



Local Incubator Platforms: Lessons from the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) in Nigeria

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Abstract. Apprenticeships are the oldest form of training in the world of work and business, representing a means of passing on skills. This practice predates the medieval era, where trade guilds, journeymen, and craftsmen flourished to ensure that skills were passed on and the productive power of labour could be harnessed. Modern-day research has, nonetheless, redefined entrepreneurship, omitting this crucial aspect of the field, while the domain of apprenticeship has been narrowly conceptualised to solely encompass blended work and class-based skills transfer. Without denying the impact of both viewpoints, this study draws a parallel between entrepreneurship and apprenticeship using the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) model as a case study. Using the model of the Igbo Apprenticeship System, this paper explores how this combined individualistic, yet collective model, bridges the gap between poverty, entrepreneurship, and the power of mastery. This research utilises the illustrative case study/process tracing approach to examine a pool (60 participants) of Igbo entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The findings show the benefits of mutual aid or a ‘share-the-wealth’ free-market approach that has helped reduce poverty levels in the Igbo communities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Apprenticeship, Value Creation, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Experiential Learning, Community

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1. Introduction

Africa has a long history of running businesses embedded in family and communal relationships from the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras (Imhonopi et al., 2013). Within this peculiar business terrain, there is evidence of business start-ups, competitive analysis, business strategy, location and business structuring, albeit revolving around value creation and community (Adeola, 2020). However, these features have hardly been documented in the entrepreneurship academic literature, presumably because of the perceived difference in format and style when compared with Western business ideologies and entrepreneurial strategies which support innovation and opportunity (Adeola, 2020; Schumpeter, 1934). The Igbo, one of the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria, located in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria, are naturally enterprising and ingenious. This has made that the Igbo informal enterprises have been identified for their integrative role in nation-building (Meagher, 2010). Harneit-Sievers (2006) has also recorded the exceptionalism of the Igbo group or clan, even in the midst of crisis, as experienced in the almost three years of Nigeria's Biafra Civil War.

However, the literature has failed to link this kind of organized entrepreneurship with the rising interest in apprenticeship and the contribution to nation-building. Despite the recognition of Igbo entrepreneurial activities, empirical studies remain scarce. Research within the region has focused on socio-cultural influences, patriarchy (Ajekwe, 2017; Ojiaku, 2015) and informality of the economy (Meagher, 2010). The current research bridges that gap. Specifically, we seek to investigate the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) in Nigeria, a business model used by the South-Eastern region of Nigeria, and uncover some of the strengths and present them in the form of lessons learnt of this age-old apprenticeship model. We embrace Gonon's definition of apprenticeship since it aligns with the (IAS) model we seek to examine. *'Apprenticeship is a mode of learning that focuses on acquiring specialised skills pursuant to getting young adults ready for work and society'* (Gonon, 2011, p. 33). Many countries deploy apprenticeship programmes in a variety of forms, but they are all grounded in the underlying principle of 'mastery'. Mastery is the terminal point of the apprenticeship, with the 'apprentice becoming the Master', a process that is developed according to specific historical and cultural contexts (Deissinger et al., 2006). This view of apprenticeship supports the need to transition from a solely subsistence view of entrepreneurship to a more transformational view that provides jobs and income streams for others, which is arguably long overdue (Maas et al., 2019).

This research, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Can the IAS model be used to illustrate how entrepreneurship can effectively balance the needs of the individual and the collective to create a wide-scale socioeconomic impact?

2. Can the sharing model of the Igbo Apprenticeship System be propagated and scaled?

By exploring these questions and others, we hope to contribute to knowledge on entrepreneurship and apprenticeships in the under-researched context of Nigeria. First, we add to knowledge on entrepreneurship and local incubator hubs, which is different from Western assumptions. Second, we examine the apprenticeship model from a unique perspective that combines entrepreneurship and mastery to steer up the entrepreneurial ecosystem, in an arrangement void of the government. In doing so, we highlight how trust enabled Igbo entrepreneurs to overcome institutional barriers and successfully establish a dynamic business culture. Third, we theorise the Igbo context of entrepreneurship through apprenticeship and, in doing so, provide an understanding of how the ecosystem is developed and transmitted across generations.

This study is structured as follows: First, the article discusses the literature and arguments on the definition and types of apprenticeship and specifically interrogates the Igbo Apprenticeship System further. The socio-cultural and socio-economic framework of the Igbo Apprenticeship System is explored, highlighting its foundation in communal trust, and examined through the theoretical lenses of Social Trust Theory and Expectancy Theory. Second, the illustrative case study approach is used to amplify the voice of the indigenous people who engage in the IAS. Third, based on emerging themes from the coding process, this study examines the relationship between social trust and expectations within communities and how this influences an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of contributions, limitations, and implications for future research.

2. Literature Review

This section is divided into two parts. First, we explore the literature with the aim of offering insights into the types of apprenticeships available on a global scale. Second, we attempt to highlight the Igbo Apprenticeship System by considering the socio-cultural and socio-economic context and the Igbo Apprenticeship System in context.

2.1 Types of Apprenticeship

Apprentice and apprenticeship have different definitions and meanings based on the dichotomy that exists in the contextual embeddedness of Global North and Global South countries. However, the underlying principle remains that an apprentice refers to someone who learns a job or skill by working for someone for a period of time, who is very skilled at the job (Varetto, 2017). In most cases, the individual practically engages in a specific area of interest, to be able to earn a

living from that vocation or profession (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). Therefore, this individual is expected to submit himself/herself for that specific period of time under the tutelage of a master/mistress who holds a mastery in that field/specific area of interest (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). There are three distinct types of apprenticeship in the literature, namely Traditional, Formal, and Informal (ILO, 2017).

2.1.1 Traditional Apprenticeship

This is largely dependent on informal oral agreements and is heavily attached to strong traditional rules and kinship, particularly in rural areas. These forms of apprenticeship do not include school-based training (Igwe et al., 2018). Here also, apprenticeships are oftentimes subjected to very strict gender division.

2.1.2 Formal Apprenticeship

This form of apprenticeship is a modern, formalized and well-structured form of learning (Molz, 2015; Olulu and Udeorah, 2018), is regulated by law, and a large period of the apprenticeship is carried out within the identified or selected company, while also alternating with the school environment. Lancy (2012, p. 115) sees apprenticeship in a more generalised manner as a “formal contractual relationship between a master and a novice of a specific duration which is designed to serve two ends: provide cheap labour, and/or fees to support the master’s enterprise, and to afford the apprentice an opportunity to learn and receive certification or mastery”. According to the US Department of Commerce (2016), formal apprenticeships possess some distinguishing features namely: (a) apprentices are registered and get paid by employers during the entire training period; (b) apprenticeship programmes must meet national requirements or standards for registration; (c) apprenticeship programmes must provide on the job learning, and job-related classroom instructions; (d) on the job learning is usually conducted under the supervision of a workplace mentor, and (e) the aftermath of the training is an industry recognised credential that showcases occupational proficiency.

For example, in 2012, the European Union provided a region-wide overview of the range of apprenticeship-type schemes prevalent in the EU Member States. The aim was to appraise the employability levels of apprentices and improve their labour market transition (European Commission, 2012). It is worth noting that the EU concept of apprenticeship is on-the-job (i.e. company-based training) in combination with school-based training schemes, for which apprentices are paid. These schemes are formally contracted, subject to governance and oversight and often lead to a qualification (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). While in Australia, apprenticeships follow a similar model to the EU, they also have traineeships, which are a newer and shorter form of apprenticeship that focuses on the service sector. Both pathways, however, are controlled by the government (Nnonyelu &

Onyeizugbe, 2020; Smits, 2006). Apprenticeship schemes in the UK are skills-focused, but many are linked to a university degree (Smith et al., 2018).

2.1.3 Informal Apprenticeship

According to ILO, informal apprenticeship is “*the system by which a young learner (the apprentice) acquires the skills for a trade or craft in a micro- or small enterprise learning and working side by side with an experienced craftsman*” (ILO, 2012, p. 4). This relationship between the Apprentice and the Master is normally embedded in local norms and traditions, and the training costs are usually shared between both parties. This form of mimetic learning often happens outside of the formal education system. In this vein, Collins et al. (1991) described the cognitive apprentice, citing how children learn to speak by imitating others in their family or community.

