

Igbo Traditional Apprenticeship System: An Indigenous Model of Entrepreneurship Development in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract: This theoretical paper reviewed Igbo traditional apprenticeship system (ITAS) to identify the features that make it the seedbed of entrepreneurship among the Igbos, its present challenges, and possible solutions. Relevant published works and interviews were employed. The paper found that the potency of ITAS derives from the hands-on approach, the settlement of apprentices, post-apprenticeship business support, and development of character that flows from its rigorous training. ITAS challenges include youth apathy towards participation, rising incidence of fraud, and defaults in apprentice settlement, lack of access to funding from banks and government agencies. Governments' model suffers from inadequate funding, mismanagement of funds, high mortality rate among government funded MSMEs, and failure to use indigenous systems to develop entrepreneurship in Nigeria, etc. It was found to lag behind ITAS. This paper recommends that government should endeavour to revamp the economy, improve funding, and integrate ITAS into its entrepreneurship development policy and programmes, but should leave its structure and features intact. Government should establish low interest credit facility that settled apprentices can access after verifiably starting their businesses, while a certain percentage of their verifiable settlement should be tax deductible for their masters. The rigorous ITAS training will replace the hurried and shallow training offered by the government model and the effectiveness of ITAS model will, if integrated, boost the effectiveness of the government model among the Igbos.

Keywords: Igbo traditional apprenticeship system, settlement, entrepreneurship development.

1. Introduction

Igbo people (the Igbos) predominantly occupy South-East, Nigeria, and comprise Ebonyi, Enugu, Abia, Imo and Anambra States, which constitute the Igbo mainland and the focus of this paper. However, Igbo homelands are also found in other states such as "Ika region of Akwa Ibom state; the Ikwere, Bonny-Opobo and Ahoada regions of Rivers state; the Oshimili, Aniocha and Ndokwa regions of Delta state; and parts of Cross River state", etc. (Osiri, 2020 p.297). The Igbos are industrious, assertive, communalistic yet individualistic, innovative, enterprising, resilient, and entrepreneurial (Osiri, 2020; Iwara *et al.*, 2019; Obunike, 2016; Orugun & Nafiu, 2014; Agozino & Anyanike, 2007). They are driven into economic migration to different parts of the world by their restive spirit of enterprise, aggravated by high population and inadequate natural resource endowment in their homeland, among other factors.

Igbo entrepreneurship is rooted in their traditional apprenticeship system, known in the Igbo language as *igba-odibo* (servanthood). The Igbo traditional apprenticeship system (ITAS) is indigenous to the Igbos

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(OneWorld Nations, 2019), and has effectively served their entrepreneurship development needs; enabling them to recover from the monumental loss of lives, properties, businesses and other livelihoods engendered by the Nigerian-Biafran civil war of 1967-1970 (Forbes, 2017; Falola *et al.*, 2008). The peculiar features of ITAS offer a quintessential route into entrepreneurship engagement. In fact, research evidence shows that those who underwent ITAS before starting their own businesses perform better than those who did not (e.g. Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2020). Congruently, an overwhelming majority of successful Igbo business men passed through ITAS (Onwuka, 2015; Orugun & Nafiu, 2014; Udegbe, 2013; Eze, 2012).

ITAS is an indigenous system of education (training) in craft and trade, embedded with management and entrepreneurship skills. It is an organic response to the socio-economic challenges that confront the Igbos, and is deeply rooted in Igbo cultural values, norms, customs, beliefs, traditional laws and governance, etc. As mentioned earlier, it derives from a socio-cultural means of exchange known in Igbo language as *igba-odibo* (servanthood). *Igba-odibo* is a cultural mechanism that enables the exchange of service for pecuniary and/or non-pecuniary values. Typically, less privileged members of society offer, or agree, to serve more privileged ones, as a way of becoming deserving of (earn) the pecuniary or non-pecuniary support (reward) they expect from the privileged members. This is consistent with the individualism in communalism that characterises the Igbo culture, as expressed by the Igbo philosophy: *aka nri kwoo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwoo aka nri* (the right hand washes the left hand; the left hand washes the right hand). An average Igbo person is not contented with being dependent on other people without offering some compensatory favours to his or her benefactor. As succinctly captured by Nnadozie (2002), Igbo individualism is “a sense of independence borne out of a sense of personal pride but adequately mixed with a sense of communalism, not communism”. While individualism motivates individual ambition and contributions, communalism provides a cohesive support system as conveyed in the Igbo philosophy (and social consciousness) of *onye agha na nwanne ya* (nobody should leave his sibling behind) and *igwe bu ike* (there is strength in large numbers).

