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Business Mentorship System of the Igbos and Job Creation in Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Business Mentorship System of the Igbos commonly known as 'Igba-Boi' apprenticeship is a common practice among the Igbo people, especially the Onitsha Main Market traders in southeast Nigeria. The study focuses on the effect of the mentorship system on creating employment opportunities and other aspects of entrepreneurship in Onitsha, Anambra State. Using survey data, the study explores the relationship between mentorship and job creation through the lens of Social Learning Theory, which suggests that skills and behaviours are learned through observation and social interaction. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 375 mentors, current mentees, and former mentees. Thus, with the help of descriptive and thematic analysis, the study shows that the system of the mentorship contributes to the strengthening of the entrepreneurial abilities of the mentees and the growth rates of businesses launch and employment. The study reveals that mentees who are well trained and equipped are likely to set up business ventures thus offering employment opportunities in the region. Based on these findings, the study recommends that government structures be formalized to support and enhance the capacity of this traditional mentorship system in fostering entrepreneurship and job creation in Onitsha Main Market and similar commercial hubs.

Keywords: Business Mentorship System, Entrepreneurial Skills Development, Igba-Boi, Job Creation, Onitsha Main Market

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1. Introduction

The Business Mentorship System of the Igbos is a microeconomic framework and means of cultural preservation among the Igbo community of southeast Nigeria. It is sometimes referred to as the "Igba-Boi" or the "Igba-Odibo" apprenticeship system. This system, for many generations, has been the pillar to economic growth, development, and support of business and entrepreneurship activities within the given region. In this system, young Igbo men are led through the part and parcel of trade and business by their masters: business people who provide the budding businessman with inculcation of knowledge and attitude that are central to the business person. After their apprenticeship, these young men are 'blessed' by their masters, who, often, offer them capital or stock to start up some businesses, which in turn create jobs and economic activities (Nwaubani, 2020; Ukaegbu, 2003).

This study reveals that the mentorship system, inclusive of Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State, has a significant role to play in the slot development of the youth towards self-employment skills. Onitsha Main Market is one of the largest markets in West Africa, and this venue offers the most active commercial background for the development of this apprenticeship system. The market sustains intra-Igbo commerce, but it plays a central role in national and international business, hence a suitable ground for entrepreneurial development through the system of more experienced Igbo mentors (Nwaka, 2013).

This has been achieved owing to the fact that the Igbo apprenticeship system, with a more attached emphasis on mentorship and communalism, as well as the on-hand practical training and workmanship, has drastically cut down on unemployment in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Okeke (2011) stated that this system is one of the most effective business systems evolved by indigenous entrepreneurs in Africa. There are certain core competencies, such as practice-based learning and mentoring, which are very important for cumulative skills development. It empowers young men with skills in actual business, readiness to do business independently, and also inculcates discipline in them. By offering a home to many of such apprentices, Onitsha Main Market offers the market platform where most of the apprenticed identified entrepreneurs unlock and operate on their independent entrepreneurship, enhancing employment creation on the market.

Traditionally, the apprenticeship system in Igbo society can be dated back to pre-colonial trade practices that were more of commerce, barter, and craft. The system evolved in order to ensure that the young men inherited knowledge and business skills from their fathers and could therefore carry on the economic activities of their fathers (Afigbo, 1981). The apprenticeship system also evolved to the changing economic environment during the colonial period and became even more formal as business and trade and commerce developed in the region (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1971) affected the Igbo apprenticeship system in a very special way. The economic loss due to the war increased unemployment and poverty in the southeastern area. But the Igbo people, using their traditional commercial sense and the apprenticeship system, were able to reconstruct their economy in the post-war period. For instance, many young men in Onitsha Main Market adopted the mentorship system as a way of unlocking the process of entrepreneurship and economic recovery (Uche, 2012). The continued applicability of the system is best illustrated in Onitsha Main Market, where the system has supported the development of SMEs. These SMEs, which are mostly led by former apprentices, are the mainstay of the local economy. Nwaka (2013) notes that the system of mentorship in the market has been effective in the creation of employment opportunities, poverty eradication, and improvement of the quality of life of the Igbo youths.

However, the traditional Igbo mentorship system is not without its challenges in the contemporary world. The factors that have influenced the system include globalization, technological development, and shifts in cultural trends. Today, young people are more encouraged to go to school and get formal employment and white-collar jobs, hence reducing the chances of going for informal training. Also, rising business formalization and regulation are issues for the informal trade players, especially in markets such as Onitsha (Meagher, 2010).

