

## **Igbo Culture and Business Practices in South East Nigeria: A Critical Review**

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the relationship between Igbo culture and business practices in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria. Over the years, scholars have introduced so many leadership, management and business theories to guide businesses. This study aims to examine critical Igbo cultural practices that serve same purposes as some of these business management theories in guiding business successes in the South East of Nigeria. This study also looked at how the Igbo culture and Igbo leadership influence Igbo entrepreneurial practices. It was found that so many Igbo Cultural practices such as Igbo apprenticeship system and business mentorship guide and motivate Igbo entrepreneurs to succeed in business. As a result of these values, individuals train under their master to gain general business management skills (known as Igba-Boi). In some cases, some of trainees end up pursuing other types of businesses quite different from the where they served using the same business skills in the new trades. The study recommended that Nigerian government should learn from western government in encouraging Igbo apprenticeship system that governs most successful businesses among Ndigbo and developed as an official business incubation system for the youth. The study further recommended government can support individuals who have mastered certain skills but lack capital with fund infusion.*

**Keywords:** Igbo culture, business practices, South East, Nigeria

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## INTRODUCTION

Igbo land occupies a region of around 15,800 square miles in southeast Nigeria (Nwakoby, 2023). Over the years, Igbo people have believed in their maxim, 'OnyeAghalaNwanneya' which means 'nobody should leave anyone/brother behind'. This has been how they sustained family legacies, tradition and belief systems. For centuries Igbos have replicated this 'OnyeAghalaNwanneya' maxim in entrepreneurship and wealth creation by bringing family members or extended relatives into their business models. This they do to assist other family member to achieve self-reliance and to ensure that no family members would depend on another for daily livelihood and succor. In leadership and management, Ndigbo believes in carrying everyone along. This is the major way they use to make sure that the culture and legacy is preserved. In early years, elders in Igbo communities take their young male children along with them while attending village meetings or gatherings to allow their children to learn and participate. Sometimes, they gather members of their family in the night and tell them stories that had happened in the past. These stories go a long way to teach the children cultural values and ethics. As they listen, they clap, sing or run depending on the stories told. These activities have lasting impressions on the children as they tend to live and abide by the moral lessons learnt from the story they heard.

It is as well understood as a search for profit based on innovation, creativity and efficient utilization of resources in a consistent Igbo cultural pattern, as they engage in *Ibidoahia* or *Oru* (starting an enterprise), *Izuahia* (business transactions), *Imuahia* (learning a trade), *Imuoru* (learning a craft or vocation), and *Igbaosoahia* (indulging in trick of marketing another's goods with his consent at a price that raises capital) (Ezeajughu, 2021). The much-talked about Igbo Apprenticeship System arose from this age-long practice. Even though apprenticeships have been around for a very long time, for the Igbo people, they are a way of wealth creation, economic growth, and national development. The Igbo apprenticeship system continues to be the foundation of the Nigerian economy (Mark, et al, 2023). Igbo traditional culture can be characterized as very hierarchical, controlled, and controlling; the family head's job ensured security for all members of the family by assuring the supply of food, housing, and security for all family members while cultivating leadership through male-dominated and long-term oriented-resource management across generations (Nwakoby, et al, 2023). The Igbo people are renowned for their prowess in commerce and other economic endeavors. Through their enterprises and the *Igba-boi* apprenticeship model, they have spread throughout Nigeria and other African nations (Orugun&Nafiu, 2014 in Osita, et al, 2022). The Igbo entrepreneurs are persons who do not only co-ordinate factors of production, but who from time to time seeks opportunities to make profit through innovativeness, creativity, customer's satisfaction and efficient utilization of scarce resources in a consistent cultural pattern (Orugun and Nafiu, 2014 in Agbionu, et al, 2015). There is also a popular saying that, in any town or city you do not find an Igbo man, then such a place is unfit for habitation and might be economically sterile.