Igba-odibo can be broadly classified into domestic servanthood and apprenticeship, both of which differ from slavery (known in Igbo language as *igba-ohu*) and modern paid-employment. In domestic servanthood, a less privileged family gives out a member of the family to live with, and perform domestic duties for another person or family, in exchange for the servant’s upkeep, support for the servant’s family and, sometimes, the servant’s education or vocational training. This arrangement is voluntarily undertaken and can be terminated by either of the parties, which differentiates it from slavery. In apprenticeship, a family gives out a member of the family to a craftsman or trader to serve for a specified duration, in exchange for training in the craft or trade; intended to enable him start his own business or vocation. The differences between craft and trade apprenticeship will be discussed later, but the core difference is that while craft apprenticeship can be for entrepreneurship or vocation or job training, trade apprenticeship is solely to give the apprentice the opportunity to develop the capacity to establish and grow his own business (entrepreneurship). Secondly, craft apprenticeship has an alternative in formal vocational education but trade apprenticeship has no alternative because it has no equivalence in formal education curricula. Therefore, the Igbo trade apprenticeship system is distinct, and a widely validated entrepreneurship development model among the Igbos (see Amaechi, 2021; Osiri, 2020). In fact, it has been described as the largest business incubator platform in the world (Neuwirth, 2017).

Conversely, government entrepreneurship development model has been beleaguered. Successive governments have made several policy and interventional efforts to develop entrepreneurship because of its positive relationship with desired economic outcomes (Vracheva & Stoyneva, 2020), and because it produces micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that are critical to economic growth, job creation

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and social stability. Governments have the responsibility of providing public infrastructures, policies, regulations, programmes and initiatives that promote business start-up and growth. In line with these obligations, the Federal Government has established more than sixty-five (65) entrepreneurship development programmes administered by Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Bank of Industry (BOI), Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC), Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Development Bank of Nigeria (DBN), Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and NIRSAL Microfinance Bank (MSME Africa, 2023).

However, problems of inadequate funding, financial mismanagement, counter-entrepreneurship behaviours (e.g. celebration of unverifiable wealth, stigmatisation of failure, and risk aversion), and difficulties of determining the right mix of policies and programmes still persist. Beneficiaries are poorly trained and, therefore, not equipped with requisite entrepreneurship and business skills. Besides, the national-cake mentality that is wrongly associated with government grants and loans still subsists, and suggests that such funds deserve to be misappropriated and loans not repaid. These factors contribute to high business mortality rate among businesses that were started with government entrepreneurship development funds (e.g. Peter *et al.*, 2018; Kehinde *et al.*, 2016). Critical economic indices are worsening, which may imply public policy failure. Youth unemployment rose to 53.4% (NBS, 2022), and the 2022 Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that nearly 133 million (63%) of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor (NBS, 2023). Worsening economic indices and research findings question the appropriateness and efficacy of public entrepreneurship development policies and programmes, among other things.

The juxtaposition of ITAS and government entrepreneurship development models shows that ITAS is superior to the government model in creating and growing businesses in Nigeria. Can this under-performance be partly attributable to public policy failure to identify and integrate proven informal sector solutions? In other words, can public policies and programmes be deliberately tweaked to incorporate indigenous systems that have been widely validated in each region or geo-political zone of the country, such as ITAS for South-Easterners? Would such a policy not be more relatable and amenable to the peculiarities of the targeted population, and would it not reduce resistance and provoke greater local ownership and, by that fact, induce greater effectiveness and sustainability of the policies and programmes? Importantly, can such integration mutually strengthen both ITAS and government entrepreneurship development models by helping each other to address its challenges? Is it not counter-productive to paint the different peoples or geo-political zones of Nigeria with the same policy brush, in spite of obvious divergences, peculiarities, and histories? This paper made use of relevant published materials and interviews of some ITAS stakeholders.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study responds to the need to further explore and understand the potencies of ITAS as an entrepreneurship development model and the need for public policy integration of such indigenous informal sector systems, as a way of improving the reach, acceptability, effectiveness and sustainability of both the indigenous and government models. Specifically, this paper seeks to:

