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Training Methods, Entrepreneurial Learning Strategies, and Outcomes in the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme in Kaduna State, Nigeria, 2003–2023

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Abstract

This study examines the training methods, entrepreneurial learning strategies, and developmental outcomes of the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme (ITAS) in Kaduna State, Nigeria, between 2003 and 2023. Although the scheme has attracted considerable scholarly attention as an indigenous institution for entrepreneurship, enterprise replication, and socio-economic mobility, comparatively limited research has examined the pedagogical processes through which entrepreneurial competence, leadership capacity, and business continuity are cultivated. Addressing this gap, the study investigates the methods and strategies employed by entrepreneur-mentors in developing apprentices and evaluates their implications for entrepreneurial and institutional sustainability. Employing a qualitative historical research design, the study draws on primary data generated through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and archival materials, complemented by relevant scholarly publications and documentary sources. Data were analysed thematically. The findings reveal that, despite its informal character, the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme operates through a coherent and systematic learning process rather than an arbitrary training arrangement. Entrepreneurial development is fostered through structured mentorship, experiential learning, graduated responsibility, practical problem-solving, character formation, continuous performance assessment, and progressive exposure to business management. These interconnected strategies facilitate not only technical competence but also leadership development, ethical business conduct, entrepreneurial resilience, and enterprise continuity. The study further identifies contemporary institutional challenges, including excessive disciplinary practices, financial impropriety, declining social values, and occasional abuses that threaten the integrity of the apprenticeship scheme. It concludes that the enduring relevance of the scheme depends on preserving its guiding principles while pursuing context-sensitive institutional adaptation that strengthens accountability, safeguards apprentices' dignity, and enhances mentorship quality. The study recommends collaborative interventions by families, community leaders, business associations, and policymakers to reinforce the ethical and developmental foundations of this ingenious entrepreneurial institution.

Keywords: Training Methods, Entrepreneurial Learning Strategies, Outcomes, Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme

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Introduction

The leadership training dimensions of the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme (ITAS), focusing on the unique methods and strategies deployed in grooming trainees and their consequent impact, with particular reference to its operation in Kaduna State between 2003 and 2023, is the focus of this discourse. While the scheme is widely acknowledged for facilitating capital formation and enterprise replication, less scholarly attention has been devoted to its less structured and informal processes of leadership formation. This study, therefore, interrogates the extent to which the apprenticeship model functions not merely as a mechanism of skill acquisition but as a deliberate system of business leadership development rooted in indigenous knowledge, mentorship, discipline, and experiential learning.

The analysis proceeds by examining the training methods and pedagogical strategies inherent in the scheme, though uncodified, highlighting how these mechanisms cultivate technical competence, managerial capacity, entrepreneurial resilience, and strategic orientation among participants. It further evaluates, within the Kaduna context during the period under study, the socio-economic impact of the scheme-business leadership training-wise, and the challenges confronting its contemporary practice. Through this focus, the study positions the Igbo apprenticeship system as an informal yet robust leadership development framework with implications for enterprise sustainability, community organisation, and broader institutional leadership. Contemporary research works have focused mainly on the socio-economic deliverables of the scheme to diverse stakeholders, particularly the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. The issue of methods/strategies deployed by the master-trainer-entrepreneurs in building the business technical know-how of the youngster trainees is rarely paid attention to; how much more, the consequential impact of such methods on the trainee-apprentices among others. This endeavour, therefore, is primarily aimed at addressing the lacuna, with Kaduna State in Northern Nigeria as a study area, where the trade apprenticeship scheme has been in extensive operation among the Igbo ethnic people.

Conceptual Clarification

Two concepts are clarified here. They are:

Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme (ITAS)

ITAS is an indigenous, culturally rooted system of entrepreneurship formation based on principles of mentorship, shared prosperity, and intergenerational wealth creation. It involves the placement of a young learner under the tutelage

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of an established trader (*Oga*), who provides training, discipline, and exposure to commercial networks.[2] In its classical *Igba-boi* variant, ITAS culminates in the settlement of the apprentice, often through the provision of start-up capital, business stock, and, in some cases, a shop. Beyond material resources, the master extends goodwill, commercial networks, and continued informal mentorship, thereby integrating the newly established entrepreneur into a broader system of cooperative competition.[3]

ITAS differs fundamentally from venture capital and modern business incubation models. Whereas venture capital is time-bound and investment-driven, ITAS operates as a capital-sharing and capacity-building system, transferring not only financial resources but also social capital, experiential knowledge, and entrepreneurial culture.[4] Historically, the expansion of ITAS has been linked to major structural disruptions, particularly the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), which devastated Igbo economic life and compelled the adoption of apprenticeship as a survival and recovery strategy.[5] Earlier historical processes, including the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the return of freed Igbo slaves, have also been identified as formative influences on the scheme's evolution.[6] For this study, ITAS comprises all its operational variants, including *Igba-boi*, *Imu-ahia*, *Imu-olu aka*, and associated commercial practices such as *Igba-oso ahia* (business errands undertaken for customers). Any Igbo informal training arrangement oriented toward entrepreneurial establishment is treated as falling within the scope of ITAS.