Scholars have carried out several studies on the apprenticeship system and Igbo mentoring as part of Igbo business practices yet despite the numerous research evidence in this area, there are still a lot of on-going discourse on sustaining the benefits of the Igbo business system in contemporary development. This study seeks to contribute to this discourse by exploring other aspects of Igbo cultural practices that support the apprenticeship system in South East Nigeria. This is because Igbo people, in the South East Nigeria though still practicing what is generally regarded as apprenticeship system have moved a lot further to some other interesting ways of carrying out their businesses which are also guided by their culture. It is also very important to trace the Igbo culture and business practices back to how businesses were conducted before the conventional apprenticeship system. The literature of the study looked at the how the Igbo culture has influenced business practices such as the Igbo mentoring, Igbo leadership, Igbo apprenticeship and Igbo cultural practices and modern day leadership theories.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Igbo apprenticeship and business practices**

The Igbo traditional business environment thrives on a very profound vocational and craft-based knowledge acquisition known as Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) through the instrumentality of Igbaboi/Bonyi. Igbaboi/Bonyi has a chequered history, and is a process whereby a successful business person, as a way of enhancing business expansion and/or altruistically giving back to the kindred or community, informally contracts an apprentice to learn a trade or craft under agreed terms and conditions (Onu and Agu, 2021 in Onu, et al, 2023). The origin of nwa boy has been traced to Igbo business learning culture otherwise known as Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System (ITAS). This apprenticeship scheme is considered an informal and unstructured training scheme arranged for a definite period of time, which youth undergo so as to gain a desirable aspect of entrepreneurship skill through the development and automation of the ITAS in order to earn themselves a business of a life time (Dibia, 2013 in Ominiji, et al, 2018).

Igbo apprentices also do other domestic chores in the house like washing cars, ironing and cleaning whenever they are not in shop. They are appraised based on not just work ethic while learning and growing the masters businesses but on performance in non – business related areas like respect for the masters' spouse /family etc. 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 (Iwueke, et al, 2020). At the end of the apprenticeship they are compensated with a take-off fund which they use for shop rent, goods, equipment (if needed) and in some cases, accommodation for a given period of time (Ukwueze, 2021). The Igbo apprenticeship model and programme is the

brain behind the existing and consistent operations of small scale businesses across Igbo land. The Igbo Apprenticeship programme and activities have been observed to be a sine qua non for the economy of Nigeria and the quality of life of the people at both rural and urban settings (Onyeigwe, 2020). The businessperson or artisan provides the apprentice with guidance and training throughout this time.

According to Alake (2018) in Mark, et al (2023), apprenticeship is a part of the Igbo business culture, where an established businessperson in a town, street, or location has a duty to accept teenagers and young adults from their households and provide them with informal business training and mentorship. This goes to show that before the modern day apprenticeship system was introduced into the present business models, Ndigbo had long practiced the scheme. In fact most notable established traditional medicine men and women presently in Igbo land learnt their craft by merely observing their fathers and sometimes mothers. As strange as this may sound, it is entirely true as some of the traditional medicine practitioners in the South Eastern part of Nigeria often say that they inherited their craft from their mothers or fathers as the case may be. From these crafts, they were able to send their children to gain western education which are sometimes borne out of the zeal to modernize their craft.

According to Okwuowulu (2022), the apprenticeship practice is in three categories, namely:

**Traditional Model:** The traditional model involves the transfer of family skill to the next generation of members.

**Informal Model:** The informal model, though traditional in nature, have non-family members engage in the apprenticeship scheme.

**Modern Apprenticeship:** The modern apprenticeship scheme involves training of participants in vocational skills, well-structured programme of learning, fixed working/training hours and combination of vocational training with educational programmes.

However, there is another form of apprenticeship practiced in the South Eastern part of Nigeria worthy of mentioning in this study. That form of apprenticeship can be tagged apprenticeship by exchange. Here, an individual who wants to learn a specific skill set, goes to an established outfit in that specialty and negotiates terms of service. Usually, the apprentice is asked to buy some certain number of soft drinks, hot drink, kolanuts and pays a specific amount of money. Then, the numbers of months or years the apprentice would have to learn the skill would be officially stated. Most times, the learning period lasts between six months and two years. In some cases, the apprentice would be specific in the area of specialization he or she would want to concentrate on assuming it is an outfit with various sections. This is typical of choosing to study chemical, engineering, computer engineering, mechanical engineering or electrical engineering even though they are all engineering fields. At the end of the agreed period, the apprentice is either

issued a certificate of participation or just officially allowed to start his own business. He or she is not given any seed fund or capital by his/or her master to start up his or her business rather funds may come from personal savings, loans and donation from family members. Apprentices who served and behaved well both in the common form of apprenticeship and in apprenticeship by exchange are prayed for and blessed by their masters.