Some of the attempts to modernize the system have been to combine academic training and apprenticeship with vocational training. Some organizations have implemented a blended system, which incorporates apprenticeship training with academic training to address the dynamic nature of the twenty-first-century economy (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2020). These initiatives are meant to support the sustainability of the Igbo mentorship system while at the same time making sure that the system is still relevant in providing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the youths in places such as Onitsha Main Market.

Against this background, this study aims to assess the effect of the Business Mentorship System of the Igbos on employment generation and entrepreneurial skills training in Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State. Therefore, the paper seeks to establish how the traditional model of mentorship in this particular market contributes to the economic growth of the mentees and the general job creation initiatives in the region. The results show that mentees' entrepreneurial abilities and business success are greatly improved by the mentorship programme. The findings also indicate that a higher percentage of mentees who receive extensive coaching and support have a higher chance of starting and operating their own successful enterprises. The implications of the findings from this study will be useful to

policymakers, business leaders, and stakeholders who are concerned with the development of entrepreneurship and unemployment in Anambra State and other regions.

2. Business Mentorship and Job Creation: Global Perspectives and the Impact of the Igbo Apprenticeship Model

The involvement of business mentorship in the creation of employment opportunities has been a major concern in economic discourses across the world. In many instances, mentorship programmes have been established as critical in supporting the growth of entrepreneurship, SMEs, and employment. Business mentorship entails pairing experienced business people with less experienced ones to offer them guidance, expertise, and emotional support. St-Jean and Audet (2012) posit that mentorship helps to develop and sustain the skills of entrepreneurs, offers much-needed motivation, and makes business ventures more sustainable.

Mentorship can be either formal or informal, although the formal one is a set of programmes that are initiated by business incubators or the government. Informal mentorship is more relaxed and develops gradually as the relationship between the two parties progresses (Jain, 2015). In the southeastern part of Nigeria, the Igba-Boi Business Mentorship System has been a major source of economic activities, which incorporates business skills with supervision. This system has played a role in the development of SMEs in Nigeria; after the completion of apprenticeship, they are provided with financial capital and business advice (Ojukwu, 2019).

This study has established that mentorship plays a central role in promoting entrepreneurship and employment across the world. It improves decision-making, fosters sustainable business practices, and assists the business owners in creating connections, acquiring resources, and funding (Sullivan, 2000). Different types of mentorship, such as structured programmes, have been effective in creating employment and assisting SMEs, particularly in the emerging markets. There is evidence that shows that there is a positive correlation between the mentorship and job creation; the firms that receive the mentorship are likely to create more employment (Rhodes & Roffe, 2007).

Mentorship programmes are especially useful for women and people of colour because they experience more challenges in the business context (Eby et al., 2013). Small enterprises have been created through student mentorship programmes in the developing countries, and employment has been created through embracing innovation and entrepreneurship.

SMEs are one of the major sources of employment across the world, and business coaching is a vital factor that contributes to the growth and sustainability of SMEs (Neumark et al., 2011). The Igba-

Boi apprenticeship system, which is in operation among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, is a model that has been very helpful in job creation and economic growth. It takes 5 to 7 years to train young apprentices, and at the end of the training period, the young apprentices are given a financial settlement to start their own businesses (Nwaokoro, 2011). Nzimiro (1972) says mentor-mentee relationships are based on trust, loyalty, and reciprocity. The system is greatly anchored on social capital, family, and community relations, which are very crucial to the success of the mentee after the completion of the apprenticeship (Ezeh, 2017).

The system has helped in determining the economic development of southeastern Nigeria; the expansion of the small and medium-scale enterprises owned by the former apprentices has created many employment opportunities (Ekejiuba, 2003). However, as pointed out by Obunike (2016), the system has some constraints, like inadequate access to financial services and business development services. Nevertheless, the Igbo mentorship system is still a strong instrument for the development of entrepreneurship and the creation of new workplaces. These factors should therefore be taken into consideration by policymakers and other stakeholders who wish to design programmes that would foster employment generation and entrepreneurship in Nigeria and other countries.

