

## **Apprenticeship Training System and Business Sustainability in Anambra State South East Nigeria**

**<sup>1</sup>Iwueke Obinna C., <sup>2</sup>Halima Sule Alhassan & <sup>3</sup>Oparaku Patrick N.**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Business Admin and Management, Federal Polytechnic Nekede Imo State*

<sup>2</sup>*Federal Ministry of Education, Department of Education Planning and Research Development, NATCOM UNESCO, Abuja*

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Public Admin Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Imo State*

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### **Abstract**

The rate of Small business failures in South East Nigeria in recent time has brought to the front burner, the critical role of Apprenticeship Training System in Business Sustainability. Business Failure has adverse impact on individuals, organizations and the entire system. Apprenticeship which is intergenerational means of transmitting technical skills and tacit knowledge from the master to the apprentices is gradually declining as a result of various factors like poor mentorship, educational and fund constraints. This paper therefore investigates apprenticeship training system and business sustainability in Anambra state using a population of 1000 respondents from different trades/ crafts/ business. Questionnaire was the main instrument of data collection while Chi- Square was used to test the hypotheses. Related literatures on apprenticeship and business sustainability were reviewed. Findings reveal that the level of education of the apprentices determines the acquisition of the trade knowledge and also the Masters williness to mentor the apprentices who must be ready and have the capacity to learn. Therefore, the study recommends that apprentices must possess some levels of education that is basic for effective understanding and comprehension of trade knowledge and secrets. Also the masters must have mentoring skills to bring out the creativity in apprentices, while taking cognizance of business trends.

**Keywords:** *Apprenticeship, Business sustainability, Mentoring, Trade Knowledge and Creativity*

*Corresponding Author:* Iwueke Obinna C.

## **Background to the Study**

Apprenticeship training system is a human resources development scheme that blends learning and training in preparing individuals to set-up, own and run independent businesses. Apprenticeship is an age long system practiced worldwide but very popular with business in southeast Nigeria because it was the main source of starting up lives for people after the Nigeria-Biafra Civil war between 1967-1970.

Apprentice training system involves transmitting of technical skills and tacit knowledge from the master to the apprentices through observation, memorisation and imitation over a period of time for the apprentices to master the skills and knowledge of the trade or craft. Hence, apprenticeship involves a program that trains an individual, to become skilled through learning and applying the acquired knowledge in business operations. The apprenticeship system enables the master who is grounded and developed in a trade or craft to have agreement with Apprentice in a range of 4-10 years, whereby the Apprentices serve and learn from the Master in the business. The agreement which contains the model of settlement is often signed by the parents/ guardians on behalf of the Apprentice.

Kanu(2019) opined that the skills transmitted during Apprenticeship constituted a special form of human capital, a set of recipes, which are often called secrets of the trade, a saviour faire that determines how goods and services were to be produced, marketed and would be allowed to engage in it.

Chinwuba and Ezeugwu (2017) state that success of the Igbo Apprenticeship System has been responsible for the vast wealth creation by the people from the south East States of Nigeria. The wealth creation is courtesy of human capital development arising from a combination of learning and training that end in settings up business by the Apprentices. The success is attributable to circle nature of the system whereby after the apprentices have been settled, they pick other who have graduated at different levels of education (primary, secondary or tertiary) from their families/ communities for apprenticeship. Often successful completion of the apprenticeship training without negative report from the Master is a pride to the Apprentice and a basis for good settlement- provision of fund and other assistance to the apprentice to start his own business. In the Igbo parlance, the “Oga” is the master while the apprentice is “Nwa odibio” and system is Igba “odibio”, and System is igba Odibo" Invariably, Apprenticeship have been a major source of wealth creation for most flourishing businesses in Anambra State but recently it is losing its place in business and the commitment of both the Masters and Apprentices are no longer effective. This has affected wealth creation from many trade/craft businesses adversely.

## **Statement of Problem**

Apprenticeship training systems has been effective in the past until recently. The problem can be attributable to the following observations.

1. Inability to infuse formal education into apprenticeship system due to clashes with time frame.
2. Inability of Masters to properly mentor the apprentices and bring out creativity in them.

3. Problem of settlement after training arising from lack of capital (seed capital) for the apprentices to start up
4. Lack of training programmes to equip Masters with requisite skills, knowledge abilities to run business in changing times.

All the Observations have made Apprentice training system less popular and in turn adversely affect business sustainability in Anambra State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to determine how Apprenticeship training system affects business sustainability in Anambra State. The specific objectives include:

1. To determine the relationship between apprentice educational qualification and comprehension of trade knowledge.
2. To find out the relationship between the mentoring ability of the Masters and Apprentices creativity.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study.

1. How has the apprentice's educational qualification affected learning and use of trade knowledge in business?
2. How can the masters mentoring ability ensure that apprentices use their creativity?

