equality and women's empowerment through skill acquisition programmes. These programs are designed to break down gender barriers and provide women with the opportunity to learn and develop skills in various trades. These programs often include apprenticeship training programs, apprenticeship workshops, and apprenticeship mentorship programs. By promoting and supporting women's participation in apprenticeship, they help to increase their economic independence and overall empowerment.

Women involvement in apprenticeship has gone far and has equally evolved as we can see. Women apprentices in the Igbo apprenticeship system can benefit in several ways from their madams (female mentors or trainers). These benefits include:

- a. **Skill Development:** Apprenticeship provides women with hands-on training and practical skills in a specific trade or profession. Their madams serve as experienced mentors who pass on their knowledge, expertise, and techniques. Through this mentorship, women apprentices gain valuable skills that can help them establish their own businesses or secure employment opportunities in the future.
- b. **Access to Networks:** The relationship between apprentices and their madams often extends beyond the training period. Madams can introduce apprentices to their networks of clients, suppliers, and other professionals in the industry. This access to networks can help women apprentices establish connections, build relationships, and expand their professional opportunities.
- c. **Guidance and Support:** Madams play a crucial role in providing guidance and support to their apprentices. They offer advice, share experiences, and help apprentices navigate the challenges and complexities of their chosen trade. This mentorship can boost apprentices' confidence, provide emotional support, and help them overcome obstacles they may face during their training and beyond.
- d. **Business and Financial Knowledge:** In addition to technical skills, madams often impart business and financial knowledge to their apprentices. They may teach apprentices about pricing, budgeting, customer relations, and marketing strategies. This knowledge equips women apprentices with a well-rounded understanding of their trade and enhances their entrepreneurial capabilities.
- e. **Role Modeling:** Madams who have succeeded in their respective trades serve as role models for women apprentices. Their achievements and accomplishments inspire apprentices and demonstrate that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated industries. Seeing successful women in leadership positions encourages apprentices to pursue their goals with determination and challenges societal norms and expectations.
- f. **Empowerment and Independence:** The apprenticeship system provides women with opportunities for economic empowerment and independence. By learning a trade, women gain the skills and knowledge necessary to generate income and support themselves financially. This economic independence can have a transformative effect on their lives, enabling them to make decisions, contribute to their families' well-being, and exert agency in their communities.

Overall, the relationship between women apprentices and their madams offers numerous benefits, including skill development, access to networks, guidance, business knowledge, role modeling, and empowerment. By investing in women's training and mentorship, the Igbo apprenticeship system can contribute to breaking down gender barriers, promoting gender equality, and fostering the economic and social advancement of women in South East Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a multifaceted concept that has been studied and defined by scholars from various disciplines. Hisrich, R. D et al (2017) said that "Entrepreneurship is the process of creating value by bringing together a unique combination of resources to exploit an opportunity and generate innovative ideas that result in the establishment of a new venture." Shane, S (2000) also said that "Entrepreneurship refers to the process by which individuals, either independently or within organizations, identify, evaluate, and exploit opportunities to create value through innovation. It involves the combination of resources, including human, financial, and social capital, to launch and grow new ventures or foster entrepreneurial activities within existing organizations." Alvarez, S. A (2007) said that: "Entrepreneurship is the process by which individuals, teams, or organizations identify and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities without being immediately constrained by the resources they currently control."

Entrepreneurship is generally referred to as the process of identifying, creating, and pursuing opportunities to start and manage a business or organization. It involves the willingness and ability to take risks, innovate, and mobilize resources in order to transform ideas into viable ventures. Entrepreneurs are individuals who exhibit entrepreneurial traits and behaviors, such as being proactive, opportunity-oriented, and resilient. Entrepreneurship encompasses a wide range of activities, including:

- a. **Opportunity Identification:** Entrepreneurs are those who are able to identify and evaluate opportunities in the marketplace or society that are often overlooked by others. They can identify unmet demand, market opportunities, or problem solving solutions.
- b. **Innovation and Creativity:** Entrepreneurs are people who are able to identify and evaluate opportunities in the marketplace or society. They find gaps in the market or innovative solutions to issues that others may not see.
- c. **Risk-Taking:** Entrepreneurs are risk-averse and willing to embrace the uncertainty and risk of failure that comes with starting and managing a business. Risk-averse because they recognize that risk is inherent in the pursuit of opportunity and are willing to confront and manage it.
- d. **Resource Mobilization:** In order to run a successful business, you need to have access to and use a wide range of assets. These assets include but are not limited to: Financial capital (equity) Human capital (people, skills, and talent) Social capital (network and relationships) Physical assets.
- e. **Business Planning and Execution:** Business plans are the strategic documents that an entrepreneur creates outlining their vision, objectives, plans, and operational elements. Business plans are executed by the management of operations, marketing strategy, sales strategy, finance strategy, and other essential elements of the business.
- f. **Growth and Scaling:** Growth and scalability are at the core of entrepreneurship. As an entrepreneur, your goal is to grow your business, gain market share, and discover new markets or growth opportunities.