3. Methodology

The study utilized the Social Learning Theory, which posits that observation and social interaction acquire skills and behaviours. A survey research design was adopted to gather data on the “mentorship system and job creation” among mentees, mentors, and former mentees in Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State, Nigeria. According to the Onitsha Main Market Amalgamated Traders Association (OMMATA), the total number of officially registered businesses in the market is six thousand (6,000). From this population, a sample size of 375 respondents was determined using Yamane’s formula, and stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation of mentees, mentors, and former mentees. To obtain quantitative insights, 375 respondents were given a standardized questionnaire. The survey's data was descriptively examined using content and theme analysis.

4. Business Mentorship System of the Igbos and Job Creation in Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State, Nigeria: A Social Learning Theory Perspective

The Business Mentorship System of the Igbos, a traditional form of apprenticeship in southeastern Nigeria, has greatly impacted entrepreneurship and employment. The system, which has been shaped by the colonial and socialist systems, applies the Social Learning Theory (SLT) to determine its contribution towards the development of entrepreneurship in Onitsha Main Market as postulated by Bandura in 1977.

The major SLT concepts such as identification, modeling, cognitive processes, and self-efficacy are well rooted in the Igbo mentorship system. Business skills are acquired through emulation of the employers' activities, including negotiations and management of finances (Ezeh, 2017). The system of vicarious reinforcement is applied in the process, where apprentices observe their mentors' success and get financial reward. This reinforcement enhances self-efficacy, thus enhancing the entrepreneurial intentions (Obunike, 2016b; Bandura, 1994).

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) is important for the Igbo mentorship system that is based on observation, cognitive learning, and self-efficacy. It assists apprentices to gain confidence, start their own businesses, and meet modern economic issues like unemployment among the youths. The incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary approaches to entrepreneurship can help in the creation of employment and economic growth (Okonkwo & Obialor, 2019).

For instance, the Business Mentorship System of the Igbos can assist in the fight against unemployment among the youths in Nigeria's Onitsha Main Market (Okeke & Eme, 2014). As an indigenous system that emphasizes observation, cognitive learning, and self-efficacy, this study provides a sustainable solution to job creation in southeastern Nigeria and other regions. Therefore, the Business Mentorship System of the Igbos is still useful in the fight against unemployment and the encouragement of business in Nigeria.

5. Result and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	55	14.7
	Male	320	85.3
	Total	375	100
Age	Below 18	115	30.7
	18-25	145	38.7
	26-35	80	21.3
	36-45	25	6.7
	Above 45	10	2.7
	Total	375	100
	No formal Education	35	9.3
	Primary	115	30.7
	Secondary	155	41.3

Level of Education	Tertiary	70	18.7
	Others (Specify)	0	0
	Total	375	100
Current Business Role	Mentee	225	60
	Mentor	113	30.
	Former Mentee (Business Owner)	37	10
	Total	375	100
Duration of Involvement in BMSI	Less than 1 year	35	9.3
	1-3 years	70	18.7
	3-5 years	115	30.7
	More than 5 years	155	41.3
	Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The demographic data in table 1 shows that the BMSI in Onitsha Main Market has more male participants, with 85.3% of respondents being male and 14.7% female. This implies that the mentorship system is more or less biased towards male candidates; this is due to the fact that the business world has been shaped in a way that men are dominant. However, the fact that there are women, although in a smaller number, means that there is a possibility of expansion. The age distribution shows that the system is more inclined to a younger generation, with 69.4% of the respondents below 25 years old as per the company's goal of moulding the future business personalities.

The educational background proves that the system of mentorship is open for people of different levels of education, with 41.3% having secondary education and 30.7% having primary education. The system focuses on the practical experience, and people with little education can easily succeed in the business world. This is evidenced by the current business roles, whereby 60% of the respondents are mentees, 30% are mentors, and 10% are ex-mentees who have started their own businesses. The length of time spent in the BMSI indicates that 41.3% have been in the programme for over five years and 30.7% for 3-5 years.