As a result of these informal apprentices being largely embedded in the informal economy, they are usually subject to the precarious conditions of working in the informal economy where access to rights and protection are either non-existence or the apprentices are not aware of such rights, as guaranteed by, for example local associations or trade unions. They are also unaware of other training opportunities available to them, and the large influx of persons into the labour market due to the low absorption rates in the formal economy has led to increased competition in the informal economy (ILO, 2012). In support of our view on the interrelatedness of entrepreneurship and apprenticeship, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) report (2012) suggests that informal apprenticeships go beyond the concepts of human capital and labour market, which view apprenticeship as a transactional, two-party contract, towards an approach that recognises the value of a practical, experiential business training system, with their roots in a culture and a community. Informal apprenticeships are entirely workplace-based and do not include a school-based component of learning (Chankseliani et al., 2017).

This is similar to the model operated in developing countries, such as Nigeria, which is mostly informal (Smith and Kemmis, 2013). These informal apprenticeships are not formally governed; there are no contracts of employment, and education is not the primary goal. The IAS’s informal apprenticeship’s primary goal is to foster and promote entrepreneurship. This training system of the informal economy has evolved out of a tradition of family and kinship-based apprenticeship. According to Neuwirth’s (2017) Ted Talk, as cited in Kanu (2020, p. 18), on his experience of the Alaba International Market domiciled in Lagos, Nigeria, but majorly operated by Igbos originally from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria:

‘And when I finally got it into my head to ask, ‘What is this “settling”?’’, it turns out that when you’ve done your apprenticeship with someone you work for, they are required to set you up in business. That means paying your rent for two or three years and giving you a cash infusion so you can go out in the world and

start trading. That's locally generated venture capital. Right? And I can say with almost certainty that the Igbo apprenticeship system that governs Alaba International Market is the largest business incubator platform in the world'.

A recent comparative study of eight countries —Australia, Denmark, Egypt, England, Finland, Germany, India, and South Africa— by Chankseliani et al. (2017) aimed to examine the apprenticeship provision at the macro, meso, and micro levels in order to investigate existing policies and purposes of apprenticeships. The study revealed some interesting findings. The findings suggest that formal apprenticeships remain less widespread in the Global South economies, with Asia and Latin American countries showing low levels of apprenticeship participation. Table 1 shows a description on the formality of apprenticeship and a description of how the apprenticeship programme is run in these countries.

Table 1. Types of Apprenticeship mapped by country

S/No	Country	Apprenticeship Style	Scheme (s)
1	Australia	The Australian apprenticeship model adopts a traditional 'dual' system which includes both workplace and institution-based training (Smith, 2019). They run the apprenticeships and traineeships programme with a similar model of learning. With apprenticeship focusing on trade occupations while traineeship focusing on non-trade occupations such as in services, or personal care sectors (Noonan & Pilcher, 2017).	Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program
2	Denmark	The Danish VET system is also a dual system combining school-based and workplace training. The enrolled students start with a 1-year school-based vocational period and then the students are expected to sign an apprenticeship contract at a workplace for the remaining part of the programme (Jørgensen, 2011; 2017).	National Advisory Council on Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training
3	Egypt	In Egypt, the informal apprenticeship system can be seen dating back to Roman, if not Pharaonic times. This programme is popular in crafts, construction, retail, garment-making, and automobile maintenance (Westermann, 1914).	
4	England	In England, quite similarly to the dual approach, work-based learning is seen as an answer to skill gaps in the English workforce. Therefore, apprenticeships help skills development, improve wages and support career progression for the apprentice/individual (McIntosh, 2007).	Modern Apprenticeship (MA) Competency-based training (CBT) National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

5	Finland	Finnish apprenticeship system is perceived as providing individuals a second chance. The provision is fully funded by the state, and the apprenticeship framework includes a relevant vocational qualification and a minimum general education content, including Finnish language, maths, science and social science (Aho et al., 2006).	
6	Germany	Germany also adopts a 'dual' system that includes school-based learning as well as company learning (Pilz & Li, 2014). This is often regarded as the ideal apprenticeship system and is operated by the local chambers of commerce and industry called Kammern. The German apprenticeship system offers 323 recognised training occupations.	Vocational Training Act (BBiG) Crafts and Trades Regulation Code (HwO).
7	India	In India, teaching and learning were carried out through various traditions. The guru-shishya tradition in times past encouraged disciples learning trade-related skills and knowledge through unique relationships of 'guru' and 'chela' in a makeshift school called <i>gurukul</i> (Bhurtel, 2012). The relationship between the guru and the disciple was based on the bond fuelled by respect, commitment, devotion and obedience. However, in recent times, India has adopted the dual model of apprenticeship albeit a 'silent' adoption, by not fully making references to the German example, perhaps due to the difficulty in selling a 'borrowed' foreign solution to a localised problem (Valiente et al., 2021).	Gurukul
8	Nigeria	The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) is a process whereby a prospective entrepreneur is enrolled, typically between 12 and 25 years of age, under a Master, who is usually an experienced entrepreneur, to understudy the desired skills for a particular business/trade. It is an unpaid business apprenticeship model at the end of which the apprentices receive cash infusion and support to start their own business. The apprentices are traditionally all boys (Asikaogu, 2018).	The Igbo Apprenticeship System

Source: Adapted from Chankseliani et al. (2017).

Chankseliani et al. (2017) conclude that embedding the context of apprenticeship within each national environment proves useful as this would support the development and analysis of the statistics, and their interpretation of them, which requires detailed contextualisation.

2.2 Understanding the Igbo Apprenticeship System

2.2.1 The Socio-cultural and Socio-economic Context of the IAS

The Igbo people's apprenticeship has a long tradition (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020) and is deeply culturally embedded. The apprenticeship scheme is seen as the seedbed of the Igbo's entrepreneurial spirit, and it aims to foster self-employment and self-sufficiency as a way of life (Chukwuma-Nwuba, 2019), the

significance of which is explored in the present paper. In the IAS, families match aspiring young entrepreneurs with experienced Masters, with whom they work side-by-side, often in micro or small enterprises. An arrangement is made verbally between the families of the would-be apprentice and the trainer-to-be, for training to be undertaken over a period of time. The service to be provided by both parties is usually specified at the outset of the relationship. In some situations, symbolic payments are made to the Master, but this is largely seen as the binding of a relationship between the two families (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020). This practice is widespread and is partly believed to be a major contributor to the region's entrepreneurial reputation. The businesses created through this process, irrespective of where they are located, enjoy a longer life span than most start-up businesses in the rest of the country; it is a model that is clearly working (MG Modern Ghana, 2019; Orugun & Nafiu, 2014; Olutayo, 1999).

The Igbos are renowned for their capacity to recognise opportunities and to act entrepreneurially; to enter new markets, and to adopt new innovative technologies. Consequently, they have been categorised as the most naturally enterprising indigenous people of Africa (Meagher, 2010). Much of their success is predicated on the power of their social networks (Meagher, 2010). In all businesses, and in every part of Nigeria, the social networks that have resulted have played an effective and vital role in leading economic entrepreneurial activities, particularly in Southeastern Nigeria (Tranberg Hansen & Vaa, 2004).

The Igbos' culture is characterised by sharing, mutual respect, brotherly understanding, communal cohesion, and the acceptance of the obligation to serve and to work. The principle of community and brotherhood manifests in various spheres, including a sense of the sacredness of life, good relationships (be it in business or marriage), respect for elders and authority and the joint development of local communities (Asikaogu, 2018). Indeed, a popular Igbo adage says, 'go the way many people go; because if you go alone, you will have a reason to lament' (Davidson, 1969). Consequently, as Asikaogu (2018) argues, the values of the Igbos depend largely on individual identification with and within the community. Given that the community in Igboland is the custodian of the people, they are mandated to abide by the community customs and norms. The community becomes the guardian of behaviours and even though members are interdependent, they are also independent and self-reliant. In this way, an Igbo person must operate within an ancestrally chartered system referred to as the clan, which is what gives an Igbo his or her identity and citizenship. The Igbo culture, therefore, offers its members both ideological and physical identity. The Igbo community denotes, more than anything else, ontological equality of human relations in as much as all the members of the community are thought to have descended from the same ancestor.

The necessity for socio-economic independence among the Igbos is pivotal, and through the years, their entrepreneurial skill has been brought into the spotlight (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017). Similarly, their entrepreneurial

performance as a group is outstanding and has surpassed that of any other ethnic group in Nigeria and the wider region (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017). Entrepreneurship, to an Igbo, is any sort of self-employment through the establishment of a business or start-up (popularly known as ‘ibido ahia²’ or ‘imu ahia³’).