Training Methods/Strategies

These are the various unstructured, uncodified, indigenous and informal ways and means through which the master-trainer-entrepreneurs impart knowledge, skills and business acumen to the trainee-apprentices throughout their apprenticeship period. The training methods are deployed by several stakeholders led by the individual masters of the apprentices, assisted in most cases by other masters who, as members of a particular trade association, assist one another in overseeing apprentices serving under them in the interest of their business and, of course, the co-prosperity building objective of the scheme. The apprentices themselves share knowledge and information amongst themselves, thereby contributing to their training and grooming for business excellence. The gamut of all these constitutes the scheme's training methods and strategies, which are not only indigenous but ingenious.

[2]D.L. Mpi. "The Role of the Igbo Apprenticeship System." *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Developing Economies (2019)*: 12–14.
[3]Helen, Udoka Chukwu et al. "Igbo Apprenticeship System in the Modern World." *Journal of African Business Studies (2022)*: 101–103
[4]J.J. Orugun, and A.T. Nafiu. "Indigenous Enterprise Systems and Informal Capital Formation." *Nigerian Journal of Economic History (2017)*: 78–81.
[5]M.C. Ezeajughu. "Post-War Igbo Economic Reconstruction." *Nigerian Historical Review (2008)*: 89–92.
[6]Toyin, Falola. *The Power of African Cultures.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press (2003): 134–137.

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The Igbo trade apprenticeship scheme is an informal and unstructured training programme which an apprentice undertakes for several years in order to gain entrepreneurial skills and knowledge with a view to establishing and successfully managing their own enterprise. The master business owner is the trainer as well as mentor to the young apprentice-trainee and mentee. Though there is an absence of any syllabus or manual, the proficient master -trainer adopts diverse methods and strategies aimed at moulding an excellent and astute business guru out of the apprentice.

The methods applied by master entrepreneurs in the training of apprentices are unique, practical, hands-on experience, and what some call "learning by doing". They encompass: coaching, counseling, job rotation, understudying and "self-regulation training", among others. In the self-regulation strategy, for example, after a few years of an apprentice being under the master's direct supervision, the master opens another shop for the now relatively learned apprentice to manage on his own and report to him, and occasionally, once a month or even quarterly, the master will be available to do some auditing. The apprentice at this stage is virtually his "own boss". Nonetheless, the master mandates him to remit monthly a certain amount of money out of the profit made as savings, and this keeps the apprentice on his toes.

Where the apprentice fails in paying it on time for one to two months, it signals some dysfunctional tendencies, warranting examination. This is an art of management by exception. A good number of respondents intimated that it is from what the apprentice makes from this point that is used in settling him in proportion. The value of stock, cash at bank/hand, and the monthly savings with the master are all aggregated to determine the apprentice's seed capital or settlement amount.[7] A brief discussion of some of the methods is necessary. Suffice it to reiterate that there is no codified manual/ pedagogy, but training is rooted in the Igbo indigenous knowledge process of learning by doing or methodological mentoring and other informal learning patterns. The methods, strategies deployed and utilised in Igbo trade apprenticeship training include:

On-the- job Training: This is a basic strategy of Igbo apprenticeship training. The apprentice, through this, is learning by doing. According to Declan Benco, the master-trainer purposefully avails the apprentice the opportunity of assisting in business activities, and by such practical involvement, learning is taking place, and with time, the trainee-apprentice is given more

[7]Uche Ibekwe, Aged 33years, Businessman, Interviewed at his business premises, No.7, Hospital Road, Kafanchan,08/07/2025. This view is corroborated by Chief Martin Okoli, Aged 62 years, Interviewed at his business premises, No.3 Ogbomosho Street, Kafanchan,8/7/25; Blessing Onu, Aged 40 years, Businesswoman, interviewed at her business premises, PP10 Warri Street, Kaduna, 17/9/25; Chima Nnodim, Aged 48 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, G1 Ibadan Street, Kaduna, 17/9/25; and Onyeka Agbanusi, Aged 42 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, Sabon-Gari Market, Zaria, 11/7/25.

responsibilities, thereby progressing in the learning ladder.[8] To Emeka Ogu, it is akin to movement or promotion from lower classes to higher ones in the formal school system till the final year of graduation, and to be candid, on-the-job training is a core method in apprentice grooming, if not the basic and most utilised.[9] To one respondent, it essentially entails learning through hands-on deck involvement and active participation in the business, and the importance of the apprentice's regular diligence explains why masters/trainers committed to apprentice development seldom allow them to be distracted by house chores and other frivolities, capable of constituting a distraction.[10] This active participation is regularly important to the apprentice, "because if you are not there, the same training event opportunity may take some time to recur. Masters, therefore, stress the importance of this to apprentices, especially when a critical learning opportunity occurred, and an apprentice was absent."[11]

Graduated Training: Though informal and unstructured, the Igbo indigenous learning system is ingenious enough to adopt a graduated learning approach. The apprentice is exposed to rudimentary activities first, and thereafter, more complex issues like stock-taking, purchasing and sales bargaining follow. Several respondents alluded to the fact that the ingenuity of the Igbo apprenticeship training is made manifest here, and that just like learning in the formal school system, an apprentice is exposed to elementary issues and gradually to secondary and, with time, to more complex ones, like going to buy goods alone. It is when the master is reasonably confident of the apprentice's capacity, competence and fidelity that he can offer him the opportunity of superintending a branch on his own with minimal supervision.[12]

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[8]Declan Benco, Aged 66 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his Business Premises, No. 3, Emir Road, Kafanchan,7/7/25. This view is corroborated by Emeka Ogochukwu, Aged 60 Years, Interviewed at his Business Premises, L11 Ibadan Street, Kaduna, 17/7/25.