Table 2: Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Skills Development

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did you receive formal business training before entering the mentorship system?	Yes	55	14.7
	No	320	85.3
	Total	375	100

What specific skills have you acquired through the Igbo Boy Business Mentorship System?	Business Management	106	28.3
	Negotiation Skills	50	13.3
	Customer Relations	97	25.9
	Financial Management	49	13.1
	Marketing	63	16.8
	Others (Specify)	10	2.7
	Total	375	100
To what extent do you think the mentorship programme has contributed to your entrepreneurial skills development?	Very High	166	44.3
	High	154	41.1
	Moderate	50	13.3
	Low	4	1.1
	Very Low	2	0.5
	Total	375	100
How often does your mentor provide practical business advice?	Always	101	26.9
	Frequently	124	33.1
	Occasionally	114	30.4
	Rarely	24	6.4
	Never	12	3.2
	Total	375	100
Are you confident in your ability to start and manage a business after the mentorship programme?	Strongly Agree	189	50.4
	Agree	164	43.7
	Neutral	11	2.9
	Disagree	9	2.4
	Strongly Disagree	2	0.5
	Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

It has been ascertained that the Business Mentorship System of the Igbos (BMSI) is useful in developing the business skills. From the data obtained in table 2, it is evident that the majority of the respondents (85.3%) had no formal business training before joining the system, hence the importance of the system in offering business training to those with no formal education. In terms of skills developed, business management is the most developed skill with 28.3%, followed by customer relations with 25.9%, while marketing, negotiation, and financial management came 3rd with 16.8%, 13.3%, and 13.1%, respectively. The BMSI is quite balanced, providing the students with a wide spectrum of business competencies.

Regarding the extent of skill development, an overwhelming 85.4% of respondents rated the mentorship system's impact as either "Very High" (44.3%) or "High" (41.1%), indicating its significant contribution to their entrepreneurial skill set. Furthermore, the guidance from mentors in terms of practical business advice is given constantly, and 60% of the respondents said that they get it “always” or “frequently.” But there is a need for occasional improvement (30.4%). Last but not least, the confidence in the ability of the mentees to start and run their own businesses is high, with 94.1% either “strongly agree” (50.4%) or “agree” (43.7%) to feel prepared to succeed post-mentorship, which supports the BMSI’s ability to develop skills and entrepreneurial confidence.

Table 3: Business Success and Job Creation

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have you started your own business after completing the mentorship?	Yes	315	84
	No	15	4
	In Progress	45	12
	Total	375	100
How would you rate the financial success of your business compared to other businesses in Onitsha Main Market?	Very Successful	173	46.1
	Successful	144	38.4
	Moderately Successful	45	12
	Less Successful	8	2.1
	Not Successful	5	1.3
	Total	375	100
How many employees do you currently have in your business?	None	17	4.5
	1-3	106	28.3
	4-6	118	31.5
	7-10	89	23.7
	More than 10	45	12
	Total	375	100
How many of your employees were mentees of the Igbo Boy Business Mentorship System?	None	15	4
	1-3	103	27.5
	3-6	113	30.1
	7-10	75	20
	More than 10	69	18.4
	Total	375	100
Do you believe that the mentorship system has helped create job	Strongly Agree	200	53.3
	Agree	170	45.3
	Neutral	5	1.3

opportunities in Onitsha Main Market?	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The Business Mentorship System of the Igbos (BMSI) has influenced business and employment in Onitsha Main Market. Table 3 data reveals that 84% of the respondents have started their own businesses after the programme, with 12% in the process of doing so. The success rate of the mentees who have moved from apprenticeship to entrepreneurship is a clear indication that the system supports new business creation. Financial success is also high, with 84.5% of respondents rating their businesses as either “very successful” (46.1%) or “successful” (38.4%). Only 3.4% of the respondents rated their businesses as “less successful” or “not successful,” proving that the programme has a high success rate in establishing successful businesses.

In terms of job creation, 96% of respondents have at least one employee in their business, with the biggest groups having 1-6 employees 57.6%. Also, 96% of respondents have employed the mentees from the BMSI, and 30.1% use 3-6 of the former mentees and 18.4% have more than 10, which show that there is a healthy turnover of employment within the system.

Last but not least, an overwhelming majority (98.6%) either “strongly agree” (53.3%) or “agree” (45.3%) with the statement that the BMSI has helped in the creation of jobs in Onitsha Main Market, thus supporting the argument that it has played a role in the fight against unemployment and the promotion of economic growth.