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following research hypotheses were formulated for the study

- HO<sub>1</sub>: Apprentice Educational Qualifications does not have significant relationship with trade knowledge
- HO<sub>2</sub>: Mentoring Ability of Masters does not have significant relationship with Apprentice creativity.

### **Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

This research adopted a descriptive survey technique and the population of the study is made up of 1000 people comprising Masters and Apprentices in Anambra State. The sample size of 400 was determined with Taro Yemene formula. While 400 questionnaires were distributed 300 from 95 Masters and 205 Apprentices were duly filled and returned, representing 75%. Data for this research was analysed using the statistical package for social sciences version 20 (SPSS20). The descriptive part of the study was summarised with frequency, percentage and mean, while chi-square statistic was used to test the hypotheses.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Conceptual Framework**

Apprenticeship is a work based placement that combines practical on-the-job training with continued learning at a specified period of time toward a recognised qualification. Igbo apprenticeship system involves informal discussions between the Master and Apprentices relatives. The ability of the master to train, integrity and success of the business overtime gives

him the invisible assets- “goodwill” which attracts business patronage and people approaching the Master to train their siblings. Once the apprentice is recruited, he becomes a part of the master's household and is expected to perform activities that are unrelated to training. Hence, apprentice training in most cases is not limited to trade but also the general upbringing. Invariably there is transfer of the responsibility of upbringing of the child from the parents or sponsors to the Master, agreement on the length of training period, the term of settlement and others things as may be required are specified in a written document signed by the Master and Apprentice sponsors.

The written agreements contain the following:

1. The period of time the master will train the apprentice
2. Fees the sponsors of sponsors apprentice will pay if any and indemnity if the Master loss through stealing.
3. The Master settlements for Apprentices. But, if the Apprentice repeatedly violates the provisions of the agreement he would be dismissed without settlement.

### **Types of Apprenticeship**

Haan (2008) identified three major types of apprenticeship training which include

1. The Tradition Apprenticeship: This refers to the well-organized transfer of skills within families and social groups based on social cultural conventions. There is an agreement between the Master (craft person) and the relatives of the Apprentice regulated skill training.
2. The informal Apprenticeship: There, Apprentices unconsciously acquire relevant skills from observation, questions and direct telling by the Masters. Questioning ensures effective learning this type is common in informal activities such as welding, car repairs and tailoring.
3. The Modern Apprenticeship: This type is regulated by an apprenticeship act which stipulates that the length of training period, the training hours, the payment of parts of minimum wage etc. This type is seen in Medium and large Enterprise. It has dual system which ensures that planned learning takes place in two locations in the organizations premises and in the vocational.

### **Igbo Apprenticeship Training System**

Igbo apprenticeship training system is unstructured and informal with training done on the job while the masters delegate authority, to the most senior Apprentice (oldest Apprentice) who in turn delegates part of the authority to the next apprentice down the line. Alike and Orjiako – Umunze (2019) state that in the system which is informal there is scheduled agreed time frame which an Apprentice undergoes in order to acquire a desirable aspect of entrepreneurial skill. Also unpaid business Apprenticeship designated as the incubator model allows people to learn business from a master for certain duration and at the end of the apprenticeship period, get seed capital and support from the Master to start up his own business. According to Kanu (2019) Apprentices do not earn salaries during the apprenticeship period but their masters give them, food, clothing, accommodation and transport in some cases. According to Chinweuba and Ezenwa (2017) the Apprentices work for the Masters, after completion of training for an

agreed period of time. On completion the apprentice stewardship is evaluated by the Master who settles the apprentice with cash or goods or rent payment for business premises or a combination of any two or the three. This principle which is fundamental practice creates long-lasting mutual trust and love between the Master(s) and Apprentice(s). The Apprentice is appraised by the following factors- work ethics, respect for Master, customers, performance of domestic chores, development of social and business skills.

Hence, the Igbo apprenticeship training system is all embracing in developing an individual.

### **Types of Igbo Apprenticeship system**

There are two basic types of Igbo apprenticeship system.

1. Igba odibo or Nwa boyi (To serve the Master): Here a learner of a specific trade or craft moves in with the Master based on agreement between the Master and the learners relatives. So the Master takes full responsibility of the learner while the learner serves the master both in the business setting and home front. The master has the responsibility of settling the learner at the end of the agreed time when the apprentice graduates.

### **Advantages of Igba Odibo**

Iwara , Ameachi and Netshandma (2019) identified the following advantages

- i) It enables parents to identify their children ambition(s) and who will help them to realize them.
- ii) Motivates children to accept and pursue it
- iii) Reveals the type of Masters that mentor the children to realize their ambition through various capacity assistance.