- (i) Identify the features of ITAS that promote entrepreneurship among the Igbos;
- (ii) Identify current challenges of ITAS; and
- (iii) Propose government intervention that can help to mitigate the problems of ITAS, which will also help to boost the entrepreneurship development capacity of both models among the Igbos.

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3. Entrepreneurship Development

Entrepreneurship involves the creation of value for individuals and society. It has been variously defined as wealth creation, undertaking of business risks, and establishment of new businesses (Udofot, 2012; Anyanwu, 2010; Hisrich *et al.*, 2005), innovation (Arisi-Nwugballa & Udu, 2008), recognition and exploitation of market opportunities (Kirzner, 1997), identification and creation of business opportunities (Venkatraman, 1997), and ability to use factor inputs to produce new goods and services (Onuoha, 1991), etc. However, this paper adopts Hisrich *et al.* (2005)'s definition of entrepreneurship as the establishment of new businesses, specifically MSMEs. This definition agrees with government's approach to entrepreneurship as the establishment and growth of new businesses to drive economic growth via creation of jobs, income, revenue, etc.

Entrepreneurship development "refers to the process of boosting entrepreneurship skills and knowledge through training and institution-building programmes", which are aimed at assisting individuals to establish and grow their businesses (UNDP, 1999). In doing this, entrepreneurship education presents as a veritable tool for producing entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship educators (Alarape 2008). Besides regular education programmes, entrepreneurship development programmes include on- and off-the-job trainings served in seminars, workshops, conferences, short-term structured trainings, apprenticeships, etc., which are intended to impart entrepreneurship knowledge and skills that capacitate people to successfully establish and/or grow their businesses. Other aspects of entrepreneurship development programmes include financing, financial management, marketing, and other support services. Entrepreneurship development strategy is aimed at stimulating economic growth and development through substantial increases in the number of MSMEs to generate significant increases in output, job and income creation (Arogyaswamy & Rodsutt, 2007).

3.1 Apprenticeship

Like entrepreneurship, apprenticeship is variedly defined, probably because it is variedly practised in different societies. The developed countries of the world have evolved from traditional to modern apprenticeship, reflecting their evolution and developmental realities. Modern apprenticeship involves on-the-job training, development of theoretical knowledge, and academic certification components. Basic education certificate is required for entry into modern apprenticeship; duration of training is typically shorter than in traditional apprenticeship; and apprentices receive remunerations (Macleod & Hughes, 2006; Ryan & Unwin, 2001). This type of apprenticeship is majorly purposed to provide vocational and job trainings.

Conversely, traditional apprenticeship is predominantly practiced in many developing countries, including Nigeria. It is intended to deliver knowledge and skills through practical on-the-job teaching and learning (Okorie & Ezeji, 1988). Domiciled in the informal sector, it serves a predominantly poor, uneducated or fairly educated populations that are often without employable skills. There are no entry academic requirements, development of theoretical knowledge or certification, as obtains in modern apprenticeship. The persistent high rate of youth unemployment deepens the desire for traditional apprenticeship as a viable route to entrepreneurship and creation of wealth, even for educated youths.

3.1.1 Igbo traditional apprenticeship system (ITAS)

The Igbos are, probably, the Nigerian tribe that has demonstrated the greatest proclivity to entrepreneurship (Igwe *et al.*, 2020), and ITAS is the seedbed of their entrepreneurship both at home and in diaspora. ITAS is predicated on the Igbo philosophy: "*onye fee eze, eze erute ya*", which literally means "he who serves the king shall, in turn, be king", and will be served by others. *Igba-odibo* is a widely

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accepted cultural mechanism for exchanging value in domestic and business contexts. As mentioned earlier, ITAS consists of craft and trade apprenticeships. The purpose of craft apprenticeship is to teach and learn technical knowledge and skills required in crafts such as bricklaying, tailoring, printing, weaving, and blacksmithing, etc. Trade apprenticeship, on its part, focuses on teaching and learning of commercial skills required in trading. Both types of apprenticeship are also embedded with management and entrepreneurship training.