Table 4: Challenges and Recommendations

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What are the major challenges you have encountered during the mentorship programme?	Lack of Financial support	109	29.1
	Inadequate Mentorship	122	32.5
	Market Competition	78	20.8
	Lack of Business Opportunities	59	15.7
	Others (Specify)	7	1.9
	Total	375	100
How would you rate the effectiveness of the mentorship system in overcoming these	Very Effective	178	47.5
	Effective	175	46.7
	Neutral	15	4
	Ineffective	5	1.3

challenges?	Very Ineffective	2	0.5
	Total	375	100
What improvements would you recommend for the Igbo Boy Business Mentorship System?	More financial support	111	29.6%
	Better mentor-mentee matching	138	36.8%
	Improved Business training	117	31.2%
	Others (Specify)	9	2.4%
	Total	375	100%
Would you recommend the mentorship system to other aspiring entrepreneurs?	Yes	369	98.4%
	No	6	1.6%
	Total	375	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 data gives information on the difficulties that the mentees encounter in the BMSI, the perceived efficiency of the system, and recommendations for change. The most cited challenge was “inadequate mentoring” with 32.5% of the respondents, and the second most cited challenge was “lack of financial support” with 29.1% of the respondents. This shows that although the system of mentorship is well developed, there are issues with the extent of mentorship and financial support offered to the mentees. Other issues that were highlighted include “market competition” (20.8%) and “lack of business opportunities” (15.7%) which indicate that there are other factors apart from the mentorship that affect the challenges faced by the mentees. Other unspecified challenges were mentioned by only 1.9% of the respondents, thus showing that most of the challenges were covered by the options provided.

Nevertheless, the system of mentorship is considered to be rather efficient by the majority of respondents. A combined 94.2% of the respondents said the system was either “very effective” (47.5%) or “effective” (46.7%) in assisting them to overcome the challenges they faced. Only 1.8% considered the system as being inefficient. This implies that though the system has its drawbacks, the mentorship system in most cases delivers the required support to the mentees in order to overcome business challenges.

The results reveal that the mentees recommend the following changes in the programme as the most effective ways to improve the programme: Better mentor-mentee matching (36.8%) and improved business training (31.2%). The desire for “more financial support” (29.6%) also supports the notion of funding in business development. The fact that there are only a few other recommendations (2.4%) indicates that most of the recommendations are in these areas. An overwhelming 98.4% of the respondents said that they would recommend the mentorship system to other aspiring entrepreneurs, which is an indication of overall satisfaction with the programme despite the difficulties encountered.

This analysis shows that although the Business Mentorship System of the Igbos is mostly successful, there are some essential aspects that need to be addressed to improve the programme's effectiveness, especially in terms of offering more profound mentorship, funding, and business education.

6. The impact of the Igbos 'Business Mentorship System on the improvement of the mentees' abilities in Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State, Nigeria.

The business mentorship system of the Igbos, also known as "Imu Ahia" or the Igbo apprenticeship model, has been identified as the primary means of economic growth and business incubation in Southeastern Nigeria for centuries. The system incorporates a close-knit model between the two parties whereby experienced business persons (the tutors) impart skills and knowledge to the young and inexperienced persons (the learners). This system is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Onitsha Main Market, Anambra State, Nigeria, which is arguably one of the largest commercial centers in the West African sub-region. In this study, the effects of this type of mentorship system for the progression of the entrepreneurial skills and performance of the businesses of the mentees in Onitsha Main Market are considered.

The Igbo apprenticeship model is an unstructured but disciplined training model, and it is a famous tradition in Igbo that a trainee takes several years of training between five and ten years. Looking at this structure, mentees during this period are exposed to a variety of business competencies such as accounting, customer service, supply chain, and bargaining. These skills are developed through apprenticeship when the mentees engage in the daily operations of the business of the mentor. Compared to theoretical education, this kind of learning is beneficial in many ways since it acquaints the mentees with real business-world problems and gives them prompt feedback from their mentors (Chukwu, 2015).

Moreover, the mentorship system helps mitigate the risk of business failure, which is a common challenge for many startups. Research has shown that businesses established by former mentees of the Igbo apprenticeship system tend to have higher success rates compared to other small enterprises in Nigeria. According to a study by Onah (2020), over 70% of businesses in Onitsha that started through the mentorship system remain operational after their first five years, which is significantly higher than the national average, where many small businesses fail within their first few years. The success of these businesses can be attributed to several factors. First, mentees often inherit the network of suppliers, customers, and business partners that the mentor has developed over the years. This established network provides a competitive edge, making it easier for mentees to thrive in the market. Second, the close,

ongoing relationship between mentor and mentee often continues after the settlement, ensuring that the mentee has access to guidance and support when faced with challenges (Obioma & Ebue, 2019).