2.2.2 The Igbo Apprenticeship System in context

The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) (known as Igba-Boi or Igba-Odibo), is a process whereby a prospective entrepreneur is enrolled, typically between 12 and 25 years of age, under a Master, who is usually an experienced entrepreneur, to understudy the desired skills for a particular business/trade. It is an unpaid business apprenticeship model at the end of which the apprentices receive cash infusion and support to start their own business; this is known as settlement. The apprentices are traditionally all boys. The Master trains the young ‘boi’ (boy) and provides housing, food, and maintenance for the agreed predetermined amount of time (at least 3 years, but usually not more than 10 - 15 years). In the main, no fee is provided to the Master. The training terms and conditions are agreed verbally between the Master and the boy’s family and are predicated on reliability and confidence. This prolonged apprenticeship ensures that the apprentice has internalised the business concept and gives the Master/Mistress the opportunity to profit from a bigger firm. The lengthy training period transitions through various stages, which often commences with a period of service (servant status) and progresses to give the ‘boi’ (boy) the opportunity to learn useful information, such as (a) where to find goods for less money; (b) how to interact with different sellers; (c) how to understand the business clan. This is the foundation for the ‘boi’ (boy) to create his or her own business network (Ekekwe, 2018).

The Igbo Apprenticeship Systems is highly experiential as many of the participants are poorly educated. However, the principle of ‘settlement’ has created a sharing economy that has resulted in the creation of the largest incubator mechanism in the world (Neuwirth, 2017) where scarce resources, such as cash and capital, are communally managed and where trust is a foundational principle. Reports show that the Igbo traders control 74% of total investments in Nigeria (Orji, 2021). Against this backdrop of long-term socioeconomic value creation, this paper examines how the IAS provides a nurturing ecosystem that utilise both cultural and individual ‘internal’ and ‘external’ experience as part of the cognitive and social fabric of learning (Dobson et al., 2018). The duration of the apprenticeship and its cultural embeddedness facilitate experimentation and reflection as part of the learning process; the cognitive and the social (internal and external experiences) enable the learner to progress.

2. Ibido Ahia means starting a trade. The apprenticeship signals the commencement of a trade.

3. Imu Ahia means learning a trade.

3. Theoretical Backdrop

Based on the evidence shown in the literature, this paper explores the relationship between managing scarce resources, such as cash and capital and the underlying foundation of communal trust through the theoretical lenses of Social Trust Theory and Expectancy Theory.

3.1 Social Trust Theory

The Igbo apprenticeship scheme is built on trust. Trust has been shown to lower the transaction costs of monetary actions and the inherent risk of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2012). This is particularly relevant as Nigeria is characterised by weak institutions (Dike, 2005).

The concept of social trust argues that trust belongs to the society and not to an individual, it adopts a top-down approach that focuses on how trust is not just a personality trait of an individual, but individuals participate, contribute and benefit from a trusting culture, that encourages an atmosphere of trusting attitudes and behaviours. Delhey and Newton (2003) argue that social trust theory has six major theoretical approaches. The first two relate to the individual, 1) personality theory and 2) success and well-being theory, while the remaining four are societal theories, including 3) voluntary organization theory, 4) social network theory, 5) societal theory and 6) community theory. Voluntary organization theory suggests that a society is more likely to generate a higher level of social trust if there is a presence of a variety of voluntary associations and organisations within that society. Social network theory suggests that people form circles of private and unofficial contacts, which come together to solve the problems of scarce resources and services. Societal theory, on the other hand, focuses on the variations in trust caused by societal conflict. While community theory converges on the features and characteristics of local communities, rather than any informal social networks existing amongst them (Putnam, 2000, p. 205).

This study will adopt the community theory of trust because it gives the foundation for practical insights to emerge where the role and influence of the Igbo people is based on community trust and resource sharing (Delhey and Newton, 2003). Proponents of this theory argue that “community trust is the positive expectations by community members towards current and future opportunities in the local community where they live and interact” (Di Napoli et al., 2019, p. 560). Community trust in Igbo culture is a complex and multifaceted concept, deeply embedded in social structures, traditional practices, and cultural values. It is maintained through strong kinship bonds, communal cooperation, respected leadership, effective conflict resolution, and shared spiritual beliefs. Understanding these elements provides insight into how trust is cultivated and sustained within the Igbo community and in the apprenticeship system. Community trust in the Igbo culture is deeply rooted in traditional values, social structures, and communal practices. It is maintained within the culture through:

a) Emphasis on kinship and extended family networks. This is based on mutual obligations, shared responsibilities, and collective decision-making. Family ties are strong, and there is an expectation of loyalty and support among relatives. Thus, the choice of a master is not dependent only on the decision of the parents or guardian, but also on inputs from the extended family.

b) Age Grades and Peer Groups, also known as ‘Otu’ or Umunna which play a crucial role in social organization, providing a sense of belonging and accountability.

c) Communal living and cooperation which foster a sense of unity and trust, as individuals rely on each other for mutual support and success.

d) Religious and spiritual beliefs foster community trust in the Igbo community. Their belief in a higher moral order encourages individuals to act with integrity and honesty, knowing that their actions are being observed by both the community and the spiritual realm.

Community trust positively correlates with what the Igbo call ‘settlement’. A settlement is both a pattern of community living, that is physical as well as cultural, and that encourages role modelling, mastery of experiences, risk-taking and creativity to occur in a safe environment until the individual is capable of operating independently and is ‘settled’ (Igwe et al., 2018). In the second sense, being settled is the point at which the apprenticeship ends and is provided with the means to start their own venture. By living and working together in the settlement, with a strong sense of community and mutual well-being, a subsistence view of entrepreneurship is transformed by a system providing jobs and income streams for others. When settlement occurs, the servant becomes the master, and the process recommences.

3.2 Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory, which is also known as Rational Intention Theory, is adopted for this research because rational prioritization has a documented effect on individual’s decision-action intentions (Irene et al., 2021). The application of this theory is vital for understanding the dynamics of the IAS model. The foundations of expectancy theory can be found in the work of Lewin (1935); however, it was psychologist Victor Vroom who proposed that the level of motivation applied to a task is contingent upon the rewards anticipated. Individual cognition in decision-making is the focus of the expectancy theory, and this is based on the anticipated outcome (reward) rather than deprivation (Barba-Sánchez and Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2017, as cited in Irene et al., 2021). However, outcomes are not the only aspect that influences decision-making (Hirschi and Fischer, 2013). People consider their wants, values, and beliefs, as well as their expectations when evaluating the likelihood of success, in each situation.

As a result, according to Vroom (1964), motivation is a function of a person's beliefs and expectations that particular actions – referred to as instrumentality – would result in specific outcomes – referred to as valence – and the attractiveness of those outcomes. In 1969, Graen proposed an extension to expectancy theory, when he described first-order and second-order behaviour. First-order behaviour is judged as standard – (normal) for someone performing specific tasks; second-order behaviour results from internal and external rewards and penalties one is subjected to when performing a role. Although numerous studies (for example, Gatewood et al., 2002; Edelman et al., 2010) have examined the empirical application of expectancy theory in the entrepreneurship arena, not all of them have proven the interrelationships indicated by Vroom (1964). In most cases, they confirm the fundamental hypotheses in many real-life situations in certain industries (Renko et al., 2012). Also, Locke and Baum (2007) claimed that expectancy theory provides a fantastic foundation for comprehending why and how certain people decide to engage in entrepreneurial activities as opposed to being engaged in a traditional paying job. In the context of this study, it could help us understand why some parents would enrol their young children in IAS. According to Hsu et al. (2014), “expectancy theory would predict that an individual willingly invests the effort necessary to start a business if he/she believes that high input of effort will make it feasible for him/her to attain desirable goals through business ownership” (p. 123). The effort-performance-outcome model, according to scholars like Gatewood et al. (2002) and Manolova et al. (2012), suggests that the process of starting a new business is mostly reliant on these three factors: expectation, instrumentality, and valence. In his study of entrepreneurial motivation, Holland (2011) found that entrepreneurs stick with their ventures “when the outcome valences are high” (p. 347). Thus, we can infer that a person's desire to continue working for himself or herself is influenced by both the subjective likelihood that they will meet their goals and the allure of self-employment. In the context of the IAS model, we argue that:

1. Expectation: Effort Leads to Performance

In the Igbo apprenticeship model, the apprentice (boi) believes that hard work, diligence, and adherence to the master's guidance will lead to mastery of the trade or business.