In apprenticeship by exchange, the apprentice will offer something in exchange for training sessions while in the common form of apprenticeship, the apprentice does not offer anything in return for a short or long term training. Another angle of the common apprenticeship system is that apprentices may train under a particular outfit which deals in a specific line of business yet they may decide to venture into any other form of business as is seen mostly in main market Onitsha. In this case, it is obvious that what the apprentice learnt are business skills which would aid him or her in managing another business venture. In apprenticeship by exchange, it may be somewhat challenging for someone who paid money to learn hair-making or cake-making to venture into tailoring or makeup which require different set of skills, creativity and practice. In South Eastern Nigeria, when a good apprentice, whether in the formal apprenticeship system or otherwise, and if the apprentices has served well, his/her master would pray for him or her before sending his or her off to start his or her own business. This is usually called '*ime free/ settle*'. The master would hold a kolanut in his right hand, and ask the apprentice to kneel for prayers. The prayer usually goes thus:

My son/my daughter, you have served me well  
May the universe serve you well too  
May you sit among kings and queens  
As you did not steal from me, yours will not be lost  
May the land which you walk on bless you  
May you be blessed on all the four market days  
My son/daughter you are blessed  
May my forefather come to your aide any time you need help  
You shall be greater than your mates  
May the god grant our wishes

All who are present would chorus "*Isee*" - that is Amen. Ndigbo believe in '*ifeemelumma*'(whatever is worth doing is worth doing well) and this is usually evident in the length they are willing to go to perfect their business. On the other hand, an apprentice who did not perform well gets the opposite of these prayers and may never succeed.

Through this belief of show me the way, many families in South Eastern part of Nigeria are able to build trans-generational wealth. According to Madichie (2021);

*‘The Igbos like most other indigenous group believed in maintaining a legacy of not just their language but other values, customs and norms. In particular for the Igbos, business continuity seems paramount as a means to ensuring that there are trans-generational business legacies’.*

### **Igbo business Mentoring and business practices**

Business mentoring is one-on-one relationship that helps entrepreneurs learn and develop their business ideas while providing them with useful second options, impartial feedbacks and different perspective of issues that arise within the business environment (Onen, 2021). The concept of Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) is a special form of apprenticeship which entails youth sacrificing early marital life for trainings that will earn them business skill and financial support to establish small-scale enterprise. This is regarded as a traditional form of apprenticeship or mentoring specifically designed for youth to acquire knowledge and financial support needed to establish business or an aspect of informal education for engaging in business transactions among youth in Igbo-Land where trade and commerce constitute the major occupation (Ominijo, et al, 2018). The concept, construct and operationalization of business mentoring is as old as man. The business mentor or „Oga“ undertakes the responsibility of his well-being. The „boyi“ on his part undertakes to serve his „Oga“ diligently. At the end of the agreed period the „Oga“ settles the „boyi“ with an amount that will enable him to begin his own trade. This has become an ideology and a mantra amongst Ndigbo (Nwora, 2011 in Agbionu, et al, 2015). In the Igbo Apprentice System, apprentices agree to be mentored by a master to acquire practical, hands-on experience and master the intricacies of a trade, vocation, or profession (Eze, 2023). The Igbo entrepreneurial abilities have been believed by many to be one of the pillars of Nigeria's economy, and it has contributed to the improved standard of living of people in the region. Igbo people see business mentoring as a communal entrepreneurial framework were already established businessman mentors their young ones, and over time set them up in business by giving start-up capital or credit facilities to start their business (Osita, et al, 2022). Igbo culture is their mentorship culture he demonstrated it by stating how the influence of the extended family system (*Umunna*) is used in entrepreneurship training among the Igbo whereby a successful entrepreneur picks up a nephew or a young cousin and puts him under internship in his own line of business for some years until he is able to freelance on his own with the seed or endowment capital the “Master” will give him. While on his own the young fellow also tries to mentor another relation and the group develops entrepreneurially (Nzereogu, 2019).

### **Igbo Leadership in Business Practices**

Leadership and management go hand in hand because the two concepts involve showing the way and making sure that the way is followed in other to achieve the objectives. According to Asika

(2017) leadership is the act of persuading individuals to focus their efforts on achieving predetermined goals. This means that individuals have personal goals however, a leadership duty is to make every member of the group or family to focus on achieving a pre-determined goal that benefits everyone.

