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SECURITY CHALLENGES AND APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM AMONGST IGBO BUSINESSMEN IN THE SOUTH-EASTERN STATES OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper was informed by security challenges and apprenticeship system among Igbo Businessmen in the South-Eastern states, Nigeria. The study aims at investigating security challenges and apprenticeship system among Igbo businessmen in the South-eastern states of Nigeria. Secondary data was mostly used in the study. The study identifies the apprenticeship system as a network analysis where businesses can be reproduced and duplicated in thousand folds hence multiplying entrepreneurship and the business-spirit which the Igbos are known for. Security challenges confronting Igbo businessmen was identified in this study. The recent security challenge in the east is a threat to lives and properties as well as the growth and sustainability of businesses in general and the apprenticeship system in particular among Igbo businessmen. The study concludes that if these security challenges are not controlled, it will terminate the sustainability of potential businesses that will rise through the apprenticeship system in the south-east. The study government at all levels should as a matter of urgency formulate and implement policies which are capable of tackling the various security challenges bedeviling the nation and its economy through the training of security personnel, negotiations (where necessary), and by deploying advanced technology in managing security issues. The study also recommends that Igbo apprenticeship system should be remodeled to fit into contemporary business demands.

Keywords: apprenticeship system, security personnel, South-Eastern States, Igbo Businessmen

Introduction

Apprenticeship is an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, classroom instruction, mentorship, and a portable credential. Ekekwe(2021), posits that the Igbo Apprenticeship system remains a vehicle to accelerate wealth creation and insure a future. Igbo businessmen view Apprenticeship as network analysis – whereby one can start something with a single thing, produce and duplicate same into a thousand folds. Viewing it from a practical



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perspective - A young man would be recruited as an apprentice – by four or five years hence, he would be settled with what is known as seed money to start up his own business. He would thereafter continue in the trade he has learnt from his master, applying all necessary business skills and experiences gathered over the years during which he was under Apprenticeship. As he progresses with business activities, he is expected to engage other young boys to replicate the process he went through as an apprentice and settle them the same way he was settled. This would among other things depend on the viability and sustainability of the business venture and continues in perpetuity! In a nutshell, the Igbo apprenticeship system allows young people learn a trade and start a business. Supporters vaunt it as a Nigerian model of stakeholder capitalism.

Ekekwe (2021), whose work was published in the Harvard Business Review, sees what followed as a valuable case study in "stakeholder capitalism" that has produced several prominent Igbo Businessmen, including car magnet Innocent Chukwuma of IVM. There are several arguments from various which suggests that the Igbo Apprenticeship system is the best form of Education in Africa and has produced more Dollar denominated millionaires in Harvard (Omokri 2020), For emphasis, the Igbos are found in the south eastern part of Nigeria, particularly, Abia; Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and also in some parts of the south-south region which includes: Delta and Rivers states. Igbo businessmen through the apprenticeship system are scattered all over the nooks and crannies of Africa. They are present in every state in Nigeria, regardless of the security or economic condition of the said region. It is however not surprising to note that Igbo businessmen are currently settled in Sambisa Forest, Borno State, the most volatile state in Nigeria with countless attacks by the proscribed Boko Haram Terrorist group. This sounds unbelievable, but can be confirmed by the researcher after a conversation with an executive member of the OhanezeNdigbo (The apex social organization of Igbo people in Nigeria) who was involved in settling a leadership dispute for the Organizations branch in Sambisa Forest, Borno State.

Insecurity is a major threat to entrepreneurship and all manner of development, economic, social, political, cultural and otherwise. Nigeria is faced currently with a myriad of security challenges ranging from attacks from terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Kidnappers, Bandits, Armed robbers, unknown gun men and other non state actors in the country. According to Achumbar and Akpor (2013) insecurity has threatened national security and has prompted huge allocation of the national budget to insecurity. Businesses are usually the worst hit of insecurity challenges. The perfect case study is the incessant 'Sit at Home' orders carried out by non state actors in the South East part of Nigeria, the incessant terrorist attacks in the north east, banditry and kidnapping in the North Central and North west and Farmers – Herders clash in the middle belt and parts of the south east. Virtually, every part of the nation is besieged with a major security threat. Business and investment thrives in a peaceful climate. No investor or business owner will be willing to invest in an environment which is plagued by insecurity. Igbo businessmen who play a very critical role in the economic development of Nigeria are not immune to the security challenges bedeviling the nation. Insecurity has been a major reason for the closure of several businesses in Nigeria including multinationals. Several businesses have relocated to neighboring West African countries citing insecurity issues. Apprenticeship which serves as a platform of transferring business skills and expertise from a master to his apprentice is threatened against this backdrop, the study aims at investigating security challenges and apprenticeship system among Igbo businessmen.