- **Effort:** The apprentice puts in effort through daily tasks, learning the intricacies of the trade, and contributing to the business.
- **Performance:** The master provides feedback and correction, ensuring the apprentice's efforts translate into improved performance and skill development.

2. Instrumentality: Performance Leads to Rewards

The next component of Expectancy Theory is instrumentality, where the apprentice believes that good performance will be rewarded. In the Igbo

apprenticeship model, this is evident through the promise of ‘settlement’ at the end of the apprenticeship period.

- **Performance:** Successful completion of tasks, learning the business, and demonstrating reliability.

- **Rewards:** At the end of the apprenticeship, the master rewards the apprentice with capital, tools, or goods to start their own business. This settlement is both a tangible reward and a recognition of the apprentice’s hard work and dedication.

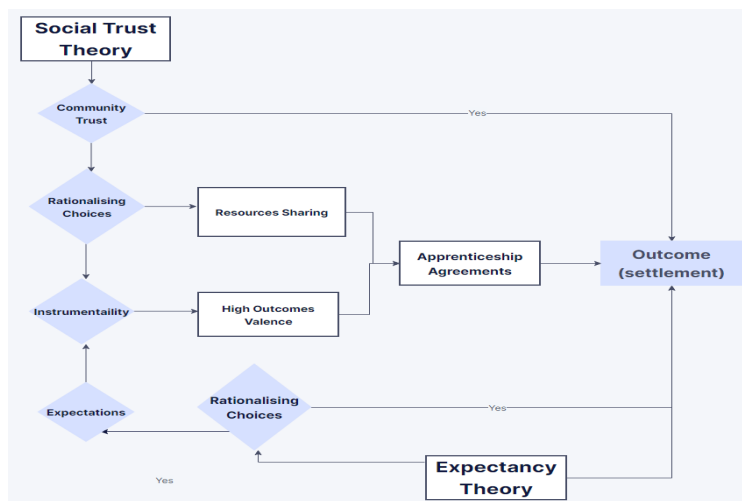
3. Valence: Value of Rewards

Valence refers to the value the apprentice places on the rewards they expect to receive. In the Igbo culture, the rewards from the apprenticeship are highly valued because they represent a pathway to economic independence and social status.

- **Value of Rewards:** The settlement enables the apprentice to establish their own business, gain financial independence, and earn respect within the community. The cultural and economic significance of these rewards ensures that the apprentice is highly motivated throughout the apprenticeship period.

This study, which is based on the Social Trust Theory and the Expectation Theory, examines the Igbo entrepreneur’s decision to join the IAS with a view to rationalising the choice to serve for a period of between five and ten years without pay, trusting and believing that at the end of the apprenticeship, they will receive funding for their own new venture from their Masters. The causal relationship between the Social Trust Theory and the Expectation Theory is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Nexus between Social Trust Theory and the Expectancy Theory.



Source: Authors.

4. Methodology

This research utilised the Illustrative Case Study approach that employs the Process Tracing (PT) technique (Irene et al., 2024). This technique was chosen because it enabled us to trace causal mechanisms with the use of detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how causal processes play out in an actual scenario (Irene et al., 2024). Process Tracing (PT) can be used for case studies to gain a better understanding of the causal dynamics that produced the outcome of a specific past case, and to provide more information on generalizable causal mechanisms linking causes and outcomes within a population of causally similar cases (Beach, 2020). Additionally, process tracing adds analytical value because it makes it possible to draw firm causal conclusions from examining the evidence that a causal mechanism actually operated in a particular example. However, given that Process Tracing (PT) is a single-case method, it can only be used to draw conclusions about individual cases. To this end, we have chosen to use the illustrative case study which is a descriptive case study that highlight one or more circumstances of an event in order to clarify the situation (Hayes et al., 2015). This use of the illustrative case study and the process tracing techniques adds more depths to our research.

To begin with, we ‘interrogated’ the IAS’s empirical data and conducted a wide-ranging search of the theoretical literature to find any hints about potential mechanisms of the IAS that might constitute a cause and outcome (Beach, 2020). Given the nature of this research, our focus was to use the IAS (cause) to show how a trust-based model can result in the development of a sustainable local incubator platform and transformational entrepreneurship in a particular case (Igbo entrepreneurs) and more broadly across other cultures in Nigeria and beyond. Because of this emphasis on causal explanations, Process Tracing (PT) enabled more than just providing a descriptive narrative account of the IAS program and the expected outcome. Instead, by employing the Process-Tracing (PT) technique, we were able to examine the theoretical causal pathways connecting the cause (IAS programme) and the effects (the Incubator platform and transformational entrepreneurship). Therefore, we adopted a deductive approach, which is often employed when an empirical correlation between the cause and effect has been found in existing literature but there is uncertainty concerning the mechanism linking the cause and the effects.

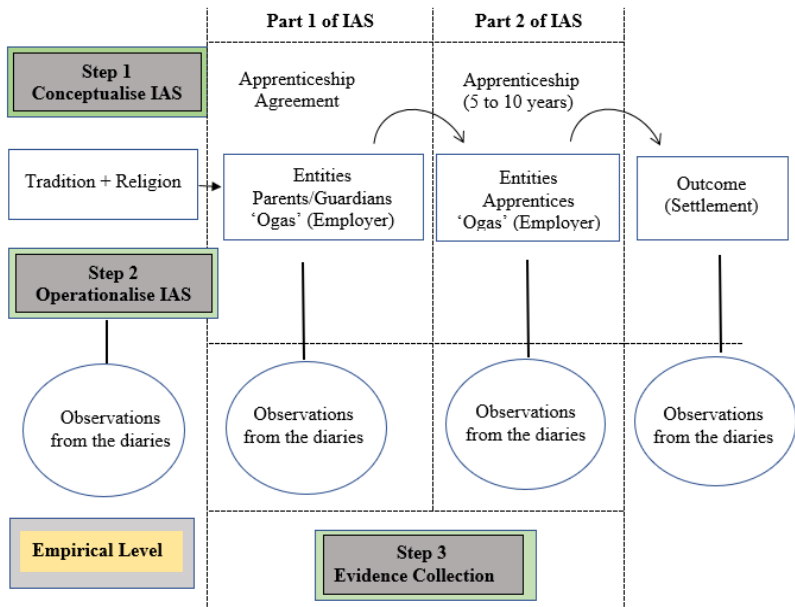
We began by conceptualising the causal mechanisms, in this case, the rational choices of the parents to enrol their young children into the IAS. We focused on the parts of the mechanisms (i.e. tradition and religion) that are theorised to be necessary for the expected outcome (i.e. settlement). Next, we developed observable manifestations for each part of the causal mechanism, including daily diary entries of some of the entities engaged in the IAS. We then gathered empirical data to see whether these observable manifestations were present, which enabled us to make logical inferences (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). Once

the causal mechanisms had been conceptualised, the next step was the operationalisation, which involved translating the theoretical expectations into specific predictions of observable manifestations present in the case. After conceptualising and operationalizing the mechanism, we moved on to the final step (step 3), which involved gathering empirical data that can be used to draw causal conclusions, updating our confidence in:

- a) whether the predicted mechanism was indeed present in the case,
- b) whether it functioned as predicted, or
- c) whether only some components of the mechanism were present.

We concluded from the empirical data gathered that a causal mechanism was present in the IAS case, as shown by the bold lines in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Process Tracing (PT) technique used in this study (adapted from Beach, 2020).



The sample for this research was drawn from a pool of Igbo entrepreneurs in Nigeria currently in the IAS system either as Apprentices or as 'Ogas' (i.e., employers). The datasets include: (a) 10 former apprentices from across different sectors who have participated in and supported others through the apprenticeship program (regarded as Master or 'Ogas'); (b) 20 current apprentices, and (c) archival records. The data was coded to look for isolatable characteristics, and participants' texts were also coded and used for connectives, discourse demonstratives and off-register words. Thematic analysis was employed for this study. This study utilises social trust and expectancy theories and focuses on

group behaviours and the cultural institutions of the Igbo people, as well as marketplace functions. To this end, we adopted a multi-modal approach for data collection that included interviews with the Masters (employers) and direct participant observations of apprentices by way of daily journal entries. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), *'when carefully managed, and with suitable co-operation from informants, the diary can be used to record data that might not be forthcoming in face-to-face interviews or other data collection encounters.* (p. 164).