On the other hand, George (2004) sees leadership as the process through which a person influences others, inspires, motivates and guides their behaviours to meet the groups' objectives. To Mc Gregor (1996), leadership is a reciprocated process in which individuals with specific goals and values as well as different economic, political resources enlist the help of others to accomplish a common goal. Obviously, leadership strives towards achieving a common goal. The goal of any leader or family head in Igbo culture is to make his family successful. To do this, he inspires, encourages, advises, motivates and directs his family members to become better people. He achieves this by living by example which is the most effective way to teach and lead what is seen that makes lasting impression than what is heard. The members of the family are also free to bring in their own ideas because the goal is to make their lives better.

To support this Austin and Leland (1991) stated that leadership is the process through which members of a group are given the freedom to collaborate in a way that advances change, transforms institution and enhances people's quality of life. As earlier stated, leadership in Igbo culture is by age. Ndigbo believe that as a man ages, he gathers greater information, wisdom and knowledge to others. This they believe will guide him in the future. According to Peace and Anekperchi (2023);

‘Men elders who are undisputedly in-charge in Pre-European Igbo societies draw their power from elderly their status...Men rose to positions of leadership as they aged. Age was expressly equated with seniority and experience. Elders were physically granted knowledge in line with the expertise they had amassed over time...’

Now one may ask can it be said that a male child who just got the chance to tour the world would be more knowledgeable than a man who has seen too many decades? Of course the traveler would learn more advanced and modernized way to do things which the elder does not have access to but however, it does not take away the fact that the elder gained the knowledge first before the younger one. Again Ndigbo usually say, *'iheokenyenon'alahu, nwatarigoroeluoji, o gaghiahuya'* (what an elder sees while sitting down, even if a child climbs the longest tress, the child cannot see it). Oji is the longest tree in Igbo land. Its usage here depicts the highest level a child can get in knowledge exhibition. Therefore a child who's well-traveled still needs his elderly family head for guidance.

This simply means that nobody disputes leadership in Igbo tradition because everyone knows who is older than the others. The headship position is not dragged or contested rather it is a collective belief of the kindred or family to know who is the head of the entire kindred or family and more so accord him his due respect. Neil (2014) has posited that the most effective management of Igbo cultural leadership is based on leadership style that is specific and derives its authority from position, personality and expertise. Neil's (2014) submission may contradict the headship by age of the Igbo people as it pins its thoughts on personality, position and expertise. This means that a younger Igbo son who is rich, educated and well-traveled can assume headship by virtue of his affluence. Ndigbo has a saying, '*onyenjenjekaonyesiawo*' which means that "a traveler is better than an elder". It is however important to state that the traveler who is obviously younger did not just fall from the skies. He was trained by someone who can be his father or any other person of higher authority. Ndigbo do not forget where they come from so no matter how far and near they may have travelled, they still come back home and give honour to whom it is due. The highly-traveled being better than the elder may be in expertise, exposure and experience, yet these do not remove headship from the most elderly male in the family. So, the most elderly and experienced still gets the utmost respect to the head of the household.

### **Igbo culture**

Culture has variously been described as the peoples' way of life. This includes a people's way of dressing, greeting and living. It also includes a people's particular processes of doing things. In recent times, culture has also appeared to be a people's identity. Igbo people, popularly referred to as Ndigbo, which this study will adopt going forward, in their quest to preserve and promote their culture pass down their activities either orally or by observation to the younger generations. In many cases they do this by celebration and festival. Nwora (2011) under-scored it thus:

'Ndigbo are very traditional people, they strive towards preserving inherited ethos and values... this manifests in the continued celebration and sustenance of cultural festivals and feasts... such festivals help to foster peace in the community and are also ways of preserving their cultural heritage'.

Culture is as important to Ndigbo as food is to humans and this is why they invest so much energy and resources in their celebrations and festivals. Ndigbo exhibit all aspects of life in their culture to the extent that one can hardly find a cultural practice by Ndigbo without a link to a modern day practice. In the areas of management, leadership and business, Ndigbo also have cultural practices that uphold principles associated with these areas. To this, Muo and Oghunjafor, (2012) in Peace and Anekperehi (2023) stated thus;

'In Nigeria, the Igbo people had their own management practice and leadership style that was peculiar to them before the emergence of modern management



theories and that is the reason Igbo people were able to survive the indirect rule and brutal economic exploitation’.