[9]Emeka Ogu, Aged 52 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his Business Premises, PP10 Warri Street, Kaduna, 22/9/25. This view is corroborated by Chidi Okechukwu, Aged 44 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his Business Premises, No.8 Hospital Road, Kafanchan,8/7/25.

[10]Malachy Ogbonna, Aged 42years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No.2 Jos Street, Kafanchan, 8/7/2025.This view is corroborated by Emmanuel Nnwannaya, Aged 42 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No.1 Timber Shade, Sabon-Gari, Zaria, 10/7/25; Chinaza Nwabugo, Aged 56 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises Timber Shade, Sabon- Gari, Zaria ,10/7/2; Okechukwu Okonkwo, Aged 50 years Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, Q7 Kano Road, Kaduna, 20/9/25 and Chibuzo Onwendu, Aged 52 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises VV1,Lagos Street, Kaduna ,16/6/25.

[11]Focus Group Discussion with Ahamefula Mbakaogu (Businessman), and Mrs. Ann Mbakaogu (Businesswoman), Q5 Kano Road, Kaduna, 20/9/25.

[12]Focus Group Discussion with Chief Modestus Anusionwu (Businessman), and Lolo Nkem Modestus, (Businesswoman), AL 10, Lagos Street, Kaduna, 17/09/25; and Bernard Patience (Businesswoman), and Bernard Ogbu (Businessman), No.10&11, Hospital Road, Kafanchan,8/7/25. This view is corroborated by Chief Sunday Anyinka Aged 78 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No. 3 Park Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria, 10/7/25; Michael Okonkwo, Aged 63 years, interviewed at his business premises No. C40 Crescent Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria, 10/7/25.

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Observational Training: This approach involves the apprentice closely observing the master in the course of business, like how he negotiates with customers, government revenue collectors, creditors, etc. The master is also a kind of signpost to the apprentice in terms of behaviour, ethics, management disposition, and leadership style, among others, throughout the period of apprenticeship. In the Igbo trade apprenticeship, 'learning takes place through observation and apprentice that devote keen interest in happenings tend to grasp more, as some knowledge is not verbally conveyed. The art of observing the master is a learning strategy every apprentice must imbibe."[13]

Rotational Training: As informal and unstructured as Igbo apprenticeship training is, the entrepreneur trainers employ a rotational learning methodology. Where you have two or more apprentices, one is saddled with an aspect of the business this week and the other with another, for example. This gives room for clear responsibility and opportunity for tracer in the event of any ugly issue. This is often employed by masters with several apprentices, as different aspects of activities are assigned to individual apprentices. It gives room for checks and balances, orderliness and the much-needed tracer in cases of abnormality, and in addition, the apprentices are indirectly learning many business aspects simultaneously as they are not only active witnesses to what one another is doing but also compare notes. Furthermore, according to Ngozi Orajiaku, this training method is not only utilised and useful where there are many apprentices, but an entrepreneur-trainer with only one apprentice also employs the method due to its merits and ease in learning, and this is very helpful to trainees.[14]

Cluster Entrepreneurs' Training and Mentoring: In a business cluster, such as Electronics, Electrical, Computer and related businesses, Pharmacy, and Building materials, etc., there exists a kind of collective master's training and mentoring of apprentices. The trade associations, by way of ethics, expect entrepreneurs to assist one another in imparting to the apprentice knowledge, morals, respect, sincerity and hard work. In this context, "the apprentice is more or less being monitored by several masters and, in the process, trained by them also."[15] The advantages of this are enormous to the trainee-apprentice.

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[13]Emeka Ogochukwu, Aged 60 years, Interviewed at his business premises, L11 Ibadan Street, Kaduna, 17/9/25. This view is corroborated by Chike Nnabuife, Aged 46 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No. 16 College of Nursing Shopping Complex, Kafanchan,8/7/25 and Ifeanyichukwu Obi, Aged 53 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No.9 Park Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria,10/7/25.

[14] Ngozi Orajiaku, Aged 47 years, Businesswoman, interviewed at her business premises, No.8 Crescent Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria,10/7/25. This view is corroborated by Ndubuisi Ewuzie, Aged 49 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No.16 Emir Road, Kafanchan,8/7/25; Ejike Nwoye, Aged 50 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, AD 10 Kano Road, Kaduna,22/9/25 and Emeka Ogochukwu, Aged 60 years Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, L11 Ibadan Street, Kaduna ,17/9/25.