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Methodology

Owing to the nature of the study, secondary data from textbooks, Journal articles and publications were used to arrive at our conclusion and recommendation. Relevant literature was reviewed on the major concepts and empirical studies were also reviewed.

Review of Related Literature

Insecurity

The concept of insecurity can be interpreted to mean different things such as: absence of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty, fear, lack of protection and lack of safety. For Achumba (2013) ----insecurity can be conceptualized into two major perspectives. First, insecurity is a situation or state of being subject to danger and the threat of it, that danger is a situation or condition of being prone to injury or harm and second, that insecurity is a situation of being exposed to uncertainty and anxiety, where anxiety is an oblivion expression of unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of future unpalatable happenings. Akin (2008) sees security as the situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions. Insecurity is a state of being unsafe and vulnerable to harm. This aligns with Beland (2005) view that insecurity is a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection. Insecurity poses different risks to the society and particularly to the economy. In recent times incidences of kidnapping and civil unrest by non state actors (Unknown Gunmen) has gained prominence. The worst implication of this civil unrest by non-state actors in Eastern Nigeria is the negative effect on the Nigerian economy. A plethora of reasons have been adduced for the insecurity challenge in Nigeria, including but not limited to marginalization, unequal distribution of wealth, unemployment, social inequality, state failure, human right violations, resource predation, corruption, etc. Policy to tackle insecurity therefore must first address these root causes of insecurity in other to be successful.

Understanding Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship has been variously defined by different scholars. Apprenticeship refers to a systematic long term training for a recognized occupation taking place within an undertaking governed usually by a written or oral contractual agreement and is subject to certain established standards and principles. Literally, it has to do with learning a skill or line of trade from someone who is more experienced in the said field of business. In line with this definition, Adekola (2013) defines Apprenticeship as the process of learning a trade or acquiring a skill through enlistment with a master craftsman. In this case, a total novice in a particular field is subjected to a process of training by a master who has overtime mastered the craft, business or trade. According to Olulu and Udeorah (2018), apprenticeship is regarded as a means of training people to learn a trade or craft for their future wellbeing or livelihood. They also noted that apprenticeship practice can be categorized into three namely: traditional, informal and modern apprenticeship model. Adeyeye (2009) posits that basically, apprenticeship involves a contractual relationship between a master craftsman and a trainee. The trainee is trained under close mentorship by the master. ILO (2020) identifies apprenticeship as an effective mechanism for a seamless transition for young people to move from school to the world of work. To Nnonyelu&Onyeizugbe (2020) an apprentice is in most cases, a teenager or young person who elects, or is persuaded to undertake or acquire practical, and in some cases, theoretical knowledge in a specialized area of interest, or occupation he/she would want to go into in future, or earn a living from. The





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Apprenticeship system is a traditional system of training and mentorship amongst the Igbo people in Eastern Nigeria. It has a long history in the region and has been in existence before the arrival of the British colonial masters. Over the years, it has shown some level of resilience and is reputed for producing most of the influential Igbo Businessmen in the world.

Overview of Security Challenges Affecting Igbo Businessmen in the South-East Region, Nigeria

The recent growing security threats in the South-east region has become a great concern to Nigeria at large and the South-eastern states in particular but this was not so in the past. Until recently, the South-east region was arguably the most peaceful part of the country, but now, it has evolved into a hotbed of violence targeting state security institutions by armed men popularly referred to as unknown gun men (Ezeobi, 2021). The South-east region in previous years, was previously known as centersfor business development and entrepreneurial growth but now it has become a den of armed robbery, killings, increased cult war and targeted violence at the state securities by unknown gun men. This situation has created fear, anxiety and insecurity among inhabitants, industries as well as businesses in these regions. A recent study by the Nextier Security, Peace and Development says that before 2021, the South-eastern region was mainly known for hustle and bustle associated with markets; although just like other regions, there also were cases of criminal violence manifesting as cultwars, ransomed kidnaps and armed robbery. Added to these are sustained episodes of pro-Biafra secessionist agitations that turned fatal in some instances. The database also shows that Five months into 2021, 149 people have been killed in 36 attacks in south-east Nigeria. (Nextier Security, Peace and Development Violent Conflict Database, 2021).