### **Imu Ahia (Learning trade)**

This involves an apprentice paying the Master a certain sum of money in order to learn a trade, art or business for a given period of time usually 6 months 4 years, depending on the nature of trade and the level of intelligence quotient of the apprentice.

Alike and Orjiakor (Umunze 2019) opine that a process by which an Apprentice pays for the skills acquired for a particular trade over a given period of time. This type is for those who have capital to invest in business but lack knowledge of the trade. They are not under the direct supervision of a Master but just there to learn the business.

### **Principles of Igbo Apprenticeship**

Kanu (2019) identified four fundamental principles that make Igbo Apprenticeship System distinct.

1. Igbo Social Construction of Reality : Anah and Okoro (2019) define social construction as the theoretical knowledge that the world is what the people within a given society make of it. Which is based on their belief system, values, techniques and other things that are shared in a given society? The Igbo does not see himself or herself as an individual without noticing immediately the need of the others. That is the reason why successful Igbo business personalities often pick their relatives and people from their localities equip them with requisite skills, knowledge and abilities required to set up and operate a business successfully. No wonder an Igbo adage says *no man is wealthy whose kinsmen are poor*.

2. Igbo Philosophy of Resilience: This was evident after the civil war in Nigeria when twenty pounds each was given to the Igbos who lost all their assets in other parts of Nigeria. They were able to raise from the ashes through high level of commitment, optimism, lack of fear etc. The factor of Igbo social insurance which is the obligations of the Masters to settle the apprentices and help them weather the storm. In some cases they use their lands (ala Ubi or Ala obi) as collateral if that is the only alternative.

3. Igbo think-home philosophy, According to Kanu (2019) this ideology accounts for the main reason wealthy Igbo business personalities always go back to the village and select some young person and equip them with knowledge of trade secret. They do come back every festival period- especially Christmas to invest back in their communities. This is in line with the Igbo phrase “*Aku ruo ulo*” - which means the wealth should reach home.

4. Sharing Principle: Neurith (2015) reveals in his findings on Igbo apprenticeship that Masters settled the Apprentices after graduation. This settlement entails giving Apprentices, cash, goods, payment of shop rent or combination to set up their business. Alike and Orjiofor –Umunze (2019) stressed that Apprentices are settled according to their contributions to the success of the business.

#### **Apprentice Level of Formal Education**

Education is the systematic development and cultivation of natural powers by inculcation. It involves the transmission of ideas and values from one generation to another. Emmanuel (2014) defines education as the aggregates of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are positive value to the society in which they live. Education is critical in training and development of individual's mental state and alertness.

Okoro (2018) are required to complete at least their primary education before enrolling into any type of apprenticeship. Neyt, Verhaest and Beart (2018) revealed that Apprentices with higher formal educations are more competitive in the labour market when compared with Apprentices that have only vocational training and secondary school.

Uwameiye and Iyamu (2002) noted that Apprenticeship System in Nigeria is declining because of the low educational level of Apprentices and their Masters. Onwuegbuzie (2017) opined that with good formal education combined with sound Apprenticeship background business failure will reduce considerably. Hence, Apprentices levels of formal Education plays a vital role in their business.

#### **Mentorship in Igbo Apprenticeship Training and System**

Abiodun et al (2015) defined mentor as a process an individual usually an adult accepts the responsibilities of counselling and directing another individual usually a child. Mentorship in relevant to Apprenticeship commence from the day Apprentices move in with the Master. Kanu (2019) stresses that Igbo Apprenticeship training consist of the followings: Apprentice will always respect their Masters, even when they make more wealth, Master have access to

Apprentice books of account, the Master give the Apprentice loan and trade credit, provide counsel and guidance to ensure success.

Hence, a master who is a mentor possesses necessary knowledge experience and skill out of love, the mentor spends time and energy to teach, encourage, motivate, direct and lead others to come up and become mature to forge ahead mentorship is a continuous process, mentoring focus on efficiently and professional growth.

### **Apprenticeship**

Apprentice's success in business after graduation depends to a very high extent on the knowledge about the secret of the business specifics- quality maintenance, cost management risk management and customer's relationship. Trade knowledge is about understanding the secret and processes associated with a trade. Jong and Soon (2015) opine that knowledge assists traders to understand the trade secret and gives a lot of information regarding trading which are useful in practice. Croix, Dopke and Moky (2016) report that apprentice level of education, may affect their ability to assimilate the trade secret and tacit knowledge.

### **Apprenticeship and Creativity**

Hennessy and Amabile (2010) state that Mentors should bring out creativity in people for their business to survive and succeed. Batey and Furnham (2006) creativity is the strength or capacity to invent or create any new object. Hence, creativity lead to generation and recognition of ideas that are useful in solving and achieving desirables goals.