[15]Levenson Akahalu, Aged 62 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, Ultra-Modern Shopping Complex, Sabon-Gari, Zaria,10/07/2025.This view is corroborated by Declan Benco, Aged 66 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No.3 Emir Road, Kafanchan, 7/7/25; Chief Robert Okezue, Aged 67 years,

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Counselling: The master-mentor devotes sufficient time to counselling the apprentice on life matters, business, family, health and other general issues while in the business premises, at home and elsewhere the opportunity presents. Most of the apprentices enrol for training at very young ages and live with the entrepreneurs; the master is somehow bound to play the 'father' role in the apprentice's life. In this role, according to some respondents, the master instils moral and business values of discipline, tolerance, humility, honesty, respect, perseverance, loyalty, patience, and truthfulness, among others, to the apprentice. Since in most cases the young entrepreneur, after settlement by his master, engages an apprentice before marriage, the apprentice more or less becomes an adopted first son, and the master does everything to mould him as much as he was and even much more, hence, the primacy of counselling in the youngster's life.[16] Counselling is one of the most invaluable investments that the entrepreneur-trainer makes in the life of the apprentice-trainee in tandem with the reciprocal dynamics of the master-apprentice relationship, as encapsulated in the Social Exchange Theory (SET).

Apprentice Peer Training and Information Sharing: In the Igbo business clusters, while the masters formally share information through their trade associations and among one another, the apprentices themselves relate to one another. In such relationships, they impart to one another knowledge, skills, strategies and tactics learnt from their various masters and share information on the business. This is a form of aggregated training, and this makes it easy for an apprentice after settlement to switch from one trade area to another, without difficulty, among other benefits. According to Chiagozie Augustine, as an apprentice, "we learn from one another in the course of apprenticeship, and that is one of the benefits of being friendly with your fellow apprentices. Again, we share information on what is happening in the business cluster and much more. This exchange of business strategies and ideas indirectly from different masters is invaluable and more or less helpful in learning some trades at the same time, making switching from one master's business to another easy upon settlement."[17]

Self-Regulation Training: An inquisitive mind is bound to ponder this as a training strategy, but that is the ingenuity of the Igbo trade apprenticeship. After staying with the master for a few years and having reasonably learnt the

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interviewed at his business premises, No. 28 Main Street, Sabon-Gari, Zaria, 10/7/25; Christian Ifeanyi Nwankwo, Aged 65 years, interviewed 14/7/25; Michael Nwokedi, Aged 67 years, interviewed at his business premises No.O.P 10 Kastina Road/Warri Street, Kaduna, 14/6/25 and Izunna Richard Enye, Aged 38 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, K1 Ahmadu Bello Way/ Kano Road, Kaduna,17/9/25.

[16]Declan Benco,66 years, interviewed, 7/7/25. This is corroborated by Ifeanyi Osondi, 40 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, Timber Shade, Sabon- Gari, Zaria,10/7/25; Toochukwu Ejemba, Aged 43 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, B10 Ibadan Street/ Ibrahim Taiwo Road, Kaduna, 19/9/25 and Charles Okafor, Aged 73 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No.4 Emir Road, Kafanchan,7/7/25.

[17]Chiagozie Augustine, aged 20 years, Apprentice. Interviewed at the Master's business premises, No.16 Emir Road, Kafanchan,8/7/25; Albert Dogo, Aged 28 years, interviewed at the Master's business premises, Q5 Kano Road, Kaduna,20/9/25; and Mathias John, aged 20 years, Apprentice, interviewed at Q7 Kano Road Kaduna,20/9/25.

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intricacies of the business under the master's direct control and supervision, the master establishes a branch in the same city or another city and sends the apprentice to superintend it outside his direct control. The implication is that while the apprentice could be said to still be under apprenticeship training, he is more or less on "self-regulation training." The implication of this is that "at this point, the apprentice is his own master, so to speak; the owner of the business only comes periodically, say quarterly or bi-monthly, for stock-taking. If the apprentice continues to be faithful and productive, on completion of the agreed years of apprenticeship, the master devotes a proportion of the profit, usually a quarter or one-third, to settle the apprentice. The quantum of profit made by the apprentice is a factor here. This is in the good old days of Igbo apprenticeship, where apprentice dedication and faithfulness are sure."[18] This perhaps explains why trainees of the scheme undergo strict training, curtailing some privileges in the process, which not only imbues the art of frugality in them but also toughens and makes them more resilient.