The myriad of security challenges that the year 2021 brought along with it ranging from kidnapping, armed robbery, cult war etc has affected the free flow of movement and also business activities in the south-east regions. A multi-stake holder consultative forum organized by the Friedriech-Ebert-Stiftung Nigeria in collaboration with the Civil Society Legislative Consultative Centre, co-funded by the European Union reported statistics on the current security crisis in the South-east region saying that between January and April 19, 2021, over 17 police stations in addition to a correctional facility, have been visited by unknown gunmen, leaving in their trail dead officers, charged police stations, freed prison inmates, and empty stations armoury (The Friedriech-Ebert-Stiftung database, 2021). The emergence of the Monday sit-athome enforced by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) that started sometimes in June 2021 was also another threat on security that retarded the smooth operation of business activities both existing and potential businesses. Despite the state and federal government's efforts to cancel the Monday sit-at-home, most businesses and organizations still observe the sit-at-home because of the fear of being killed. This shows that the security arm of the government of the south-east region has been weakened as the Ndigbos are more afraid of the IPOB's order than the stage government's order. Some scholars have identified weak security arm of the government as one of the major causes of insecurity in Nigeria and in the South-east region in particular (Okonkwo et al, 2015; Achumba et al, 2013 & Ikezue, 2014). The tension and insecurity in the eastern states is heightened and this in turn has retarded business activities both existing businesses and potential ones in these states.





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Implications of the Security Challenges for Apprenticeship System Among Igbo Businessmen

Apprenticeship system is a platform that give young people the opportunity to learn a trade and start a business. The apprenticeship system can be traced to as far back as in the bible days as one of the laws given to Moses which says (Exodus 21: 2). It now became evident among the Igbo tribe as the 'Igbo Apprenticeship System' called Igbaboi. The apprenticeship system is a cultural practice where young igbo boys are sent to businessmen in various cities to learn grade and after he has learned from his master, he is settled with capital and goods to start his own business. According to Ekekwe(2021), the apprenticeship system was propelled by the Igbo leaders when young men started to leave the South-east region after the end of the civil war in 1970. Iruoma in Ekekwe (2021) reiterated that after the defeat of Biafra, a breakaway state dominated by the Igbo people, the Nigerian government seized the bank accounts of many Igbos but issues them a small grant to start afresh. Many young men used the money to travel to various cities to start business (Iruoma, 2021). The security challenges in the south-east region has affected the apprenticeship system in no small way. This, in turn will also affect potential businesses from springing forth in the eastern states as these young apprentices, on the completion of their years of learning, would go out of these states to start-up their own businesses states or may even discontinue learning because of fear or uncertainty of the future of the igboland. In the words of Iruoma (2021), the Igbo Apprenticeship system fuels Nigeria's entrepreneurs and has developed numerous entrepreneurs in Nigeria and beyond and this has helped to improve the welfare of the igbo people. It has also enabled people acquire a lifelong skill such as running and nurturing a business and building value chains (Iruoma, 2021).

This calls for urgent attention in addressing the security challenges in the south-east region especially in Anambra state. We are hopeful that with the dispensation of a new government in Anambra state, these security challenges would be rooted out; because if these challenges are not addressed, the sustainability of businesses and entrepreneurship in the Igboland would be adversely affected. Also, the Igba-boi' culture which allows businessmen to return to the villages to pick up the next generation to train would be affected hence preventing the emergence of more.

Empirical Review

Gerald et al (2020) conducted a study on Apprenticeship system, an eroding culture with potential for economic anarchy. This study adopted a survey research design. The study area is southeast Nigeria, with the study covering five states of the region. The population was 500. The source of data for the study was a structured questionnaire. The method of data analysis was purely descriptive; using a combination of mean and frequencies. The study concluded that the unprecedented unemployment statistics in Nigeria can only get worse in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic, and therefore the need to encourage youths to embrace apprenticeship as a viable way forward. Among others, the study recommended that the government should partner private organizations for a public-private arrangement to create more modern apprenticeship centers suited for the 21st-century economy. Okoli et al (2019) conducted a study which examined the Igbo man perspectives of apprenticeship and entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria: Implications to economic growth using the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) and the regression model of the Ordinary Least Square (OLS). A total sample of four hundred and eighty-two (482) SMEs owners of Igbo extraction were the respondents of this study. From the result of the PCA, the principal components that serves as motivations for



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apprenticeship by Igbo entrepreneurs is the cash infusion giving to apprentice as start-up capital. Secondly, the principal components form the Igbo man perspectives of factors influencing entrepreneurial development is tolerance for risk and thirdly, the principal components from the challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system is that apprentices sometimes steal from their masters and adds to their start-up capital. Regression results revealed that all the three coefficients (The motivations for apprenticeship by Igbo entrepreneurs; Igbo man perspective of factors influencing entrepreneurial development; and challenges in the Igbo man apprenticeship system) have significant effect on entrepreneurial development in southeast Nigeria. 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. This is because of its sustainability in SMEs development and poverty reduction among the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria among others.