### **Business Sustainability**

Sustainability is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. It leads to creation of true and, real value to systems and resources upon which that value depends on. Business sustainability involves analyses and decision making across business functions obtained through a committed and clear understanding of transactions that may occur both in the present and future.

According to Popescu and Popescu (2019) it involves ensuring that business continues to operate and make profits without exhausting available resources. Igbo apprenticeship system ensures wealth creation from generation to generation with focus on economy (profit) society (people) and, environment i.e earth resources)

### **Theoretical framework**

The study adopted human capital theory. A Beck (1975) state that human capital theory focuses on competence knowledge and personality attributes, both the Master and Apprenticeship ability to create earth for the society. Hence through apprenticeship training system both kinetic and potential human capital of both masters and apprentices are utilized. Hence, the theory supports apprenticeship training system.

### Empirical Review

Obunike (2016) in his Igba Odibo Study on Igbo entrepreneurs and micro business a study of household equipment line main market Onitsha Nigeria revealed that apprenticeship has been responsible for business success and growth.

Agbionu (2015) study revealed the place of positive mentorship from successful entrepreneur to the upcoming and prospective entrepreneurs. Ezenwakwelu, Egbosionu and Okwo (2019) in their study found out that, apprentices acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills for self employment through formal and informal apprenticeship training systems- they revealed that lack of qualified manpower, lack of start up capital and insufficient training tools impedes the course of apprenticeship acquisition of sufficient skills and knowledge for business set up.

### Data Presentation

#### Results

**Table 1:** Chi-Square of Significance of Apprentice Educational Qualification level to Acquisition of Trade Knowledge

Variables	Observed	Expected	Df	X2 significant
High educational qualification level	191	100		
Low Educational Qualification level	103	100	2	171.26.000
No educational Qualification	6	100		
Total	300			

Source: SPSS 20

Following the results from table I, the Chi-square is significant ( $X^2 = 1712.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ) therefore apprenticeship educational qualification level has significant relationship with the acquisition of trade knowledge and secrets.

**Table 2:** Chi-square result of Mentoring Ability of Masters and Apprentices Creativity

Variables	Observed	Expected	Df	X2	Significant
Transmission of knowledge and ideas	93	100	2		
Application of tacit and special skills	94	100	2	6.82	,032
No educational Qualification	6	100			
Total	300				

Source: SPSS 20

Table 2 indicates that there is a significant relationship between mentoring ability of masters and apprentices creativity with ( $X^2 = 6.86$ ,  $P = 0.32$ )

### Discussions

Hypothesis I states that apprentice's educational qualification does not have significant relationship with the acquisition of trade knowledge and secrets. But the study rejection of the null hypothesis shows that Apprentice Educational Qualification is critical to the



understanding, acquisition and application of trade knowledge and secrets. This finding affirms the report of Ezenwakwelu, Egbosionu and Okwo (2019) which revealed that, apprentices acquire technical and entrepreneur skills for self employment through formal and informal apprenticeship training systems. The formal aspect deals with education. This is in line with call on the government reviewing educational curriculum to be practical oriented. this is expected to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Also, Onwuegbuzie (2017) Supported this finding from his study which revealed that formal education combined with sound apprenticeship background reduce business failure considerably. Hence, formal Education is critical for Masters and Apprentices.

Hypothesis2 which states that mentoring ability of Masters does not have significant relationship with apprentice creativity. Was rejected, Agbionu (2015) confirmed this result in the study which revealed that positive mentorship from successful entrepreneurs are needed by apprentice who are upcoming and prospective entrepreneurs. Also Zeleke (2013) supports the finding further from the study which revealed that businesses fail due to lack of skills, lack of supervisory support to newly set- up business and ability of operators of new business to acquire vocational skills.

### **Conclusion**

Apprenticeship system of training has been responsible for business growth and success in Anambra state and Nigeria at large in the past. However presently the decline in its use has adversely affected business start ups development and growth. Hence there is an urgent need to address the situation.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government as a matter of urgency should review the educational curriculum to ensure that both theory and practical contents are taught simultaneously.
2. Educational system should use Master tradesmen of required crafts to handle practical aspect that is use of practising artisans in the training programme proper.
3. There should be attitudinal change which will encourage positive mentorship from successful entrepreneurs to upcoming and prospective entrepreneurs.
4. Government should adoption the practices of the Igbo-man apprenticeship System as a strategy for the development of Small Scale industries.
5. Government should provide, conducive environment in their various apprenticeship training programmes and institutions to boost business and skills development for both Masters and Apprentices.
6. Government should design and implement training and development programmes that enable both Masters and Apprentices to improve their educational qualifications acquire requisite skills, knowledge and abilities in line with their line of trade or craft and trends. This will increase Masters mentoring capacity and capability as well as apprentice's creativity.

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