Endurance and Restricted Privileges Training Strategy: The endurance training common with the Armed Forces is aimed at strengthening the capacity and discipline of trainees for tough times, among others. The Igbo apprenticeship training also employs this strategy in building apprentices to be responsible and cost-minded entrepreneurs, to remain resilient in times of business storms or downturns. The masters employ ample ways in instilling discipline in the apprentice, including curtailing certain privileges. Attesting to the efficacy and worth whileness of this as a training strategy, Chinasa Nwabugo, among others, opined that it may be viewed as an act of "slavery or wickedness", but that even the Holy Bible enjoins parents to spare not the rod in order not to spoil the child, and that to most Igbo entrepreneurs, discipline is a core element of apprenticeship training as excessive privileges dovetail to indiscipline and consequently failure.[19]

Excellent Performance Reward Training Strategy: This entails recognising and rewarding excellent performance and behaviour of the apprentice by the master-trainer. As a strategy of training, it not only motivates the particular apprentice so recognised and rewarded to keep up the good performance/ behaviour, but also engenders a sort of competition among the apprentices. Reiterating the use of this training strategy by masters, a respondent recounted his personal experience thus: "In the days of my apprenticeship, our master

[18]Chief Robert Okezue, Aged 67 years, Interviewed, 10/7/25. This view is corroborated by Eberechi Nkwereonye, 56 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, ECWA Shopping Complex, Kafanchan,8/7/25; Okezie Okorie, Aged 43 years, Interviewed at his business premises, No.8, Dan Musa Road, Oriakpata, Kaduna, 14/06/2026; Anthony Ejike Obi, Aged 42 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, GG1 Warri Street, Kaduna, 22/9/25 and Onyedika Chukwu, Aged 34 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, AV 11 Kano Road, Kaduna, 22/9/25.

[19]Chinasa Nwabugo, Aged 56 years Interviewed, 10/07/2025.This view is corroborated by Chike Echefu, 32 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, No. 1 Warri Street, Kafanchan, 7/7/25; Emma Eze, Aged 48 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, AV 2 Benin Street, Kaduna, 14/7/25 and Ikechukwu Madukwe, Aged 51 years, Businessman, interviewed at his business premises, JC16 Ibadan Street, Kaduna, 13/9/25.

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utilised the excellent performance reward strategy a lot in pushing us to perform higher and exhibit good behaviour. As a motivation tool, the rewards sometimes are as little as being conferred with the privilege of being the custodian of the shop/ packing store key, an increase of a little sum of #50 in the apprentice's lunch money, or being exempted from performing certain house chores, etc. Nevertheless, it works wonders, and at each reward, Oga explains the rationale to the understanding of all trainees."[20] This strategy, as useful as it may be in apprentice training, has the potential of breeding unnecessary rivalry, envy and strife that are sometimes counter-productive.

Impact and Challenges of Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Leadership Training in Kaduna State, 2003-2023

The Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme leadership training impact in Kaduna State within the period of this studyis positively numerous. Nonetheless, there exist some challenges in the training methods and strategies deployed, especially in the contemporary 21st-century world. Some of the methods may have served useful purposes in the 19th century and greater parts of the 20th century. However, contemporarily, they are somehow seen as seemingly 'inhuman', as some people are likening the scheme to 'slavery' in disguise. Olewu, writing on the scheme and children's right to work among others, postulated viz:

The defenceless nature of children, their poor family background, low literacy level, close ties of parties to the apprenticeship arrangement and less formality in initiating apprenticeship relationships have been found to create room for the abuse of the labour and general rights of children involved in the scheme…There is a lack of statistical data regarding the ills faced by children in business apprenticeship. This may be due to a lack of reporting of the incidents… However, available from informal interactions with persons undergoing or that have undergone the igba boi system are the following problems which are violations of the interest of the child involved in the arrangement. These violations exist, and they prevail largely because of the close ties of relationship, poverty, lack of education, etc., prevalent in such arrangements.[21]

[20]Ogbonna Ukeje, Aged 52 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his business premises, Q 10 Ahmadu Bello way/Kano Road, Kaduna, 16/6/25. This view is corroborated by Okechukwu Okonkwo, Aged 50 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his business premises, Q7 Kano Road, Kaduna 20/9/25; Austin Utomi, Aged 42 years, Businessman interviewed at his business premises, B1Ibadan Street/ Nupe Road, Kaduna,19/9/25; Kenneth Anichebe, Aged 48 years, Businessman Interviewed at his business premises, No. 17 Hospital Road, Kafanchan, 8/7/25; Edwin Ariko, 63 years, Businessman, Interviewed, at his business premises, Hospital Kafanchan 8/7/25; Silvanus Okorie, Aged 48 years, Businessman interviewed at his \business premises No. 9 Park Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria, 10/7/25 and Everest Adonu, 52 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his business premises, No.9 Park Road, Sabon -Gari.Zaria,10/7/25.

[21]John Uchechukwu Olewu, "Examining the Igbo Apprenticeship System and Children's Right to Work", published at Lawyard.org,2023:3,14.

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It may not be debatable that the scheme generally has challenges, and so also its training methods and strategies. Nonetheless, its positive impacts far outnumber and outweigh the few challenges. Interactions with respondents lend good credence to this fact.