In soliciting diary entries, we had to establish a balance. We sought to establish a user-friendly procedure that enabled the participants/diarists to express themselves while also directing them toward the subjects or themes we were interested in. We used several methods to accomplish this: (a) the diary required straightforward, everyday activities, such as daily chores at home and in the shop; (b) the instructions were straightforward and non-prescriptive; and (c) we established a rapport with the apprentices that enabled us to call them often and gently nudge them not to forget the entries. Given the nature of the research, we aimed to gather unbiased data and minimise distortions which can occur in natural social settings by providing minimal structures on how to input the diary entries. Rather, we provided user-friendly informal guidelines, the purpose of which was to forge mutual respect where the diarists are treated as equal partners in the research process. We then created a protocol for getting feedback and, if necessary, verifying the correctness of diary entries. The diary-interview method offered us the opportunity to establish a connection and link the journal to a thorough interview.

4.1 Limitations and Challenges of Methods and Materials

Given the nature of this study and the participants' characteristics, we believe the diary data collection process was appropriate; however, this was not without its challenges. Firstly, most participants were not very literate and had no idea how to keep diaries. Therefore, we spent the first four weeks training them on how to complete the diaries and what information was relevant to the study. Secondly, most of them forgot to make any entries, thus we had to make multiple calls to remind them to make the entries. Thirdly, some apprentices leave it until the end of the week to make the entries, by which time they may have forgotten some of the activities undertaken. Thus, we found similar entries for consecutive days with little depth. Consequently, the period of data collection was unnecessarily prolonged beyond our expectations.

4.2 Data Analysis

As stated earlier, thematic analysis was employed for this study. Given that this study utilises social trust and expectancy theories, our analysis focused on group behaviours and the cultural institutions of the Igbo people, as well as marketplace functions. The diary entries were collated and transferred to Nvivo where we

systematically categorized excerpts from the diaries into themes and patterns. Open coding system was used to break down the data into meaningful segments after which we followed up with axial coding to link categories and identify core themes which were developed to capture the essence of the apprentices' journeys. In developing the themes, we ensured that we focused on elements of social trust and rational intentions, given the objectives and theoretical framing of the study. The resulting coding protocol is presented in Table 2, while reference points and direct quotes from the diary data collection are reported in Figure 3.

Table 2. Coding Protocol for this study

Descriptive codes	Second-order Themes	Theoretical Backdrop
"I always knew that I was going to be an apprentice because my parents always spoke about it as I was growing up. The only issue was 'with who' and 'what trade'. My uncles found me a master which my parents accepted" (App. 3).	Collective Responsibility	Community Trust and Social
"In our community, extended family plays a big role in assuming responsibilities for members, financially, emotionally, you name it. So, a lot of people are involved in making the decision and ensuring that the apprentice is settled at the end." (App 18).	mutual obligations, shared responsibilities, and collective decision-making	Kinship and extended Family
"In our culture, we are taught to embrace everyone whether they are close or distant relatives. I believe this is why we all feel that we belong. Igbo people always extend love and support beyond our clans and villages to others" (App 10).	Sense of belonging and accountability (communal activities)	Peer Groups ('Otu' or Umunna')
"The reason why parents trust us 'Oga' to settle their children is because of the 'Omenala' of our people. It is like the values of or ethos of our society and the foundations of our activities and actions". (Master 1)	Higher Moral Order	Religious and Spiritual Beliefs
Think of the IAS as a man who starts a business and becomes successful. He then brings young boys and train them to be future competitors. While doing this, he takes on significant responsibilities to guarantee the success of those rivals. This is why the IAS is successful because it closes the inequality gap. Apprentices become masters and the cycle continues. (Master 5).	Wealth Distribution Community-Based Finance Model	Economic Interdependence
The relationship between the master and apprentice is a long-term relation that involves families and clans. Remember that the apprentice serves for a long time and even after they are settled, they still remain under the mentorship of the master for a long time (Master 2)	Long-term Relationships	Communal Living and Cooperation
"There is poverty in our country. The only way out is a trade because so many people go to university but no job. With this, you are sure of settlement" (App 8)	Value of Expected Rewards	Expectancy
"If you work hard for your master and you are diligent with his business, he will settle you well" (App 11).	Effort-Performance Dynamics	Instrumentality
"If you learn very well and show your oga that he can trust you, then after settlement, your oga will continue to support you. In this business, dedication is important" (App 18).	Performances-Rewards Dynamics	Valence

4.3 Ethical Considerations

The diary collection method, which was adopted for this study, involved participants recording their experiences, thoughts, and feelings over a period and provided rich, detailed data for research. However, it also raised specific ethical considerations that we had to address to ensure the integrity of the study and the well-being of the participants. Firstly, we ensured that we followed the approval protocol for Coventry University which entailed ensuring that participants fully understood the purpose of the study, what the diary method entails, and the type of information they could record. Participation was voluntary, and due to the longitudinal nature of diary studies; we reaffirmed consent periodically to ensure that participants remained comfortable with their involvement. Being mindful that diaries may contain sensitive personal information, we ensured that participants knew they were not obliged to record anything they were uncomfortable sharing. By addressing these ethical considerations, we could ensure that the data collected is both valuable and respectful of the participants’ experiences and privacy. This approach fostered a trustworthy research environment and enhanced the quality and integrity of our study.

5. Findings and Discussions

Given that this study aimed to explore the lessons from the IAS and the potential to scale entrepreneurship, we focused on the structure and fundamental principles of the IAS, the learning process and the lessons from the IAS that are transferable to other contexts. The findings from this research showed that the average number of years for the apprenticeship ranges between 3-10 years (depending on the trade/sector and the age of the apprentice on enrolment), and up to 15 years (in extreme cases). It must be noted that due to the nature of the apprenticeships and cultural considerations, girls do not take part in the process. Rather, they engage in different kinds of apprenticeships that do not require the apprentice to live with the Master. Therefore, all the participants in this study are male. The breakdown of the profiles of the respondents is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Demographic profiles of respondents

No. of respondents		Percentage (%)	Type of businesses	Percentage (%)
<i>Age of respondents</i>				
15-30	40	67	Supermarket	25
31-40	14	23	Clothing/tailoring	5
41-50	5	8	Electronics	12.5
Above 50	1	2	Mechanics	5
			Building materials	20
Marital status of respondents			Health and Beauty	7.5
Single	40	67	Electrical materials	5
Married	20	33	Medical Supplies	5

Years in Business (business experience post apprenticeship) – 20 Masters			Interior decoration	2.5
			Boutique	7.5
			Wholesale and Retail	5
< 2 years	2	10		
2- 5 years	5	25		
6-10 years	8	40		
> 10 years	5	25		
Years in Apprenticeship (current apprentices) – 40 Apprentices				
< 1	3	7.5		
2 - 5	10	25		
6 - 10	21	52.5		
10 - 15	4	10		
> 15	2	5		

5.1 The Structure and Fundamental Principles of the IAS

As stated earlier, the Igbo culture is deeply rooted in traditional values, social structures, and communal practices. Through folktales and historical narrative, the Igbo people learn about trust, integrity, and communal responsibility. They also have deep religious and spiritual beliefs, which plays a role in fostering community trust. All of these factors have an impact on the way the apprenticeship is structured. The structured environment of the apprenticeship, which includes hands-on training and real-world experience, reinforces the apprentices’ expectancy that their efforts will result in acquiring valuable skills and knowledge as well as the trust that their hard work and dedication will be rewarded in the form of a ‘settlement’.

The findings from this study showed that all the apprentices had no contribution to the decision-making process and the choice of trade; it was based on the decision of the parents/guardians and other family members (family ties are strong and there are mutual obligations, shared responsibilities, and collective decision-making). This is consistent with the argument of Ezeajughu (2021) that was partly instituted to address the lack of economic options post-civil war in the Igbo land. Thus, the IAS was established as an unspoken ‘zero tolerance’ policy to address young boys and adult idleness, and it is noteworthy that many of them eventually prospered. Most commonly, the parents/family of the young boys decide which trade their child pursues with little or no input from the would-be apprentice. According to some participants:

“The apprenticeship was a difficult journey. My parents, who had no real knowledge of the business or the type of person my ‘oga’ was, chose a member of our village who was succeeding in his business. Being under someone’s control and staying there is not easy. I served in domestic capacity and in the business” (Trades apprentice, Participant 15).

