

CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE *IGBOS'* APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM OF *IMU-AHIA* (LEARNING BUSINESS)

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Abstract

Apprenticeship is an arrangement whereby a child or an adult, male or female bonds himself or herself to serve and learn within a definite time from a master who undertakes to teach his or her trade to the apprentice. The aim of this paper is to critically appreciate the Imu-Ahia system of apprenticeship, the whole idea of this system of apprenticeship, and its sustainability. Using critical analysis, the researcher finds out that apprenticeship has greatly helped in taking the youths off the street. It has also helped to provide a mentorship model between masters and apprentice, giving them a purpose worthy of emulation so they can continue the trend when they are established. The researcher hereby recommends that the Imu-Ahia system of apprenticeship be adopted in schools and enterprises as this would enhance young people's employability and thus increase their employment prospects due to the fact that it does not only serve as a means of survival for the average man but also, it has proved to be the best business incubator.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, apprentice, apprentice system, imu-ahia(learning business)

Introduction

In Eastern Nigeria, young men are called to *Imu-Ahia* which refers to an Igbo apprenticeship system. It achieved a notable global importance after the Civil War of 1967, due to the devastating effect of the war. By the end of 1970's, money and human capital were scarce, the hope of Biafra (predominantly Igbo) was lost and means of livelihood were stunted. Petty trade became one of the few ways money was made. Today, *Imu-Ahia* has evolved to become a cultural legacy not only within the Eastern region of Nigeria but also the nation at large. The Imu-Ahia Igbo apprenticeship system all begun due to the fact that the Igbo's needed to get back their future that was collected from them.

For a very long time, this model has existed in the Eastern part of Nigeria wherein artisans or traders adopt youths for apprenticeships. These apprentices research from hands-on experience and are finally set up to run their corporations with seed funding furnished by the person who mentored them. This practice is called "*Imu Ahia*" or "*igbaboyi*" and it's been the secret to the achievement and the introduction of substantial commercial distribution hierarchies and networks founded by the Igbos. It has enabled them to dominate trade in this part of our world.

The Igbo Apprenticeship system (*Imu-Ahia/Igbaboyi*) is an unpaid enterprise, incubator model that avails people the opportunity of learning a trade or business within a stipulated range of years (5-8), and at the end of the apprenticeship tenure, the trainee gets cash infusion and assistance to start up their own businesses. There is no payments throughout the period of the apprenticeship tenure, however accommodation, meals, clothing and transportation are being made available by the master. At the end of the learning years, the boy becomes as good as his master. In some cases, in order to prevent the apprentice graduate from misusing the capital all at once, the master tells him to annually return a certain percentage. Furthermore, the apprentice graduate also trains his own boys or interns in the business as well and they learn at his feet, so the circle continues. After the desolation of the Civil War and its terrible legacy of scattered grounds in Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo could not return to their homes or schools, thus they turned to the alternative—business. This is how the Igbo Apprenticeship system has been passed down from generation to generation.

There is a lot that Nigerians generation can analyze from this model. Mark Essien the founding father of the Nigerian motels reserving platform – motels.ng has continually said – “The first-class manner to discover ways to build start-ups is through working at one.” “*Imu Ahia*” has verified this to be proper for generations before, as can be seen in the similarity among the pure trade start-up and era start-up. When the apprentice trained under *Imu Ahia* completes their tutelage, there's a ceremony to mark the successful completion of the training years ‘Freedom ceremony’. This rite is just like Accelerator ‘Demo Days’. Participants of the general public are invited to be a part of the professional introduction of the newly-minted businessman. The only difference is that the primary investor in the new venture is the one who incubated it. This version is how most Igbo businesses begin. The probabilities of survival of the brand new organizations is bolstered similarly by means of presenting casual alternate finance as the brand new project turns into a part of a huge distribution delivery chain.

Imu-Ahia is vital because, before the conflict, many parents believed in school, but even the faculty is not running out for all people. The *Nwa-boys, apprentices* are taught to trade, and will also form cooperative societies and are reminded to send cash back home to have their personal residence in the East. *Imu-Ahia* is rapidly growing, it is now getting adopted by different tribes in Nigeria, and there have been requirements that *Imu-Ahia* be added to college credit. This is a sentiment shared by Stears enterprise journalist Aisha Salaudeen. “There might be arguments that those people have made lives for themselves without the

need for university, but as the sector gets modified, so do the desires of humans. An academic program will provide a younger Igbo boy that has completed *Imu-Ahia* pick the best or appropriate course, college or a polytechnic even as crossing hurdles will make him a better human being. The purpose of this study is to appreciate the *Imu-Ahia* system of apprenticeship, its importance, significance and sustainability.