Apprentice Leadership Training: There are thousands of successful Igbo entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship businesses all over Kaduna State. Most of these successful entrepreneurs are through the instrumentality of the ITAS. In the Kaduna metropolitan area, Zaria and Kafanchan towns, the researcher, in the course of fieldwork, interacted with lots of them, who, though they had limited basic education, had, through the scheme, developed leadership capacity and pedigree. Examples abound. Chief Francis Nnaegbule, with only a primary school education, and after 9 years of apprenticeship, built the Fina White Group of companies. Nnaegbule, with every sense of humility, described himself as one of the living legends of entrepreneurship and a product of the Igbo trade apprenticeship scheme in Kaduna State. According to him, he is often, among the Igbo entrepreneurs, a reference point on business success, borne out of strategic visioning and commitment, to youths in Kaduna for the past five decades, and hopefully, in ages to come in oral and recorded history.[22] Eze Richard Ogbonna, the Chairman/ Chief Executive of an agro-allied business enterprise in Kafanchan, Kaduna State, is another exemplar. Apprenticed to Mr Raphael Ogbonna, after about a decade under the master's tutelage, he was settled to start his own business in 1989. He became the Eze- Igbo, Kafanchan, in the year 2025. The emergence of Eze Richard Ogbonna as Igbo leader with just a First School Leaving Certificate is a testament to the leadership-building characteristics in the Igbo trade apprenticeship scheme, which he passed through for almost a decade.[23]

Mr Levenson Akahalu, an astute businessman of 36 years standing in Sabon-Gari Zaria, exemplifies the unique leadership attributes in the Igbo apprenticeship scheme. In testament to his leadership capacity and wisdom, in October 2024, he emerged as the President General of Igbo Community Welfare Association (ICWA) in Zaria. Leadership is said to be difficult to "conceptualise or define", but just like beauty, when you see it, it is not difficult to appreciate. According to Chief Blessing Obiesie, Akahalu epitomises leadership born out of the training attributes of the Igbo trade apprenticeship scheme, and this is effectively rubbing off on Igbo community affairs in Zaria in less than one year of his leadership.[24] There exist hundreds of thousands of successful entrepreneurs who passed through what the researcher sees as "Igbo University of Business and Leadership", formally called the Igbo trade apprenticeship scheme.

Socio-Economic Contribution and Good Citizenship: In the socio-economic sphere, for example, lives are transformed positively through the apprenticeship training, and this predisposes beneficiaries to making a

[22]Chief Francis Nnaegbule, Aged 92 years, interviewed, 9/6/25.

[23]Eze Richard Ogbonna, Aged 61 years, interviewed,7/7/25.

[24]Chief Blessing Obiesie, Aged 52 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his business premises, Zaria-Kaduna Exp. Way, Zaria,10/7/25.

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meaningful impact on society. The "unique training apprentices receive in the long run transforms them into being good citizens contributing their quota not just in providing goods and services for a gain but in the socio-economic development of their business communities. From Samaru to Sabon-Gari and other neighbourhoods of Zaria, and indeed, in virtually every part of Kaduna State, this is evident."[25] The trade apprenticeship disciplines participants, making them pursue honest means of livelihood, avoiding social delinquency, criminal activities, being pursuers of peace and peaceful co-existence, social harmony and performance of their civic duties. The impact of Igbo entrepreneurs, the majority of whom passed through the apprenticeship training are enormous in the socio-economic development of Kaduna State. Mention must be made of the provision of goods and services conveniently to people, building of houses for personal use and rentage, community development projects/programmes and payment of taxes and rates to Local Governments in the state, among others. They do so dutifully through the instrumentality of their training, which has imbued in them a sense of responsibility.

Leadership Lessons to Other Participants: Other participants in Igbo business activities, like employed secretaries, sales boys and girls, and other casual workers like transporters, loaders and off-loaders, etc., though not the focus of apprenticeship training, but by being there; the diligent ones, through observation and some levels of participation, are learning the strategies and tactics of Igbo business success. According to Ali Sanni, this is one area where the Igbo apprenticeship training is building the leadership competence and capacity of other participants, a good percentage of whom are from the local community. He stated that, for example, in Roma Associates Ltd., distributors and dealers in foam products, there were approximately thirty salespeople and workers. These people, a great percentage of whom are not apprentices, are earning their living there, in addition to the leadership lessons they are being exposed to. There had been cases of some of them establishing their own businesses from savings made and with assistance from their families. They may not all have started big, but they gradually grow big. He reiterated further that one of the sales boys, for example, after years of working for the company, began his own business by first hawking pillows and now owns a shop.[26] The researcher noted that a few paid workers in Igbo enterprises, after some time, enter into a contract of apprenticeship with the entrepreneurs, and after successful completion of the apprenticeship training, they are settled to begin their own businesses.

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[25]Chinedu Eze, 49 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his Business Premises, Samaru Ultra-Modern Market, Zaria, 4/11/2025. This view is corroborated by Joseph Ogueri, Aged 55 years, Businessman Interviewed at his business premises Sabon-Gari Ultra-Modern Market, Zaria, 11/7/25.

[26]Focus Group Discussion with Alh. Ali Sanni (Sales manager), Abubakar Mahmood (Sales Person), Akaaba Dennis (Sales Person), Samuel Daniel (Sales Person), Abudullahi Musa (Sales Person), and Sphianu Tukur (Sales Person), No. 28 Main Street, Sabon -Gari, Zaria, 4/11/25.