“I apprenticed for 5 years, but there are some of us who apprenticed for up to 8 to 10 years. It all depends on the Master you have” (Former apprentice, now turned ‘oga’)

The findings from this study (consistent with existing literature) showed that the apprentice and the employer both benefit from the system. One of the main motivations for the employer is a logical economic choice to employ inexpensive labour to supplement scarce resources, but for young people whose parents lacked the funds to send them to school, the apprenticeship offered sustenance, the chance to learn new employable skills, and the prospect of becoming self-employed, while also lessening the financial burden on their families. Consistent with the expectancy theory, the apprentice (boi) believes that hard work, diligence, and adherence to the master’s guidance will lead to mastery of the trade or business. Of the participants in this study, 90% indicated that their parents chose the ‘Igba-odibo⁴’ approach whereby a family sends their son to live with and serve a wealthy businessman within the society. There is no fee for ‘Igba-odibo,’ and the rules and conditions are primarily oral but are nonetheless ingrained in Igbo customs, norms, and traditions. For the remaining 10%, their parents opt for the ‘Imu-oru’ approach, which is more technically oriented and emphasizes greater diversification in skill acquisition and business practices. This approach often involves exposing apprentices to a broader range of trades or technical skills beyond a single specialization, enabling them to adapt to varying market demands and economic opportunities. Such diversification equips them with a versatile skill set, increasing their ability to innovate, pivot in challenging economic conditions, and seize opportunities in multiple sectors (Ezeajughu, 2021). A trial or test phase of roughly three months, during which the apprentice’s suitability for the work or other function is being tested, typically precedes the final apprenticeship contract between the Master and the apprentice’s family. When an apprentice is under his master’s care, he serves in a domestic capacity because he is not only learning the trade of the master, but also acts as a domestic servant at home. Most of the participants indicated that the 3-month test period was the most difficult for them and had them walking on the proverbial ‘eggshells’. As one apprentice put it:

‘It was not easy to arrive and serve at the home of someone not related to you. When I came to Lagos to serve, I felt like going back to the village. It was difficult because it is something I had not done before, and I was afraid of making mistakes for fear of being sent back and embarrassing my family. I felt lonely and struggled in the first few months, in addition to being obedient and submissive to my oga’ (Mechanic apprentice, Participant 40).

4. In this context, once a ward is under the care of his Master, he becomes a servant ‘Odibo’ (servant).

Regardless of the type of apprenticeship approach, there are guiding principles. First, the Master adopts the role of guardianship, thus, for a predetermined period, the Master assumes responsibility for the servant's upkeep and needs, and in exchange, the servant helps the Master out around the house and with his business. The apprentice must be devoted to his Master. Secondly, the Igbos are resilient and believe in their eschatological destiny, therefore, they emphasise hard work, competitiveness, and the pursuit of personal achievement (Kanu, 2019). This is consistent with the instrumentality aspect of the expectancy theory, where the apprentice believes that good performance will be rewarded, and the settlement is both a tangible reward and a recognition of the apprentice's hard work and dedication. Finally, the Igbos have built a social and political culture that is characterised by egalitarianism and competitiveness based on personal achievement and not reliant on one's father or brothers. This has great implications for the apprentices and some of them indicated that they served family members as apprentices and were not treated any different from other non-related apprentices. If anything, they worked harder because the Igbo people place a high value on hard work, and they believe it to be the only way to achieve greatness. According to one of the participants:

"I served my brother, but I did not get any preferential treatment because he was my brother. I worked hard like every other apprentice to achieve my own dreams. My people have a saying that ... onye obula choro ihe mara mma ga adi nkwadobe ikuchara ya okpofu n'ihu na o dighi ije oma na-ada ne'lu (this means that anyone who desires great things must be ready to work hard for them). This is my guiding watchword" (Tailoring apprentice, Participant 38)

5.2 The Learning Process of the IAS

As stated earlier, this paper examines the IAS using the framework of transformational entrepreneurship to foster ecosystems and build platforms that use both 'internal' and 'external' experience as a component of the cognitive and social fabric of learning against the backdrop of long-term socioeconomic value creation. Illeris (2003) defines learning as any process in living beings that results in a change in capacity over time and is not just caused by biological maturation or ageing. There are two distinct, yet integrated processes at work when it comes to the cognitive (content), emotional (incentives), and social (interaction) elements of learning-by-doing or workplace learning (Poortman et al., 2011). First, there is a social interaction between the apprentices/learners and the environment in which they are doing their work. This process generates the impulses needed for the second internal acquisition phase, which happens along the apprentice's content-incentive dimensions. Impulses for the internal acquisition process are produced as a result of social engagement. The knowledge, skill, or competency is actively built through an acquisition process that is primarily cumulative, assimilative, accommodative, or transformative. Which of these processes takes place depends on the apprentice/learner's past knowledge and motivation in relation to the learning environment and content.

A thorough theoretical framework for describing and comprehending learning in the apprenticeship environment is necessary to be able to elucidate the learning processes and consequences. However, there is a dearth of theoretically grounded and practically applicable research in the area of on-the-job learning (Poell et al., 2001), especially for the IAS. For instance, Schoenfeld (1999) believes that learning theories' integration of the social and cognitive elements of learning is either incomplete or insufficient. The 'acquisition metaphor' and the 'participation metaphor' should be combined to bring the social and cognitive aspects of learning together. Additionally, Billett (2008) makes the case for the interdependence of people's knowledge and the social context in which they think and behave, while Illeris (2003) believes that learning has a social component as well as cognitive and emotional components.

To better understand the process of learning in the IAS, this paper adopted the diary data collection approach, which allowed the participants to self-report their behaviours, activities and experiences over a four-week period. From the data, we saw a consistent pattern that is quite traditional/customary at best and different from the formal apprenticeship systems. The Igbo apprenticeship system consists of three stages and starts with the Master visiting the community to choose a young boy who will help him in his business. The young boy is then taken as an apprentice. The participants in this study indicated that while they found the starting point challenging, their motivation always propelled them to want to succeed and excel in the service of their Masters. This is consistent with the instrumentality aspect of the expectancy theory, where the apprentice believes that good performance will be rewarded (in this case, with a 'settlement'). The initial period included a more domesticated level of work while they gained their Masters' trust and learned the ropes of the business. It is also a period where the emotional (incentives), and social (interaction) elements of learning-by-doing or workplace learning emerge. The findings showed an unstructured approach to learning; however, there is significant emphasis placed on repetition as a vital approach to learning a skill. The main goal at this point is to develop a deeper grasp of the process, patterns, and concepts. This repetition of patterns is beneficial to Mastery even though it is sometimes difficult to find opportunities to repeat concepts, especially when working. No matter how well a business supports the growth of its learners, specific issues will arise that need to be resolved, and those issues may not necessarily be related. To this end, we sought to understand the feelings and sentiments of the apprentices in the early stage of the IAS by encouraging a deep reflection in the diary entries. According to some participants:

I became a boi because I want to be an electrician and sell electrical materials. There are a lot of people in this business and the competition is big. But I want to be the best, so I want to work hard. Every day, I wake up early to do the housework in my master's house. I cook, clean and make sure that my master's

children get ready for school. Then I rush to the shop. My work is to open the shop and clean it, dust the whole electrical parts before displaying some of them outside the shop (Electrician apprentice, Participant 23).

Before I go to the shop in the morning, I help my madam with the housework and prepare the children for school. In the shop, I am the fourth apprentice, in the morning, my duty is to clean all the sewing machines, display the materials, plain and patterned materials and also dress the mannequins. I want to be the best tailor and I am happy that I am finally learning the trade. When I get home, I prepare food and then help my madam's children with their homework before I sleep. I feel so stressed, but I am fine. I must do what it takes to achieve my dream (Tailoring apprentice, Participant 15).

The apprentice has the chance to learn about business models during the subsequent stage of incubation. He receives guidance and training in how to interact with customers and close sales. Honesty, accountability and work ethics remain the core principles of the incubation stage. The interactions between the employer, apprentices and customers result in the impulses for the internal acquisition process. The content, knowledge, skill, or competency—as some may prefer—is actively built through an acquisition process. The IAS provides the same opportunities for learning, co-creation, training, and the development of business concepts as contemporary incubation platforms do in the competitive, aggressive world of high-stakes business where profits and losses hold a premium. Both serve as stepping-stones to loftier goals, but the IAS offers a more challenging and real-world setting for training and nurturing. Although some apprentices begin their careers in low-risk positions, such as stall managers or heavy lifting, there is a worthwhile duty that is important to the overall success of the company they work in. Some of these apprentices even manage sales and stores, positions where integrity, responsibility, and work ethic are fundamental values. The distinction is that in contemporary incubators, business owners take part and pay rent, but in the IAS, trainees are simply treated as employees with huge responsibilities in the real world except on rare occasions. As one apprentice put it:

“Some masters may choose to have their apprentices work for their living in order to keep them in check” (Former apprentice now turned ‘oga’).