This can be seen in the popular Igbo saying ‘*Ibezi m Akọ*’ (May my brother/kinsman teach/ show me) or ‘*ikwuamaghịbeeziya*’ (if a brother/kinsman does not know, his brother/kinsman will show him). ‘*Akọ*’ here means wisdom/knowledge but depending on the context it is used, it could mean lesson/skill craft. Furthermore, ‘*ikwu*’ and ‘*ibe*’ are twin words Ndigbo use to depict relatives. However, it is usually used as ‘*ikwu;*’ na ‘*ibe*’, which is believed to be members of one’s maternal home (*ikwu*) and members one’s paternal home (*ibe*). Muo and Ogbunjafor’s assertion shows that Ndigbo have been surviving because of this practice of teaching and carrying everyone along. The one doing the teaching is always regarded as the older or more experienced one which automatically makes him or her the leader. This shows that Ndigbo place so much regard on leadership. To support this, Peace and Anekperechi (2023) stated thus;

‘Igbo traditional culture can be characterized very hierarchical and controlled ... the family head’s job ensured security for all members of the family assuring the supply of food, housing and security for all family members while cultivating leadership through male-dominated and long-term oriented resource management across generation’.

Ndigbo believe so much in headship and this is why they practice the hierarchy system of government at the local level. They believe the head of the family which is mostly the eldest male, cannot relegate his duties to another while he is still alive. His job is to typically make life very comfortable for all members of his family. While doing this, he gets every other younger members of the family involved in whatever he is doing to provide for the household. This way he instills leadership and management skills in his subjects which will pass from generation to generation. These elders who act as family heads draw their power merely from the fact that they are older and as such they are believed to have gathered more knowledge over the years. According to Peace and Anekperechi (2023), male elders who are undisputedly in charge in Igbo societies draw their respect, power and authority from their elderly status as they are seen as having a reservoir of knowledge and wealth of experience.

Most adults in Igbo land are surviving because they maintained the values and Igbo Culture their fathers imbibed in them. This is why the family is a very important agent of socialization. These different values are also known to be peculiar to different families in Igbo land. This is why in some places, one may hear assertions like ‘that family is known for marrying early’, ‘that family is known for succeeding in businesses’, ‘that family is known for education’ and so on, this is because the head of that family may have laid the foundation of any of these areas and the whole family followed it. This is to show that the success of a family or group depends on how well or bad its leaders performed. To support this Stogdi (1979) believes that ... a group's vigour and

potential for survival are highly dependent upon a style of leadership that can preserve its integrity, drive and objective direction. Furthermore, Peace and Anekperечи (2023) submit that a leadership style and commitment to the group's objectives are the only factors that determine how well a group is manifested. This means that whatever a family is known for is dependent on how the head of that family led and managed its members. In fact, Ndigbo measures the success and failure of a family with the leadership skills of their father. Hence, their belief in identifying a family with a particular concept and idea.

Ndigbo in Igbo culture and business practices as earlier stated believe in showing others the way. This is evident in their saying, '*Onyeaghalanwanneya*', (nobody should leave his brother behind). In all the Igbo sayings mentioned in this study, one can say that they are all rooted in partnership, interaction and exchange, be it idea or skill is deeply rooted in their belief that their cultures and traditions can only be preserved and sustained by showing others the way. This is typically evident in their leadership and management roles. In their leadership roles, Ndigbo passes down their craft and skills to the younger member of their family. In view of this, Peace and Anekperечи (2023) posit thus;

‘Elders in the family make sure that culture is preserved by handing it from generation to generation. Some families are genetically predisposed to certain cultural abilities, such as basket weaving, pottery making, blacksmithing, traditional medical procedures and even rain-making. Children have the chance to learn such skills through participant observation and apprenticeship’.

It is also worthy of note to mention that before Ndigbo advanced to this level, they practiced the trade by barter system. This simply means exchanging what one has but does not need to get what one needs but does not have. Of course even as cumbersome as this system of trading may appear, it served its purpose. This system sustained Ndigbo till they advanced to trading with cowries, pennies and presently currency notes. This goes a long way to show how adventurous Igbo people have always been. As they evolved, they carried every member of their family along, making them very dogged. This doggedness of Ndigbo spurs them into believing that opportunities are everywhere and self-help which Ndigbo call '*Igbambo*' is the ultimate. Most times the younger males who show no interest in education are quickly asked to decide which trade to learn assuming that the particular family has no skill or craft peculiar to it. Furthermore, when some parents in their wisdom notice some natural interest in a particular field or certain unique skills in their children, they begin to look for established persons in that field to train their children to perfection. Often times, children who start like this, end up learning faster and becoming masters in their craft.