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Masters' High-handedness in Apprenticeship Training: While a lot of good is said about the unique and transformative training Igbo entrepreneurs/ masters give to the apprentice, it must not be lost that there are some challenges or drawbacks. It is a common view that some of these mentors have lost touch with the realities of the 21st century as they employ extreme measures of high-handedness in the mentoring of the youngsters of today. According to some respondents, these master-mentors hold tenaciously to the way and manner they were brought up by their masters decades ago. The result is the high rate at which apprentices in the 21st century are abandoning training and eventually drifting to illicit activities, when opportunity for a legitimate avenue to earn a living is limited, most of which they consider too demanding and/or demeaning. This high-handedness of masters is the reason why some see the training as a sort of "slavery", thereby detesting it.[27]

Another dimension is that "due to the extreme discipline and fear of the masters, these apprentices seldom inform them of any ugly situation on time, including in cases of their deteriorating health conditions, until it is too late to be salvaged. Therefore, in the case of the death of the apprentice, the master is often accused of using the boy for a "money ritual". Furthermore, most of the social delinquent behaviour these young boys are accused of, which sometimes leads to their abrupt dismissal, is that they are, in some cases, seemingly innocent but cannot talk while the master is talking on account of the nature of their training, thereby breeding "docile or tamed" men.[28] This is one of the negative sides of trainers' high-handedness in the training of apprentices.

Overbearing Influence of Some Spouses: Another notable challenge stems from the overbearing influence of some spouses of the masters on the apprentice, sometimes overutilizing them on house chores at the detriment of their training. According to Nwakaego Nnachi, it is even alleged that some socially delinquent spouses lure these youngsters into having amorous relationships with them. When discovered by the master, the apprentice is often dismissed empty-handed. This happens, but quite rare, and it is a by-product of the eroding family values and societal moral decadence in society.[29]

Precipitating Unconducive Atmosphere for Training: A key challenge or drawback emanating from some masters is the surreptitious attempt to dodge their obligation of settlement of an apprentice by falsely accusing them of

[27]Onyeka Nwaonu, 52 years, Interviewed in his Business Premises, Timber Shade, Sabon-Gari, Zaria,10/07/2025.

[28]Chidubem Elachi, businesswoman, Interviewed in her Business Premises Samaru Ultra-Modern Market, Zaria, 4/11/25. This view is corroborated by Ngozi Orijiaku, Aged 47 years, Businesswomen interviewed at her business premises, No8 Crescent Road Zaria, 10/7/25; Vitalis Eze, Aged 45 years, Businessman, interviewed in his business premises, No.50/51 Stadium Line, Kafanchan,8/7/25 and Thompson Ezeawa, Aged 38 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his business premises, No.2 Kano Street,Ungwar Bunza, Kafanchan, 7/7/25.

[29]Nwakaego Nnachi. Aged 66 years, Businesswoman Interviewed at her business premises Samaru Ultra-Modern market Zaria, 4/11/25. This view is corroborated by Ogbonna Ukeje, Aged 52 year, interviewed 16/6/25 and Ngozi Onuchukwu, Aged 60 years, Interviewed 7/7/25.

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impropriety towards the end of their training. With this mindset, according to Arinze Eze, such masters make the atmosphere unconducive for the apprentice to learn. They bully, denigrate, and emotionally torture the apprentice so that some of them are forced to abandon training. This is not only distasteful but demoralising to the apprentice and absolutely dysfunctional to the scheme.[30] This attitude runs contrary to one of the core principles of the Social Exchange Theory, which is equity, as articulated by George Caspar Homans. This is because the apprentice may become disadvantaged in training, and could be denied the grant of seed capital, which is very important in starting his own business. It is, however, reassuring that some trade associations have found a way of addressing this when it comes to the level of non-settlement, where the apprentice is manifestly of good behaviour, honest and hardworking.

Social Restriction of Apprentice: The issue of negative peer influence, particularly on a new apprentice, is a challenge. To curtail this, entrepreneurs often restrict apprentices' social relationships, and this attempt at foisting "isolationism" on the youngsters breeds some abnormalities in their social development and relationships with others. It also affects their emotional stability, impinging on their attentiveness and subsequent effectiveness in learning. According to Stephine Ifediora, infidelity on the part of the apprentice is a critical challenge resulting in the dismissal of the apprentice and non-settlement in most cases, and in a few cases, the liquidation of the entrepreneur's business, bad blood between them and the apprentice/family and in a few cases, allegedly resulting in death. The fear that allowing the apprentice free hand in relating with people may 'corrupt' him is one of the reasons why masters 'foist' a life of isolation on the apprentice. It is therefore a negative impact of the Igbo trade apprenticeship training approach, which is ostensibly being done in the quest to train entrepreneurs of excellence.[31]

However, Chinedu Mgborogwu holds the view that "the unique training apprentices receive in the long run transforms them into being good citizens contributing their quota not just in providing goods and services for a gain but in the socio-economic development of their business communities and much more."[32] The impact of Igbo entrepreneurs, the majority of whom passed through the apprenticeship training are enormous in the socio-economic development of Kaduna State. Mention must be made of the provision of goods and services conveniently to people, building of houses for personal use and

[30]Arinze Eze, Aged 25 years, Businessman, Interviewed in his business premises, Samaru Ultra- Modern Market, Zaria, 4/11/25. This view is corroborated by Kosisochukwu Eze, Businessman, interviewed in his business premises, Samaru Ultra-Modern Market, Zaria, 4/11/25; Uchenna Udekwe, Aged 50 years, interviewed 16/6/25 and Chike Nnabuife, Aged 46 years, Interviewed 8/7/25.