The Master, at the end of the apprenticeship, ‘settles’ the apprentice by providing him with capital or any other agreed-upon services. The young man starts and manages his own enterprise using this money, as well as the knowledge and skills acquired during his apprenticeship.

5.3 Lessons from the IAS and its Potential for Transformational Entrepreneurship

As stated earlier, one of the guiding principles of the Igbo people is “Onye aghala nwanne ya,” which roughly translates to “may one never leave their brother

behind.” According to this belief, a man has a responsibility to pass on his money to his brothers in order to build a just and balanced society. A man’s wealth benefits the entire community. Transformational entrepreneurship aims not to treat entrepreneurs as a homogeneous group, but to consider the context in which entrepreneurship happens. Maas et al. (2019) define transformational entrepreneurship as referring to a “holistic and heuristic orientation in terms of entrepreneurship promotion and combines the individual and other sub-systems (such as society and institutions) interacting and collaborating to create a positive framework in which opportunities can be exploited beyond the local level” (p. 1).

The IAS has evolved over a prolonged period of time and has its roots in the traditions of the Igbo people and the belief that while each should serve the needs of the community, they must also be able to stand on their own two feet to do so. From a transformational perspective, and as highlighted by this study, trust, obedience, resilience, and hard work are the core attributes of the system that underpin the IAS. Learning takes place through repetition and progressive responsibility, building confidence and capability. A strong sense of duty and obligation keeps the whole process on track, along with the promised reward of settlement at the end of the journey. The system probably works as effectively as it does, due to limited alternatives and poor education.

Several lessons could be learnt from this system that may be transferable to other contexts. Given our theoretical framing, we explored social trust with particular emphasis on the community trust element. Trust is also included in the definition and understanding of social capital. One component of the relational dimension of social capital that is frequently mentioned is trust and trustworthiness. The structural and cognitive dimensions of social capital are the other components. One of the main approaches to social capital is this conceptualization, which separates structural, relational, and cognitive elements. The findings from this study highlight three main lessons that can be transferable to other contexts and models across regions with the potential for transforming societies. They highlight the importance of collective action and an acceptance of social capital as a collective resource with numerous participants in the multi-dimensional practice of community building. These three lessons will now be discussed in turn in the following three subsections.

5.3.1 Social Trust and Social Capital

As already noted, the IAS is a process whereby a family informally indenture their young men to live and serve the wealthy in their society, in the hope that they will be rewarded at the end of the apprenticeship with the skills and means to be self-sustaining. Trust is a key component of the arrangement. The apprentice trusts that his parents will choose wisely; they trust that each party will act in an honourable way; the oga trusts that the apprentice will be good at the job, and they trust that a settlement will follow. The IAS is characterised by customary or traditional contract ties. Neuwirth (2017) notes that “the interesting thing is that

nothing is in writing; everything is done on the basis of trust and reputation". At the start of the arrangement, the boy's family would often gather and meet with the Master. Additionally, at the conclusion of the apprentice time, the Master will settle the lad in his home, in front of his family. The IAS emphasizes a community-driven approach where successful entrepreneurs support the next generation. This creates a strong network of mutual support and trust. While the model involves experienced business owners mentoring apprentices and providing guidance, skills, and knowledge, the mentorship extends beyond business to personal development and community values (Ugwu, 2023).

The IAS has worked over the years despite the lack of well-defined regulations and written contracts to govern the relationship between the Master and the apprentice. This success is the result of various elements. Firstly, the apprentice exercises prudence because he understands his future will be shattered if he fails or destroys his master's business. Secondly, because he is aware that his future is intertwined with his master's financial success, he exercises caution in handling his affairs and works to grow the master's business. According to Okoro (2018), this fear encourages honesty during the years of apprenticeship because any recognised act of dishonesty, theft, and extravagant use and waste of the business funds results in the termination of the apprenticeship. However, after the agreed-upon number of years of work, one can face the wrath of the community back home if the oga dismisses the apprentice on unreasonable grounds or breaks the conditions of the apprenticeship. Therefore, the Igbo apprenticeship system is not merely a Master and apprentice relationship; it is also a community or family matter. As one participant puts it:

"Igba boi is very beneficial. Without it, I would not have gained the skills, experience, and capital needed to start my own business. It builds strength, instills obedience, and broadens your exposure. It is a valuable system that helps you become versatile and adaptable. (Former Apprentice, now oga).

To conclude, the IAS highlights social trust and social capital as two closely interconnected phenomena. This relationship is well-articulated in Francis Fukuyama's conceptualization, which encapsulates the IAS philosophy:

"Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community ... Social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between. Social capital differs from other forms of human capital insofar as it is usually created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like religion, tradition, or historical habit" (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 26).

5.3.2 Engaged Citizenship

An individual's involvement, interactions with others, and duties within their community are all included in engaged citizenship. The IAS was created to help the Igbos survive the fallouts of the civil war (Ekekwe, 2018). It is a youth-oriented system, focusing mostly on those between the ages of 12 and 25. It also includes a young-person paradigm that frames the apprenticeship experience as a partnership between an older individual or group and a younger, less-experienced person. The IAS was designed to keep the young boys busy after the war where the Igbos appeared to have lost everything. The Igbo culture disapproves of young people loitering around on the streets (Kanu, 2019). The Igbo apprentice system makes sure that if a youngster is unable to attend school, he learns a trade instead of staying at home, typically the kind of trade that his family members have been involved in. Thus, according to Kanu (2019), two basic principles drive the IAS: (a) eradicate idleness among Igbo children and discourage laziness (b) extend a helping hand to a businessperson who will, in turn, transfer knowledge to the young person, helping him. The objective is to keep kids off the streets and away from the dangerous inclinations of an idle mind by giving them a goal that is admirable so that when they become established, they may carry on the trend. Modern incubation systems are exceedingly sensitive and generally risk-adverse, with a few exceptions. Although some apprentices are turned away due to character and trust issues, the Igbo apprenticeship system is primarily about giving chances, making them good members of the community. According to one participant:

“My people believe there is no room for laziness. We believe in hard work, and we have a saying that ... *Onye obula choro ihe mara mma ga adi nkwardobe ikuchara ya okpofu n’ihi na o dighi ije oma na-ada ne’lu* (this means that anyone who desires great things must be ready to work hard for them). This is my guiding watchword” (Participant 10, Electrical Apprentice)

The Igbo apprenticeship model aligns well with the principles of the Expectancy Theory. Apprentices are motivated by the clear connection between their efforts, the skills they acquire, and the substantial rewards they expect at the end of the apprenticeship. This motivation is reinforced by the structured nature of the apprenticeship, the tangible rewards promised, and the high value placed on these rewards within the Igbo culture.

5.3.3 Reciprocity

As the apprentices progressed and became ‘ogas’, they returned home to pick up their kinsmen and take them back to the cities, dividing and sharing opportunities. This strategy is repeated over and over, and the region that was once ravaged by war, which should have been the poorest in Nigeria, is today regarded by the United Nations as the most secure in human development (Iruoma, 2021). Once an apprentice completes his training and gets settled by his master, he has a duty

to repay his master's kindness to others by doing the same for other young boys at home. The elders usually bless them on departure and admonish them with sayings like

"I remember my uncle reminding me of my responsibilities as I prepared to leave home to commence my apprenticeship... 'Onye aghala nwanne ya' [a person does not leave his brethren behind], (Participant 8)"