Concept of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is taken to denote training programmes that combine vocational education with work-based learning for an intermediate occupational skill, and that are subject to externally imposed training standards, particularly for their workplace component. The International Labour Organization, (ILO) defined apprenticeship in its Apprenticeship Recommendation (R60, 1939) as “any system by which an employer undertakes by contract to employ a young person and to train him or have him trained systematically for a trade for a period the duration of which has been fixed in advance and in the course of which the apprentice is bound to work in the employer's service.” In 1962, when the International Labour Organization, ILO reformulated its definition, in Vocational Training Recommendation (R117, 1962), several new characteristics of apprenticeship were identified. This definition incorporates some of the key features of apprenticeship as that

- it is based in the work place supervised by an employer;
- it is intended for young people;
- it is fundamental aimed at learning a trade/acquiring a skill;
- it is a ‘systematic’ training i.e. follows a predefined plan;
- apprenticeship is governed by a contract between apprentice and employer.

In another dimension, it can be seen as a systematic long-term training for a recognized occupation taking place substantially within an undertaking or under an independent craftsman and should be governed by a written contract of apprenticeship and be subject to established standards.” Apprenticeship as explained by Ezeji and Nkajimeje, (1986) is an arrangement whereby an infant or an adult, male or female bonds himself or herself to serve and learn within a definite time from a master who undertakes to teach his trade or calling to an apprentice. Apprenticeship is a form of vocational training that has formal relationship between the master-craftsman (trainer) and apprentice (trainee) through which the mutual obligations and duties of each are established by written or oral agreement. The term “apprenticeship” is associated with a contract for the services to be rendered. The service is a form of instruction on the part of the master and learning through working on the part of the

learner or apprentice. It is a completely practical learning process that helps to put the odds on ones side to enter the job market easily. Indeed, apprenticeship enables you benefit from both a theoretical and practical training.

Apprenticeships are first and foremost a means of training, primarily of the young, to enhance employability and future employment prospects. Well-functioning apprenticeship systems are dependent upon enterprises being able to create training vacancies (and job opportunities) to take on learners. This *Imu-Ahia* or *Igba-Boy* concept works in the sort of manner that enterprise proprietors might take in young boys which may be relative, sibling or non-relative from same region, house them and have them working as apprentices in business even as studying the way it works, the secrets and techniques of the commercial enterprise. After the allotted time for the training has reached, (five-eight years), a graduation rite would be held for the Nwa-Boy (the individual that learnt the trade). He would additionally be paid a lump sum for his or her services through the years, and the cash could be used to start a business for the Nwa-Boy.

Imu-Ahia is simply the Igbo name for their apprenticeship system that purports a responsibility established businessmen [the nurturer] in a town, street or locale to pick up teenagers-young adults [the apprentice] from their homes and give them an informally formal, but raw and practical, cutthroat business education. Though these apprentices are not paid, they are afforded accommodation, transportation costs [where necessary], feeding and clothing. It also takes roughly 5–7 years. The idea centres on taking them off the streets and the perilous tendencies of an idle mind to give them a purpose, worthy of emulation, so they can also continue the trend when they are established.

Aims and Objectives of the *Imu-Ahia* System of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is a relevant education and training pathway to balance technical, soft, and social skills in an integrated approach. This system aims to empower the younger generation. It can also be referred to as ‘‘passing down the mantle’’ hence making young people well established after a stipulated period of time of about 5-7years. Currently, the lack of soft and digital skills, less qualified students and more complex jobs gives apprentices the opportunity for a more prominent role. The *Imu-Ahia* system of apprenticeship helps in training young people in various skills despite their educational background. *Imu-Ahia* system of apprenticeship aims at providing opportunities for young people and adults to achieve a vocational qualification.

Benefits of the *Imu-Ahia* System of Apprenticeship

The *Imu-Ahia* system assures the best match between the skills they need and the training of young people. This system of apprenticeship brings about respect, humility and loyalty between the master and the apprentice thus fostering peace and unity among brothers. Employers can secure the skilled labour they need. This is particularly important for smaller companies which do not have the power to influence the curriculum of vocational training and sometimes find it hard to attract the attention of talented young people. The cost of inducting new staff is reduced compared with the cost of recruiting qualified applicants from the labour market.

Conclusion

In conclusion like trendy incubation platforms that provides businesses ideas for learning, co-creation, training and cultivation of business models, the Igbo apprenticeship system offers same in a world of high stake business where profit and loss hold a premium or is valuable, the Igbo apprenticeship system serves as a preparatory ground for higher function and offers a lot of risky and more practical platform or coaching and training. Some apprentice are accountable for sales and store management where honesty, responsibility and work ethics are core principles. In *Imu-ahia* system the apprentice is simply saddled with high responsibility in the practical world.

Recommendation

In addition to careers advice, schools should make students and parents; see the possibility to undertake an apprenticeship. This could include organising, in cooperation with business organisations and enterprises, school visits to enterprises, teachers spending time in a local enterprise to observe its apprenticeship scheme, and apprentices coming into schools to talk to pupils. *Imu-Ahia* system of apprenticeships enhances young people's employability and this increases their employment prospects. This helps to ease their entry or re-entry to the labour market and provides an opportunity to combine work with the acquisition of a vocational qualification.

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