[31]Stephine Ifediora, Aged 39 years, Businesswoman, Interviewed at her business premises, No.7 Park Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria, 10/7/25. This view is corroborated in Focus Group Discussion with Adams Sunday (Apprentice), and Magaji Isah (Apprentice), No.3 Park Road, Sabon-Gari, Zaria,11/7/25.

[32]Chinedu Mgborogwu, 48 years, Businessman, Interviewed at his Business Premises, No. 18, Hospital Road, Kafanchan, 08/07/2025.

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rentage, community development projects/programmes and payment of taxes and rates to Local Governments in the areas, among others.

While a lot of good is said about the unique and transformative training Igbo entrepreneurs/ masters give to the apprentice, it must not be lost that there are some challenges or drawbacks. It is a common view that some of these mentors have lost touch with the realities of the 21st century as they employ extreme measures of high-handedness in the mentoring of the youngsters of this age. These master-mentors "hold tenaciously to the way and manner they were brought up by their masters decades ago. The result is the high rate at which these young apprentices abandon training and eventually drift to illicit activities when there is no other legitimate avenue for them to earn a living. This high-handedness of masters is the reason why some see the training as a sort of "slavery", thereby detesting it."[33] In the view of Vitalis Eze, due to the extreme discipline and fear of the masters, these apprentices seldom inform them of any ugly situation on time, including in cases of their deteriorating health conditions, until it is too late to be salvaged. That is why, in the case of death of the apprentice, the master is often accused of using the boy for a "money ritual". Furthermore, most of the social delinquent behaviour these young boys are accused of, which sometimes leads to their abrupt dismissal, is seemingly innocent, but they cannot talk while the master is talking on account of the nature of their training, thereby breeding "docile or tamed" men.[34]

Another notable challenge stems from the overbearing influence of some spouses of the masters on the apprentice, sometimes overutilizing them on house chores at the detriment of their training. It is even alleged that some socially delinquent spouses lure these youngsters into having an amorous relationship with them. When discovered by the master, the apprentice is often dismissed empty-handed. A key challenge or drawback emanating from some masters is the surreptitious attempt to dodge their obligation of settlement of apprentice by falsely accusing them of impropriety towards the end of their training. It is, however, reassuring that some trade associations in Kaduna have a way of addressing this where the apprentice is manifestly of good behaviour, honest and hardworking. The issue of negative peer influence, particularly on a new apprentice, is a challenge. To curtail this, entrepreneurs often restrict apprentices' social relationships, and this attempt at foisting "isolationism" on the youngsters breeds some abnormalities in their social development and relationships among others.

[33]Onyeka Nwaonu, 52 years, Interviewed at his Business Premises, Timber Shade, Sabon-Geri, Zaria,10/07/2025. This view is corroborated in Focus Group Discussion with Ifeanyi Ibekwe (Businessman), Monday Umeh (Businessman), and Chukwuemeka Okeke (Businessman), No. 0010 Jos Road/Warri Street, Kaduna,3/10/25.

[34] Vitalis Eze, 45 years, Interviewed, 08/07/2025. This view is corroborated in Focus Group Discussion with Emenike Moses (Businessman), John Aneke (Businessman), Chidiebere Ejiofor (Businessman), and Nnamani Sunday Felix (Businessman), AF 2 Jos Road/ Bayyajida Street, Kaduna, 3/10/25.

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Conclusion

This study revealed that the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship Scheme constitutes far more than an informal mechanism of vocational skill transmission as it operates as a "structured" system of business leadership formation. It employs multifarious methods and strategies ingeniously crafted in the training of apprentices. Through experiential learning, graduated responsibility, mentorship, discipline, networking, and strategic exposure to real market conditions, the scheme cultivates technical competence, managerial acumen, entrepreneurial resilience, and visioning capacity among its participants. The Kaduna State experience between 2003 and 2023 illustrates how these embedded leadership attributes fashioned through indigenous methods and strategies have translated into enterprise growth, community influence, and sustained commercial presence. The success of numerous entrepreneurs who emerged from the scheme underscores its efficacy as an indigenous model of leadership incubation and enterprise replication.

At the same time, the study has identified critical tensions within the system, including instances of high-handedness, social restrictions, non-settlement disputes, and changing socio-cultural realities that challenge its traditional structure. These limitations, however, do not invalidate the scheme's foundational leadership-building logic; rather, they highlight the need for adaptive reforms that preserve its core strengths while addressing contemporary concerns. Thus, the findings affirm that the Igbo apprenticeship model remains a resilient and culturally grounded framework for producing business leaders, encouraging socio-economic mobility, and sustaining intergenerational transfer of entrepreneurial capacity in Kaduna State with uniquely crafted training methods and strategies that attest to the validity of African age-long indigenous education and its knowledge/skills transmission mechanism.

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