The Igbo Business Mentorship System is not only a mechanism for individual success but also a tool for community development. The system creates a cycle of mentorship where successful mentees, in turn, become mentors for the next generation of entrepreneurs. This cycle fosters a strong culture of entrepreneurship and self-reliance in Igbo society, contributing to the economic vitality of regions like Onitsha (Chukwu, 2015). Additionally, the mentorship system contributes to reducing unemployment by providing young people with a viable alternative to formal employment. Many young people who might otherwise struggle to find jobs are able to create their own businesses through the mentorship system, thereby becoming job creators rather than job seekers.

However, the structural mentoring system assists in preventing the issue of business failure among the startups, which is a widespread problem. Studies have found out that new firms created by the post-mentee members of the Igbo apprenticeship system are more successful than other small firms in Nigeria. Onah (2020) further notes that over 70 percent of the businesses in Onitsha that started through the mentorship system had survived their first five years of existence; this is even better than the national average, where many small businesses fold up within the initial five years. The success of these businesses can be attributed to the following factors: First, the mentee is available with any supplier, customer, or business partner established by the mentor over the period of his experience. This established network gives opportunity advantage, hence allowing the mentees to succeed in the market. Second, the frequent interactions between the mentor and the mentee make it so that the assistance is continued after the case is brought to a settlement and the mentee needs assistance when faced with challenges (Obioma & Ebue, 2019).

Mentorship, the modern structure of the Igbo business, is a multipurpose strategy; it is not only determined to bring successful individuals but also change the community. The concept of the system is to intertwine the process of entrepreneurs's mentoring with the influencing of new participants in the process. This cycle shapes the entrepreneurial and self-sustenance spirit among the people of Igbo and assists the boost of economic sectors, for instance, Onitsha (Chukwu, 2015). Furthermore, the concept of the mentorship system helps to decrease the rate of unemployment as it offers the youth tangible career opportunities other than formal employment. That way, many youths who would have otherwise been unemployed can start their own businesses, hence transforming from being job seekers to job providers.

However, the Igbo Business Mentorship System has some problems in the modern economy, even if it has achievements. The first of these is a problem of lack of formalization in the system. Another thing that might go wrong with this form of apprenticeship is that due to the lack of formality and the reliance on trust and word of mouth, the mentor might exploit the situation, for example, by failing to settle the mentee adequately at the end of the agreement. Furthermore, multiple changes in the current global economy, which is becoming more digital and following certain formal patterns, have left the system of mentorship unsuitable for modern business. For example, many mentees may have never directly used or come across any of the following crucial tools in today's global economy: actual financial services, business registration bodies, or the digital marketing spaces (Obioma & Ebue, 2019).

Moreover, the new generation is more inclined to pursue formal education and is already working in the technical, financial, as well as other progressive fields. Such a shift is a threat to the continuity of the mentorship system because the youth cannot be willing to spend several years undergoing apprenticeship as envisaged under the traditional mentee model (Onah, 2020). However, in response to these challenges, there have been efforts to incorporate other modern business practices and technology into the Igbo system of mentorship. For example, providing the knowledge of conducting formal business, financial management, and information communication technology could improve the performance of mentees within the economy. Other reforms aimed at the mentorship system would keep it effective despite changes in the economy while still retaining its valuable attributes.

Therefore, the study has found that the Igbo Business Mentorship System has greatly influenced skills training in entrepreneurship and business performance among the mentees in Onitsha Main Market. Thus, the system provides mentoring benefits by offering increased training flexibility, gradual skill development, and financial assistance through settlement, while mentoring prepares the mentees for owning their business. It has also ensured that the Igbo people engage in business activities through the growth of the mentorship system, which reduces the unemployment rate among the IGBO people. However, in order to remain competitive and relevant in the ever-evolving economic structures of the world, there is a need to reform the current system to adopt new-age business practices as well as integrate technology into the current traditional model of apprenticeship. These adaptations will enable the Igbo Business Mentorship System to continue to contribute effectively to the entrepreneurial processes in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Business Mentorship System in Onitsha Main Market in Anambra State is a veritable instrument for business and employment. It offers young people business skills through training, capital support, and mentorship. The ability of the system to foster self-employment and business acumen is useful in tackling unemployment, especially in regions where there are few white-collar job opportunities (Nwaokoro, 2011). However, to continue its effectiveness in the contemporary business world, the system needs to be updated, and policymakers should establish the norms of formalization, financial rewards, and availability of resources for business development. The incorporation of such practices as technology access and formal business education could improve the success rates.

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