The terms of ITAS contract agreement vary between craft and trade apprenticeships. The major contractual differences are: (i) craft apprentices typically pay training fees to their masters while trade apprentices usually do not pay fees for their training; (ii) craft apprentices typically do not reside under their masters' care but trade apprentices do, and often double as domestic servants to their masters; (iii) the upkeep and welfare of trade apprentices are their masters' responsibilities, but it is typically not so under craft apprenticeship; (iv) the duration of craft apprenticeship is typically shorter than that of trade apprenticeship; and very importantly (v) craft apprentices are usually not settled by their masters at the end of their apprenticeship period, but it is obligatory for masters to settle trade apprentices, which enhances their propensity to start their own businesses at the end of their apprenticeship. There may, however, be minor deviations from these standard practices in some places.

In ITAS terminology, 'settle' or 'settlement' refers to the money and/or goods, shop, etc., which a master gives to his apprentice at the end of a satisfactory apprenticeship period, to enable him start his own business. This is the apprentice's reward for many years of service to his master, and is at the core of ITAS. A satisfactory performance, as primarily determined by the master, entitles an apprentice to be settled. The size of the settlement an apprentice receives is the prerogative of his master, and depends on the apprentice's contributions to his master's business, character, length of service, and family relationship, etc. It is worth noting that ITAS was initially dominated by kiths and kin before it expanded to accommodate non-relatives. Nonetheless, apprentices that are related to the master still receive bigger settlements due to familial obligations.

The relevance of ITAS to business owners (masters) derives from the benefits of enabling them to grow their businesses by appropriating apprentices' talents, skills, social capital, and many years of productive efforts ploughed into their (i.e. masters') businesses, especially after the apprentices have learnt the ropes of their businesses. These benefits justify masters' participation in ITAS. But for apprentices, the relevance of ITAS derives from the opportunity it affords them to: (i) acquire requisite skills, experience, and exposure to their masters' business networks, etc., without making any cash payment; (ii) receive settlement (seed capital) to start their own businesses, and (iii) access post-apprenticeship support. Apart from receiving initial start-up capital from their masters, settled apprentices often appropriate some of their masters' patronage, contacts, and goodwill in building their own businesses. In most cases, settled apprentices and their former masters continue to exchange mutually beneficial business support long beyond the apprenticeship period (Ichoku, 2019), depending on the success and cordiality of the apprenticeship process. The relationship offers advantages akin to those of team entrepreneurship (Vesper, 1990) or stakeholder capitalism (Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2020).

The enduring relevance of ITAS to entrepreneurship development derives from the propriety and resilience of its features. Studies show that traditional apprenticeship provides traditional means of developing and financing marketable skills of young people in developing economies, which enables them to establish their own businesses (ILO, 2007; Nwanoruo, 2004). Alarape (2008) opines that apprenticeship is a watershed in the history of entrepreneurship training in Nigeria. In summary, the features of ITAS that make it a veritable tool for entrepreneurship development are as follows:

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- (i) It offers apprentices a practical, hands-on opportunity to learn trading or craft, entrepreneurship, and management skills under readily available and experienced role models (masters). The practical-oriented nature of the system, its informal delivery and ambience enhance learning, especially for uneducated and poorly educated apprentices;
- (ii) Apprentices use their masters' businesses to hone their business skills before venturing out on their own. Promising apprentices are permitted to manage their masters' businesses for some time before their settlement. That gives them the opportunity to prove their mettle, and to make profit for their masters, part of which will be used to settle them at the end of their apprenticeship period. The profit they make for their masters is a major consideration in determining the size of their settlements;
- (iii) Apprentices receive financial and/or material settlements to enable them start their own businesses after their apprenticeship, e.g. money, shops, goods, etc.;
- (iv) Besides settlement, apprenticeship gives apprentices the opportunity to develop relationships with their masters' customers, suppliers, and other service providers during their period of apprenticeship. In essence, settled apprentices do not only benefit from their settlement but from the appropriation of the goodwill of their former masters' customers, suppliers, etc., which was cultivated during their period of apprenticeship. They also benefit from short-term business loans and supply of goods on credit; and
- (v) Apprentices are trained to develop character traits that are suitable for business and entrepreneurship, viz. hard-work, thrift, obedience, humility, frugality, risk-taking, honesty, rational and quick decision-making, courage, courtesy, conscientiousness, etc., embedded in the stringent process of ITAS training.

The factors that underpin these features derive from a common cultural bond between the master and his apprentices, which regulates their relationship and deepens trust between them. Both parties are aware that they are liable to the same or similar cultural practices that promote accountability and dispute resolution. A fraudulent apprentice or master is subject to social pressures and traditional dispute resolution process that helps to ascertain the truth and enforce compliance to its decisions. This process is largely considered to be more effective and respected than court litigation. It helps to reduce conflict and promote trust, commitment, fairness and good conduct. For instance, a master who records high rate of apprenticeship failure or apprentice deaths may be labelled a ritualist and stigmatised in his community. He may also be subjected to a traditional adjudication process to prove his innocence. Fraudulent or failed apprentices are labelled as never-do-wells and also stigmatised in their communities. The family of an apprentice that is found guilty of defrauding his master will be compelled by the community to settle their son's liability or forfeit their land or other properties of equal monetary value to his mater. These socio-cultural pressures can make social life unbearable for affected masters and apprentices in their various communities, and helps to deter others from similar behaviours.

3.1.2 Challenges of ITAS

Salami (1977) and Nwanoruo (2004) identify the challenges of traditional apprenticeship to include: absence of legislation that provide for the registration of traditional apprenticeship providers in Nigeria; narrow scope of training and lack of adequate theoretical content; lack of standard entry requirements resulting in the dominance of illiterates and semi-illiterates; lack of entrepreneurship skills and resources which hamstrings graduates from establishing and/or managing their businesses well; lack of standard evaluation technique; and lack of accreditation involving supervision and monitoring of the facilities and qualifications of instructors and methods of instruction. However, this paper is of the view that these are not the real challenges of ITAS, especially for trade apprenticeship, because solving these supposed problems will transform it to modern apprenticeship, which will contradict its underlying philosophy and

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negate its relevance to the population it serves most - the uneducated, poorly educated and low income populations.

The real challenges of ITAS are high drop-out rate, dishonesty and fraud among apprentices, rising incidence of defaults in apprentice settlement, and increasing youth apathy towards apprenticeship, among others. Cases of delayed, poor and/or non-settlement of apprentices are often attributed to fraud and other acts of gross misconduct by apprentices, both imagined and real. Unbridled get-rich-quick syndrome appears to fuel youth apathy towards hard-work and honest path to livelihood, which discourages youth participation in apprenticeship and encourages fraudulent behaviours amongst apprentices and masters. Some masters fraudulently avoid settling their apprentices by levelling charges of misconduct against them close to the end of their apprenticeship, in order to avoid settling them. Furthermore, settled apprentices also lack access to funding from financial institutions and government entrepreneurship development agencies. They are, therefore, limited to funding from market associations, private thrift operators, and the likes (Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2020). These multi-thronged challenges tend to weaken the tenets of ITAS and impinge on its effectiveness, patronage and sustenance.

At the macroeconomic level, Nigeria's turbulent economic and business climates stack the odds against the survival and profitability of MSMEs – the operators of ITAS. Increasing fuel and electricity prices have unleashed about 260% increase in energy cost (Anaeto, 2023). This, combined with climbing inflationary rate (24.08%) (NBS, 2023), skyrocketing foreign exchange rates, multiple taxation by State and Federal governments (Business Day, 2023), lack of access to finance (Ikpoto, 2023), and increased operating costs (Nwafor, 2023), etc., to further dampen the ease of doing business in Nigeria, ranked 131 out of 190 in the 2020 World Bank report (World Bank, 2020). It is projected that the cumulative effects of these factors will push many businesses into extinction in 2023 (Nwafor, 2023), many of which will be MSMEs that participate in ITAS. It jeopardises the profitability of MSMEs and emasculates their ability to engage more apprentices and adequately settle them, as at and when due. It also negatively impacts settled apprentices' ability to start and/or grow their businesses.