More so, their doggedness always makes them more enterprising as they always translate the cultural values they learnt early in life to their business dealings. No wonder Olarenwaju (1999)

said that the Igbos, when compared to other major ethnic groups in Nigeria are in the forefront of the entrepreneurial sector in Nigeria.

Ndigbo as one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria are industrious in nature and this is why one sees them in almost every corner of Nigeria. This nature of theirs may not be unconnected to their cultural roots where they were taught the dignity in labour which is hidden in their sayings; '*aka ajaajana-ebuteonummanummanu/ onyeruo, o rie*', (when one works, one eats), '*nganakpuchieakwa, aguekpugheeya*', (No food for a lazy man), '*onyeorunwereugwo* (a laborer has a wage) and so on. These sayings are part of Igbo proverbs and sometimes folktales Ndigbo tell their young ones in a bid to teach them that Ndigbo are not a tribe known to stay idle and wait for food to come to them. Rather Ndigbo encourage their young ones to never give up on their pursuit for a better life. The young ones, armed with the knowledge of these beliefs of Ndigbo towards making money, look for better ways to do business and still achieve greater results. This belief is why Ndigbo say '*agbaka m mbọ, busọ ego nri*' which means work smarter not harder. Ndigbo as a nation on its own look at things differently and this may also be why where others see no opportunities, Ndigbo see fortune because their culture teaches them to dignity labour and work smarter not just harder.

Moving on, apprenticeship focuses on accommodating another person in one's business. Just like Ndigbo practiced in the past, a young person is taken to an already established individual in the business of interest of the younger one, to master the art of that particular business. This mastering can last up to six or seven years depending on the agreement of the person who is accepting the young one into his business and the family of the young one. In most cases, the established individuals in the family volunteer to take another member of the family and place him under apprenticeship in his business in the spirit of '*zi m uzọ*' (show me the way). That way, prosperity grows in the family. The apprentice after staying for the number of agreed years is settled with a sum of money. The amount to be given is totally dependent on the benevolence of the master (*oga*) and sometimes the dedication and performance of the apprentice. In most cases too, apprentices who have completed their years are also given some goods by their master to support them. Sometimes the master may also introduce his apprentice to some of his customers or suppliers or distributors just to mark sure that his apprentice succeeds.

In this sense, one can now understand why some South Eastern states in Nigeria are known for particular lines of businesses. Most times, to achieve this, families entrust the responsibility of ensuring that the family business does not fail on the first son or the eldest male in the family even through that most Igbo fathers also bring in their wives and daughters into the businesses. In support of this, Madichie (2021) believed that the role of '*di-okpara*' (first son), '*umunna*' (sons of the land) and '*umuada*' (daughters of the land) cannot be overemphasized. He went further to state thus '*these insights inform a contribution to the discourse of ethnic or indigenous entrepreneurship...*'

This is to support the importance of leadership in the family in Igbo land earlier stated in this study because once the responsibility of running the family business is handed to a member of the family who then learns more rudiments of businesses; he or she becomes a leader figure in the family business by virtue of knowing more about the business.

Thus as Emenike (2023) posited,

‘The Igbo apprenticeship system isn’t just a business practice. The Igbo culture’s rich commercial history lives on through the trans-generational Igbo business community. It not only dominates commercial activities but also serves as a means of preserving Igbo heritage, identity, language and cultural values’.

This attests to the fact that Ndigbo infuses their cultural values in their business practices and overtime, the sustenance of their enterprise can easily be traced to how they uphold their cultural values. Another set of people worthy of mentioning in Igbo business practices are called ‘ndiọsọahjia’ (drop shippers). These people do not have shops anywhere in the market neither are they apprentices to anyone in the market, but rather are fired by the spirit of ‘*igbambo*’ (self-help) which makes them scout vigorously for customers to lead to people who have their own shops and goods to sell. Sometimes they choose a particular line of business to operate in, mostly business types that have steady patronage, so, they typically roam the market looking for buyers for particular products. Once they find one, they take the buyer to a shop that is fully stocked with the products needed. While the owner of the shop is present, they negotiate price with the buyer. The rule is to never sell below the stipulated price rather the drop shipper can add any amount of money he wants on the stipulated price. Once the buyer pays for the products, the drop shipper gives the owner of the product the amount for his products and takes what is left (*nzama*). This way, he makes money to solve his daily needs. These people also survive and prosper because of the cultural values learnt at the early stages of their lives.