Nnonvelu and Onveizugbe (2020) carried out a study which seek to interrogate the practice and direction of Igbo apprenticeship, with particular interest in unraveling the reasons for the declining interest in apprenticeship generally among Igbo youths in South East, Nigeria. The study was an exploratory, qualitative research premised on desk research encapsulating a comprehensive review of ethnographic and historical records while also utilizing the observation method in informal workplaces and trading sites spread across diverse work settings. The findings indicate that the much talked about Igbo apprenticeship is facing significant challenges, and several factors have combined to demarket Igbo apprenticeship, making it less appealing to unemployed youths, with grave implications for unemployment, wealth creation and poverty reduction. Given the demand of the modern labour market, the paper called for a hybrid model of apprenticeship that introduces in a more systematic manner, elements of traditional structure with a view to improving skill levels, job independence, higher remuneration, active engagement and sustenance of interest of all stakeholders. Ifeanyi, Titus et al (2020) examined apprenticeship scheme and economic sustainability in industrial areas of South East of Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to evaluate how apprenticeship scheme influenced employment generation after civil war in South East of Nigeria, identify problems affecting apprenticeship scheme and ascertain ways apprenticeship scheme could be re-engineered in the South-East of Nigeria. As a survey research design, questionnaire was used to elicit information from one hundred and forty business operators in Aba, Nnewi and Onitsha, as the industrial cities in South East before and after the civil war, who practiced apprenticeship scheme before establishing their own business. The data were analyzed using mean, percentage and simple regression at 5% level of significance. The result revealed that Successful business start-up by apprentice generated employment for people over a long period of time in the South East after civil war. Apprenticeship scheme in the recent times lacked; involvement of labour representative in the apprenticeship agreement, written agreement under the watch of a labour officer; and opportunity to further education as well as apprentice physiological and social well being. The study concluded that apprenticeship scheme provided employment after civil war in South East of Nigeria over a long period of time; notwithstanding, apprenticeship scheme faces a lot of problems in the recent times.

Rufai & Assim (2021) conducted a qualitative study on Improving the survival rate of SMEs by mordernizing the Igbo Apprenticeship system (ImuAhia) Literatures were reviewed pertaining the origin, diversity, success and limitations of the apprenticeship system in general and Igbo



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apprenticeship system in particular. Having identified the gaps and loopholes of the system, a suitable educational model was proposed combining general and apprenticeship education. Recommendations were also provided based on international best practices. It was discovered that the system has become unattractive to the youths. Amongst others, it was recommended that the system should be reviewed such that it creates an innovative ecosystem. Acho (2020) examined the effects of apprenticeship training on entrepreneurship development in developing economies: A case study of Nigerian apprenticeship system. The study seeks to ascertain how apprentices acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills for self employment; assess the extent to which apprentices acquire entrepreneurial skills and knowledge for entrepreneurship development, and also identify the challenges encountered by apprentices in course of skill acquisition. The study adopted the survey design and interview apprentices in specific vocations. The sampled data were analyzed using Chi-square technique on Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS v.20). Experts from the academia and industry validated the instrument. The results reveal that: apprentices acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills for self-employment through formal and informal apprenticeship training systems; Lack of qualified manpower, insufficient training tools, inadequate infrastructure facilities and lack of start-up capital impede the course of skill acquisition and apprentices do ultimately acquire sufficient entrepreneurial skills and knowledge for entrepreneurship development. The study recommends that the government should provide physical, financial, and moral support for apprenticeship training to boost entrepreneurship development.

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Conclusion and Recommendation

Security challenges constitute major threat to businesses and economic development of any society. Businesses do not thrive in an insecure environment. The Igbo apprenticeship system which is reputed for creating successful businessmen is threatened by the high rate of insecurity in virtually every part of the country. Foreign and local investments cannot be attracted nor thrive in a region devoid of peaceful existence. This means therefore, that national security is a major criterion for economic development which the apprenticeship system promotes. The government at all levels should as a matter of urgency formulate and implement policies which are capable of tackling the various insecurity challenges bedeviling the nation and its economy.



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Government must negotiate and address the needs and requirements of all agitating groups as most of such groups end up as non state actors threatening the peace and livelihood of members of the society. The Igbo apprenticeship system should be remodeled to fit into contemporary business demands. Government must be decisive and deal with insecurity issues headlong as they come through training of security personnel, negotiations (where necessary), and by deploying advanced technology in managing security issues.

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