4. Theoretical Framework

Learning (of skills) is at the core of ITAS. This paper, therefore, considers it appropriate to deploy Bandura (1977)'s theory of social learning as its theoretical framework. The theory posits that people learn from others through observation, imitation, and modelling (Bandura, 1977). It advances the idea of observational learning; learning by observing the behaviours of others and the consequences of those behaviours. A large part of individual learning derives from observing role models, including parents, siblings, teachers, school mates, pastors, bosses, peers, actors and actresses, etc. As Bandura (1977, p.22) puts it:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.

Modelling and the influence of models are pivotal to social learning theory. Bandura identified three models of observational learning namely; live model (individual demonstration of a behaviour in person), verbal instruction model (verbal descriptions and explanations of a behaviour), and symbolic model (real or fictional character's display of behaviours in books, films, etc.). Attention, retention, motor reproduction, and reinforcement have been identified as processes that improve the effectiveness of modelling (Robbins & Judge, 2022). Recognition of, and attention to, the critical features of modelled behaviour is key to learning a behaviour. In doing this, models that are considered important, are readily

available, or attractive to the individual command greater attention than otherwise. Individual characteristics such as sensory capacities, past reinforcement, arousal level, etc., also affect attention (Robbins & Judge, 2022).

The ability to store information (retention) is also critical to observational learning. The ability to retain information as mental images, symbolic coding, and cognitive organisation, etc., enables the individual to access the information whenever the need for imitation (motor reproduction) arises. Mental and physical capability to repeatedly imitate observed behaviour enables learning and improvements in skill development and advancement. Lastly, individuals need to be motivated to reproduce observed behaviour. This can derive from personal (direct and indirect) experience of reinforcement or punishment for behaviours, and its outcomes.

The theory of social learning is considered appropriate for this study because it captures the procedural essence of ITAS as a process of observational learning. ITAS is consistent with Bandura's view of social learning as consisting of observation, imitation, and modelling. Masters model the desired behaviours to their apprentices, and coach them to learn the behaviours on-the-job. This process, consistently repeated over time, gives apprentices the opportunity to identify and codify critical behaviours relevant to the skills being learnt, and become able to independently replicate those behaviours. Apprentices' ability to start their own businesses at the end of their apprenticeship is a cardinal measure of success in ITAS because that is its exclusive purpose. The desire to own a business and the accruable settlement serve as motivation to apprentices.

However, the weakness of this theory is that it appears to lay undue burden of learning on the apprentice by presuming masters' mastery of the skills apprentices seek. But skills, abilities, and experiences differ among masters, and determine what they can offer their apprentices. Secondly, individual master's method of modelling and coaching would also weigh heavily on his apprentices' learning outcomes.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

ITAS stands out as a veritable indigenous system of developing entrepreneurship amongst the Igbos of South-East, Nigeria. Its potency derives from its features namely; apprentices undergo a rigorous business and entrepreneurship training using a practical, hands-on approach that is suitable for even the uneducated; apprentices have the opportunity to hone their skills in their masters' businesses, which reduces trial and error in their own businesses; apprentices receive start-up capital (settlement) from their masters; settled apprentices benefit from their masters' goodwill and support, and from the relationships they cultivated with their masters' customers, suppliers and other service providers; and finally, apprentices are trained to develop character traits that are suitable for business and entrepreneurship. Trade apprenticeship was found to offer a more comprehensive entrepreneurship development package because it offers training, start-up capital and post-apprenticeship support, while craft apprenticeship offers training and support only. The free training offered by trade apprenticeship widens the space for greater participation than in craft apprenticeship where training is paid for. Other advantages of trade apprenticeship are that it lasts for a longer duration and provides for apprentices' welfare, which affords them a longer time to learn, hone their skills and accumulate experiences before venturing into their own business.