Entrepreneurship is not just about creating new businesses. It is also about taking part in entrepreneurial activities in your organization. For example, intra-preneurship involves employees engaging in entrepreneurial behaviors to drive innovation and growth. In conclusion, entrepreneurship is a dynamic, multi-dimensional process that creates new opportunities, drives economic growth, drives innovation, and drives social progress through positive change. Apprenticeship program aims to foster the entrepreneurial mindset within your organization.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment refers to the ability of individuals or communities to improve their economic status, gain control over economic resources, and have the freedom to make economic decisions that shape their lives. It involves enhancing access to economic opportunities, resources, and markets, as well as increasing income, asset ownership, and economic security" (Kabeer, 2005). "Economic empowerment denotes the process of enhancing individuals' or groups' capacity to access, controls, and benefit from economic resources, assets, and opportunities. It involves the removal of systemic barriers, the provision of relevant skills and knowledge, and the creation of an enabling environment that enables individuals to generate sustainable income, improve livelihoods, and achieve economic self-sufficiency" (Narayan, 2010).

Economic empowerment is the process of giving people or communities more power and influence over their financial opportunities, resources, and decision-making. It entails giving people the tools they need to raise their income, improve their overall economic status, and improve their financial well-being. Economic empowerment includes a variety of elements, such as:

- a. Ensuring that underserved and marginalized populations have access to and use financial services like banking, savings, credit, and insurance. This makes it possible for people to manage their finances, accumulate savings, and make investments in sources of income.
- b. Creating opportunities for people to acquire the knowledge, education, and vocational training they need to improve their employability, their capacity for entrepreneurship, and their ability to earn money. Individuals can access better job prospects and income-generating opportunities by expanding their knowledge and capabilities.
- c. Supporting programs and policies that encourage job creation, lower unemployment, and improve labor market participation. This can entail activities like fostering entrepreneurship, assisting small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), and enhancing methods for matching job candidates with open positions
- d. Gender equality involves addressing differences in economic opportunity and participation based on gender. Initiatives for economic empowerment frequently

- concentrate on reducing the gender gap by promoting equal access for women and girls to financial services, education, employment, and entrepreneurship.
- e. Ensuring fair access to economic resources like markets, capital, land, and technology. By granting people access to these resources, they can improve their quality of life by participating in profitable economic activities.
 - f. Social safety nets are put in place to lessen economic vulnerabilities and shield people and communities from shocks and risks. Examples include conditional cash transfers, unemployment benefits, and health insurance.
 - g. Providing training, mentoring, access to capital, and market opportunities to support the growth of small businesses, startups, and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship can foster innovation, spur economic growth, and create jobs.
 - h. Although Igbo apprenticeships for women are still lower than apprenticeships for men, there are several promising female apprenticeships. Empowering individuals and communities through economic empowerment plays a vital role in poverty reduction and social inclusion, as well as in sustainable development. Through economic empowerment, inequalities are reduced, productivity increases, and a more prosperous and inclusive society is created.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The Igbo apprenticeship system is one of the socio-economic institutions in South East Nigeria that has had a significant influence on the gender dynamics of the region. In the past, the majority of apprenticeship positions in the system belonged to men and women had a limited presence in the system. Over the past few years, the apprenticeship system has changed significantly in terms of the participation of women. The apprenticeship system has always been based on masculine values. Cultural norms and traditional beliefs taught women that some skills and occupations are more suitable for men. This has meant that women were limited to doing domestic work and working in informal industries. On the other hand, men were able to monopolize lucrative and prestigious jobs. Exclusion of women from the apprenticeship scheme contributes to their economic disadvantages and worsens gender inequality.

Women's economic position in Nigeria, urbanization, increased access to education, and globalizations have all contributed to the development of the Igbo apprenticeship system. These factors have enabled women to break the traditional gender roles and occupy occupations that are traditionally dominated by men. Women entrepreneurs, women's education, cultural changes, and support from women's organizations have all played a role in women's involvement in the system. However, as women have started to participate in the system of apprenticeship in Igbo, they have faced many challenges and obstacles. Gender stereotypes, cultural resistance, and the persistence of patriarchal values are some of the reasons why women are not able to enter and succeed in certain trades. Other factors that impede women's progress include discrimination, limited access to resources, and the burden of household duties.

Despite these challenges, women's participation in apprenticeship in Igbo has been on the rise. Women's involvement in apprenticeship has resulted in many positive outcomes, such as economic independence, improved social status, and greater power in the family and community. Successful women who enter and excel at apprenticeship become role models for other women to follow, challenging traditional gender roles, and pursuing career paths that are not expected of them. To improve women's participation in our apprenticeship system, we need to overcome socio-cultural obstacles and implement inclusive practices. This can be done by raising awareness, sensitizing the public, and implementing policy interventions that support women's education, training, and access to finance. Collaboration between women's organizations, government agencies, and traditional institutions will also help to create an enabling environment that values and supports women's involvement in a wide range of trades.

In short, South East Nigeria's apprenticeship system has traditionally been dominated by men. However, more and more women have started to participate in the apprenticeship system. Although there are still challenges, women are beginning to overcome these barriers and diversify into different trades. This is helping them to become financially independent and challenging the traditional gender roles. We must continue to work towards making the apprenticeship system more inclusive and work for everyone in the region.

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