### **The link between Igbo cultural business practices and modern management theories**

Management theories, principles, and ideas encompass a variety of management, labour relations, leadership, accounting, financial, marketing, insurance, and public relations approaches that are said to enhance business or organizational performance in some quantifiable or other ways that can be demonstrated (Nwakoby, et al, 2023). Scholars have reviewed that igbo culture has been practicing the relevant leadership style that was propounded by great thinkers of management. Management sciences practices now have corresponding igbo native names for several of the most essential principles such as management by objective (Izuora), management by exception (Izundiichie), motivation (itunimuo), Esprit De Corps (Igwebuikie - Unity is strength) and Co-prosperity (Onyeaghalanwanneya). Major orthodox management practices are evidence in the way and manner the Igbo people tailored and established the Igbo business model. The Igbo

people have existed as a society before the coming of colonial masters and their leadership style was based on the decentralized system, with the main emphasis on existing with one another in harmony (udo), love (ihunanya), oneness (idinaotu), justice (ikpeziriezi), ensuring equity (egbebereugobere), fairness (onyerieonyerie ma ozoemena), and above all the progress of all (Co- prosperity, Onyeaghanwanneya) through its leadership practices (Ofobruku, et al, 2023). These below are some application of management theories in Igbo business culture

**Management by exception:** This is a dynamic leadership approach, focusing on managerial attention to only significant deviations or variations from results that had been planned ahead (Rahman, 2024). Management by Exception is in harmony with what the Igbo business has and is called IGBA- IZU or Izundiichie. Izundiichie is a trait unique to the Igbo race. In important cases when management by exception necessitates selection and discussion only the elders of Umunna will gather and make decisions on matters that do not require the input of the general population (Nwakoby, et al, 2023). When there are crucial situations where secluded discussion is required, few elders will assemble and make decisions on a matter that does not need public opinion in Umunna. Sometimes in a meeting of a serious dispute between the extended families, the elders from each Umunna will bring out one person to represent them in the settlement of the dispute. If the clan is made up of seven kindred's, that means that seven elders will be represented in the Igba-Izu (Management by Exception) (Ofobruku, et al, 2023).

**Espirit de corp:** This is one of the 14 principles of management, according to Fayol (1949) that promotes team spirit and gives an organization a sense of unity. This refers to a feeling of fellowship and common loyalty or affiliation that is shared by the members of a particular group. It is similar to "strength in unity" in Igboland, which has been in practice before the adoption of foreign management philosophy, share the same view when he says that "team building theory as a management style is being adopted in Nigeria. According to him, this style reduces hierarchy leading to flatter structures, empowering subordinates through being part of decision making and increasing responsibilities and teamwork as key forms of increasing motivation and resulting work performance" (Odor, et al, 2018).

**McGregor theory of motivation:** Motivation originates from Greek word "inovere" meaning to move. The success of any motivational effort depends on the extent to which the motivation meets the needs of the individual employees for whom it is intended. It is a set of attitudes and values that influence a person to act in a specific-goal directed manner (Ebinga, 2014). The idea of reward and recognition in motivation theory is reflected in the Igbo land title system (Nkwayeugwu/Nkpalitemuo) (Nwakoby, et al, 2023). McGregor's three fundamental characteristics of human connections, which also serve to explain some of the cultural values of the Igbo people. Scalar chain (Naghirinaghiri), unity of direction (iganiru), and collective interest (ofu obi).

### **Empirical Review**

Nzereogu (2019) examined “Culture as a fundamental factor in the Entrepreneurial success of the Igbo”, has the objectives of highlighting the impact of colonialism on the entrepreneurial culture of the Igbo people, as well as the cultural values of the Igbo that encourage entrepreneurship among them, establishing the nexus between the Igbo world view/culture and the entrepreneurial success of the Igbo people and highlighting on the effect of the Igbo entrepreneurial success on Nigeria’s economy. Institutional economic theory is used as a theoretical framework to analyze the effect of culture on entrepreneurship. A qualitative and descriptive method of analysis is also employed in this study to analyze the data presented. Hence, the findings of this study reveal that entrepreneurial activities in Igbo land are not a product of western civilization and colonialism but that of the Igbo cultural values and world views. Furthermore, it shows the impact of the entrepreneurial success of the Igbo on the Nigerian economy.