However, ITAS is currently challenged by increasing rate of apprentice drop-out, dishonesty and fraud, rising default in settlement of apprentice, youth apathy towards apprenticeship, and harsh economic and business conditions that make it difficult for masters to accept more apprentices and/or adequately and timeously settle them. Even when settled, the prevailing high cost of doing business emasculates the

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market value of such settlements and their chances of starting their own businesses. In addition, settled apprentices lack access to funding from banks and government agencies.

Government entrepreneurship development model was found to be less effective than ITAS, which has been described as the largest business incubator platform in the world (Neuwirth, 2017). This model suffers from funding problems, mismanagement by fund managers and beneficiaries, difficulties of determining the right mix of policies and programmes, and high mortality rate among funded businesses, among others. The high incidence of business mortality may be due to mismanagement arising from hasty and poor training of beneficiaries (unlike ITAS), lack of post-funding business support, and the national-cake mentality that suggests that government funding ought to be misappropriated and loans unrepaid. Furthermore, policy makers have failed to use indigenous systems, such as ITAS, to develop entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

It is evident that both government and ITAS models need help. Consequently, this paper recommends that the government should take effective measures to revamp the economy and improve its funding of entrepreneurship development programmes. Thirdly, government should integrate ITAS into its entrepreneurship development policy and programmes to serve the Igbos of South-East, Nigeria, who operate the system already. Public policy makers should endeavour to identify and integrate effective indigenous solutions in regions where they are successfully practiced, instead of painting the many ethnic nationalities with the same policy brush. Replicating an indigenous system outside its socio-cultural ecosystem will be a long, arduous and expensive endeavour that may not produce the desired outcomes because of the difficulties in replicating a culture-specific web of socio-cultural and historical realities that underpin the system in its original ecosystem. Integrating indigenous systems into public policy would make the policy more acceptable to the relevant population, reduce resistance, and produce better outcomes.

However, the integration of ITAS into government policy and programmes should be limited to providing access to funding and tax incentives to settled apprentices and their masters. It should not seek to reinvent the wheel by creating a parallel system; it should rather create structures and modalities to register and monitor interested ITAS providers and apprentices, in collaboration with relevant market/traders' associations. Periodic interactions with masters, apprentices, and leaders of market and traders' associations will provide opportunities to enlighten them on relevant government policies/programmes and how they could benefit from them. All the features of ITAS should be left intact, to maintain the integrity of the system.

The federal and governments of Ebonyi, Enugu, Anambra, Imo and Abia States should, respectively, establish low interest credit facilities that will be exclusively available to settled apprentices that have verifiably started their own businesses with the settlement they received from their masters. Apprentices' awareness that they can access additional funds to help grow their businesses will make them less apprehensive about their future and, therefore, dissuade them from dropping out of their training and/or engaging in dishonesty and fraud. Cumulatively, youth apathy towards apprenticeship will be drastically reduced when the system works more effectively and efficiently, and different levels of government provide cheap credit facilities to support participating businesses.

Lastly, this paper recommends that government should grant tax incentives to business owners (masters) that successfully train apprentices. They can be incentivised by making a certain percentage of their verifiable apprentice settlements to be tax deductible after the settled apprentices have started their own businesses. This will not only encourage them to continue to settle their apprentices adequately and timeously, but will motivate them to improve on their commitment and quality of training to ensure that

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their apprentices are able to successfully start and run their own businesses, in order to qualify for the tax deduction. These measures, if implemented, will help to resolve the challenges of ITAS and extend its entrepreneurship development capacity, which will in turn, boost the effectiveness and efficiency of government entrepreneurship development model among the Igbos. The rigorous training provided by ITAS will replace the hurried and shallow training regime offered by the government model. The solid operational structure and potency of ITAS will help to boost the effectiveness of the government model. However, like most policy measures, this proposal can be exploited by dubious operators if implemented, but it can be properly fine-tuned to reduce such exploitations to its barest minimum.

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