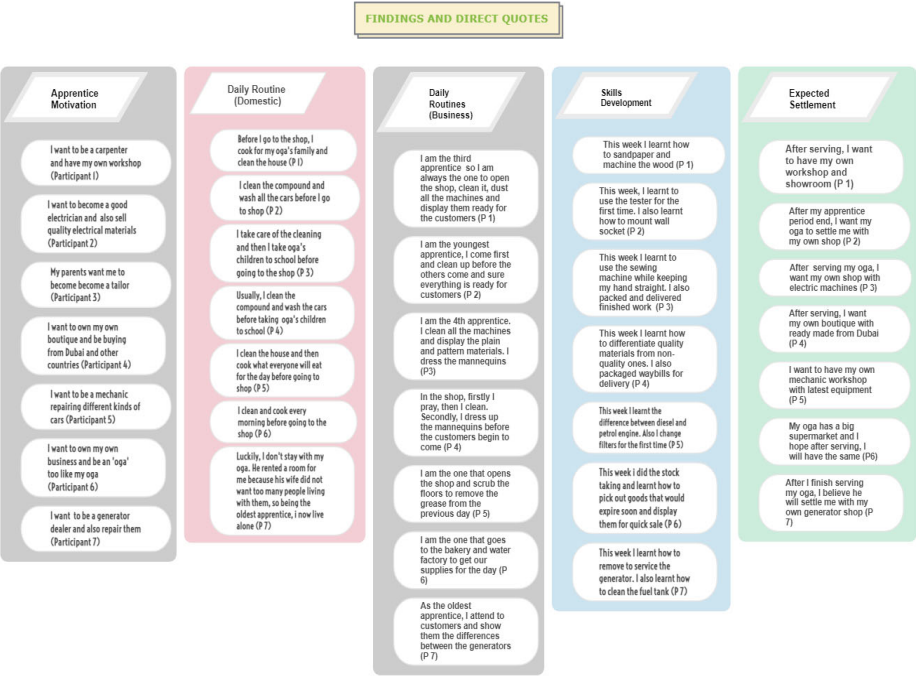
"I am currently training 3 apprentices from my village. As soon as these ones are settled, I plan to train more because it is a good culture that should be sustained" (Former Apprentice turned oga).

In contrast to other economic models in other parts of Nigeria, the IAS is a mutual aid economy. It is a framework that juxtaposes the Bible (religion) and tradition, and there is a hidden principle that makes it possible for this market to expand. It is essentially regulated by the sharing principle with honesty, accountability and reciprocity at the core of it. More millionaires and billionaires have been created by the Igbo apprenticeship system than by the entire Nigerian university economic system (Kanu, 2019). Wealthy and renowned businessmen who own companies such as Innoson, Cocharis, Ibeto, Chikason, and Ekenedilichukwu are not simply millionaires for themselves; through the apprentice incubator platform, they create millionaires every year. There is always a millionaire waiting to be born because of the way the system is set up. Each circle is preparing for the birth of a millionaire, who is either being courted, incubated, or supported. The IAS is the most gratuitous incubation system that keeps the Igbo people ahead of all other demographics in Nigeria. According to one participant:

"My Oga gave me N12 million (\$7,000) after 9 years of serving him. When I started serving, I was 14. He told me 30 percent of that N12 million was a loan to be repaid over my first 5 years of being independent. I repaid him 9 years ago, but he gave it all back to me. He wanted to make sure that I did not squander the investment, that's why he told me it was a loan" (Former Apprentice, now oga).

Finally, the fundamental lesson is that the IAS has the potential to have a positive impact on socio-economic development in the different regions across Nigeria due to its 'holistic' and 'heuristic' approach in terms of promoting and combining entrepreneurial eco-systems which in return creates a positive framework for opportunity exploitation beyond local contexts.

Figure 3. Reference Points and Direct Quotes from the Diary Data Collection



6. Conclusions and Implications

The main objective of this study was to examine the Igbo apprenticeship system to see its potential to create a wide-scale socioeconomic impact, especially by effectively balancing the needs of the individual and the collective community. The findings from this study confirm that this is indeed possible by formalizing, propagating and scaling the existing IAS system through proper awareness and incentives. The research set out to answer the following questions:

1. Can the IAS model be used to illustrate how entrepreneurship can effectively balance individual and collective needs to create a wide-scale socioeconomic impact?
2. Can the sharing model of the Igbo Apprenticeship System be propagated and scaled?

The participants argue that the IAS can be considered one of the many blessings of the Nigerian culture with many advantages. The key success factor is the informality of the model. Some researchers have described it as an informal incubator for start-ups that provides mentorship to aspiring entrepreneurs. Our study reveals that the IAS has significantly reduced poverty in the Igbo

communities by mass-scaling business opportunities, as every man has an opportunity to learn a trade. This study equally highlights the widescale socio-economic impact of the IAS through transformational entrepreneurship, such as job-creation and sustainable income sharing through its concept of reciprocity, which by extension reduces the possibility of these young persons' engagement in youth crime and other forms of juvenile delinquency as they are usually encouraged to join the apprenticeship from a young age. It is a local incubation system that provides the apprentice with a business environment where they can learn and develop an entrepreneurial mindset and engage in co-creation, training, and business model development. This model of apprenticeship provides a unique model of valuable insights for broader application. Understanding its implications can inform research, policy-making, and practical approaches to entrepreneurship and economic development globally.

6.1 Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

This model of informal learning can be explored further using a longitudinal approach to track the career trajectories of IAS graduates and measure the system's impact on their economic mobility and social integration. Such a study can investigate how the principles of the IAS can be adapted to different cultural and economic contexts, especially in other developing regions. Technology integration into the IAS is an under-explored area that could show digital tools and platforms which could be used to enhance the IAS and make it more accessible and scalable without losing its core values.

Presently, the IAS exists independently of government interventions and regulations. That the model has been successful is not in doubt, and the model can be replicated in other regions of the country, and indeed Africa. What is hard to replicate is the culture and ethos of the Igbo, which is the mainstay of the success of this approach. In the absence of trust, government input and policies may be required to facilitate the transfer. The Nigerian government and other African countries can adopt the IAS practices and the entrepreneurial development approach of the Igbos as a strategy for developing African entrepreneurship. The sustainable development of SMEs and poverty reduction in the Igbo land is evidence that this strategy works. However, replicating the model has its complexities. If the process is formalised and brought under the purview of government to ensure that the relationship between a master and an apprentice is formalised, the IAS could have the potential to transform from the informal and culturally embedded system into the transactional model operated elsewhere in the world. This formalised intervention backed by the government would guarantee that the apprentices receive sufficient mentoring of the fundamental ideas that underpin and drive the Igbo apprenticeship system.

The IAS is community-based; therefore, community resource centres can be established to provide training, mentorship, and financial resources to aspiring entrepreneurs. Given that most of the apprentices have no formal education, these

centres can provide literacy training that can further enhance their business potential. The centres can also provide business ethics training to emphasize ethical business practices and social responsibility in IAS to promote sustainable and inclusive economic development. Technology and innovation hubs/platforms can facilitate mentor-apprentice matching, training resources, and business management tools, as well as support apprentices in developing new products and services and leveraging technology to enhance their businesses.

Finally, while the Igbo model has transformational elements in its approach, many entrepreneurs could transition from being subsistence or social entrepreneurs to becoming truly transformational entrepreneurs. Utilising the approach of the Igbo has the potential to promote wider socio-economic transformations on a systemic level through entrepreneurial activities that address the major challenges plaguing many African societies, such as poverty and environmental degradation. In addition, such transformational entrepreneurial activity may create the much-needed (job) opportunities in their communities. This would require a systemic change which, according to Maas and Jones (2019), comprises: “(a) enterprise awareness; (b) innovation; (c) balancing push and pull factors for change; (d) seeking growth and (e) seeking leadership” (p. 8).

6.2 Contribution

This study aimed to explore what lessons might be learned from the Igbo apprenticeship scheme and how transferable the model is to other communities, specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa. We aimed to explore how the approach might fit the description and definition of transformational entrepreneurship and, in doing so, to further contribute to the literature on this approach to conceptualising apprenticeships. A major contribution, we feel, is the evaluation of trust (both social and community) and its links to expectancy theory, specifically to valance. Choices are made by parents and by ogas (business owners) and require both trust and an expectation that their efforts will be rewarded with successful outcomes. This is equally true for apprentices, who are required to invest heavily in a trust- and community-based system, in the belief that their efforts will be rewarded.

Process tracing enabled an in-depth interrogation of data and enabled perspectives to be gained from apprentices, who are now oga, and those currently in the system. It is clear that many masters have multiple apprentices simultaneously and so have heavily invested in the process. The study contributes to knowledge by offering an understanding of how income, venture creation, and business sustainability can be improved, considering the number of small businesses that fail within the first 5 years of their establishment (which is 70% according to Saibu and Bello, 2019). This is particularly pertinent to Africa but could be extrapolated to other areas where the community exerts a strong influence on society.

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