Eze (2023) examined the nature of the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) in Nigeria, focusing on its significance in fostering entrepreneurship and economic development among the Igbo people. The IAS involves young person’s working under the guidance of skilled practitioners to acquire practical experience and master a trade or profession. The system is built on informal agreements between apprentices and masters. The study reviews relevant studies on the IAS and highlights its role in stimulating economic growth and providing sustainable livelihoods. It explores three main types of apprenticeship within the system and describes the phases of talent identification, knowledge acquisition, and graduation. The social learning theory was adopted to understand the nature of the apprenticeship system's knowledge and skill acquisition process. The paper recommends establishing structured training programs by the government that will provide standardized skill acquisition and certification.

Ezeajughu (2021) examined the Igbo man perspectives of apprenticeship and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria. Through an apprenticeship scheme known as Igba-boi or Nwaobi which is by far the most entrenched and vibrant entrepreneurship promotion vehicle in Nigeria, people from this ethnic group have dominated and continued to excel above their contemporaries from other ethnic groups in the country and beyond. This paper analytically investigates peculiar sources, circumstances and skills that are the fulcrum of increasing socio-economic performance of the Igbo people. The study finds that entrepreneurial performance of the Igbos is underscored by their economic culture and value, which are highly existential in their traditions and belief system. These are however fostered by the long years of marginalization by successive Nigerian governments, as well as other prominent factors in pre and post-independence Nigeria. The paper concludes that the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has the potential to significantly increase the level of entrepreneurial metabolism and to stimulate the rate and pace of new venture creation and thus a viable platform for entrepreneurship promotion in Nigeria. The research also concludes that with this progressive rate, Igbo people will in time

be a force to reckon with in the socio-political and techno-economic sector of Nigeria, Africa and the World at large. The study recommends that the government of Nigeria and African by extension should adopt the practice of the Igbo man apprenticeship system and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria as a strategy for the development African entrepreneurship.

Ostia, et al (2023) determined the effect of Igbo model of business mentoring and the sustainability of small and medium enterprises in Anambra state. Appropriate conceptual theoretical and empirical literatures were reviewed. The study hinged on the need for achievement theory. A questionnaire was used for the collection of data. Borg and Gall sampling technique was used to determine the sample size of 327 respondents drawn from three commercial cities of Onitsha, Nnewi, and Awka, all in Anambra State. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as t-test statistics and multiple regression models. Findings revealed that the Igbo model of business mentoring has a positive influence on the sustainability of small and medium enterprises in Anambra state. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendation is made: government should come up with policies that encourage the Igbo type of mentoring of young ones because mentoring the apprentice by the master is very important because it helps to build a strong business synergy in the future. The engagement of salespersons by the businessmen should be scrapped.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the Igbo business practices discussed in this study, their common goal remains building a community where everyone can thrive. The Igbo business model promote opportunity to all to ease the burden of relying on one successful member of the family for succor. It is also evident that before any management and leadership theories were introduced to Africa and Nigeria in particular, Ndigbo had already embedded them in their culture and have been practicing same, as a result, they thrive in their businesses.

## **Recommendations**

It is observed that much reference have been given to the convention apprenticeship (Nwaboi) system. The study recommends observing the would be apprentice who pays certain amount of money to learn a skill that is apprenticeship by exchange and drop shippers. For such people, there should be ready to take fund available upon completion of their training and easily accessible funds for business minded individuals who do not have any source of funding to start up. . Nigerian government should learn from western government as it includes apprenticeships into college and university programs. Additionally, individuals who have mastered certain skills but lack capital can engage in voluntary service in their communities to create awareness for their skills. On the other hand, those who lack capital but are privileged to own android phones

can take advantage of the digital community by creating engaging contents for their skills. This way, they advertise themselves and expect to get called for jobs. However, consistency is key here because it may take a while before the contents get noticed. This is because unlike the conventional apprenticeship system, those apprentices who pay to learn skills are not given money (capital) upon completion of the learning period. They go to source their own capital either through family contribution, savings or loans which usually come with heavy or slightly heavy interest rates. To ease this burden, the government should make funds available and maybe establish functional institutions that will not only teach these skills free of charge but also empower its graduates.

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