

An Exploratory Study of Igbo Business Mentoring (Nwa Boy) for Establishing Small-Scale Enterprise: Panacea to Youth Unemployment in South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract

In both developed and developing societies, entrepreneurship is not only considered panacea to youth unemployment; it is regarded a vital strategy of economic growth and national development. In a developing society like Nigeria, studies have shown its importance in creating employment opportunities for the youth but such studies neglected the usefulness of Igbo business mentoring. Also, other studies have shown different strategies for starting entrepreneurship but it has been observed that such studies ignored the Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) in-spite of its reputation for raising entrepreneurs among youth in the South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. Given this, the present study, used data from secondary source to: (i) find out factors which predispose youth to engage in Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy); (ii) ascertain the differences between Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) and other forms of apprenticeship; and (iii) investigate the contributions of the Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) to small-scale enterprise, job creation and national development. Based on facts in the literature review, the study argued that Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) has been promoting self-employment drive among youth in the region. It also maintained that it has been contributing to entrepreneurial activities in the zone and across Nigeria. Finally, the study averred that the scheme could become a veritable stratagem for addressing the problem of unemployment among youth if the government, at all level, could lend its support to it. With government support for the scheme, youth in other Geo-Political Zones of the country could engage in it so as to be self-employed and be free from the scourge of unemployment.

Keywords: Igbo culture; Business mentoring; Nwa boy; Small-scale enterprise; Youth unemployment.



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1. Introduction

Every society, primitive or complex type lays much emphasis on job creation. This is due to its expediency in: (i) sustaining and preserving members of the society from extinction (Marx and Engels, 1882; Opazo, 2016); (ii) preventing mankind from idleness, which some authors have connected with criminality (Chery, 2017; Omboto *et al.*, 2013); and (iii) enabling humanity to engage their potentials to better their lots and to foster national development (Igwe *et al.*, 2013) etc.

National development has been conceived as an inclusive and collective socio-economic, cultural, religious and political advancement of a given society (Chilenga, 2017). Among other things, studies have shown that it's attainment in any given society engenders employment opportunity for the populace through industrialization and entrepreneurial activities (Hogenstijn *et al.*, 2018; Kosa and Mohammed, 2017).

Entrepreneurship according to Otovic *et al.* (2017) is a vital component in company or industry which is regarded as the next facilitator of economy after land, capital and work. These scholars contend that it entails invention or innovation based on economic activities of a person (entrepreneur) or a group of persons (entrepreneurs) that are strongly connected via contracts in corporations, joint-stock companies etc. Such economic activities usually

result in small, medium and large scale enterprises that play crucial roles in addressing the social problem of unemployment ([Mohamad et al., 2019; Suvittawat, 2019](#)).

Unemployment is the number of persons who are due for employment in a given society but could not get any despite the fact that they are seriously searching for jobs ([Bartley and Ferrie, 2001](#)). Although, some studies have shown that unemployment is a global problem of concern to humanity, its rate of escalation is different from countries to countries. While scholars such as [Burchell et al. \(2014\)](#) believe that its rate of escalation has been reduced to a greater extent in developed countries, authors such as [Msigwa and Kipesha \(2013\)](#) have argued that its rate of escalation is increasing in developing countries, creating avenues for poverty and criminality, mostly among the youth population that is generally regarded as vital force in nation building. Many youths in developing societies are grappling with unemployment because of the economic meltdown, inadequate industries and the closure of some of the existing ones due to power outage and unfavourable environmental factors [Msigwa and Kipesha \(2013\)](#).

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the [International Labour Organisation \(2017\)](#) states that the number of unemployed persons in the region increased from 28 million in 2016 to 29 million in 2017. Out of this figure, the rate of youth unemployment stands at 7.2% which makes it one of the worse cases of unemployment in the world.

Within SSA, Nigeria is regarded as one of the richest countries in terms of natural and human resources but the wealth is yet to reflect in the lives of many individuals who are living in poverty ([Eweniyi, 2018](#)). This is due to the menace of unemployment, which has negatively affected the populace, most especially the youth population in-spite of some measures employed to curtail its escalation [Abimbola \(2011\)](#) cited in [Adeleke \(2017\)](#). Out of the measures, [Adetiloye \(2018\)](#) highlighted the importance of apprenticeship in arts and crafts, while authors such as ([Abubakar, 2012; Binks and Vale, 1990; Davidson and Honing, 2003; Delgado, 2012; Ekong and Ekong, 2016; Imhonopi et al., 2013; Olokundun et al., 2014; Oluwatobi et al., 2018; Rasak et al., 2018; Shane, 2000](#)) emphasized the expediency of entrepreneurship. However, it could be observed that none of these studies focused on Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) which seemed to be prominent in raising entrepreneurs' in South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. Therefore, the focus of scholars on entrepreneurship has continued to flood literature globally; with continued silence and neglect on Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) as a strategy for establishing entrepreneurial activities.

Although studies conducted in developed nations where the practice of Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) is not known could be exonerated from this neglect but its desertion in the literature emanated from academia in Nigeria where the practice is prominent among entrepreneurs in the South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria [Orugun and Nafiu \(2014\)](#) is not impressive and needs to be rectified. It is on this note that this study was conceived to: (i) find out factors which predispose youth to engage in Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) for establishing small-scale enterprise; (ii) ascertain the difference between Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) and other forms of apprenticeship; and (iii) investigate the contributions of the Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) to small-scale enterprise, job creation and national development.

The Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) according to [Udeze \(2014\)](#), is an apprenticeship strategy which youth in South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria usually employ to acquire skills and to raise funds for establishing small scale enterprises. It involves youth forfeiting marriage early in life for a service that will eventually earn them a financial support and skills required for establishing businesses.

The importance of this effort in Nigeria where the rate of unemployment is unusually high cannot be gainsaid considering several studies that have associated the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria with poverty and criminality ([Adebayo, 2016; Ajimotokin et al., 2015; Bartley and Ferrie, 2001; Habayeb, 2015; Javaid, 2017](#)). Therefore, a study of this nature could provide clues to the government towards solving the high rate of youth unemployment.

The paper is divided into 3 parts. These include: introduction; review of relevant literature and concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature on the following sub-titles

2.1. The Concept and the Nature of Igbo Business Mentoring (Nwa Boy)

The concept of Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) is a special form of apprenticeship which entails youth sacrificing early marital life for trainings that will earn them business skill and financial support to establish small-scale enterprise ([Udeze, 2014](#)). Thus, it could be regarded as a traditional form of apprenticeship or mentoring specifically designed for youth to acquire knowledge and financial support needed to establish business. It could also be regarded as an aspect of informal education for engaging in business transactions among youth in Igbo-Land where trade and commerce constitute the major occupation ([Olawale, 2018](#)).

The origin of nwa boy has been traced to Igbo business learning culture otherwise known as Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System (ITAS) [Orugun and Nafiu \(2014\)](#). This apprenticeship scheme is considered an informal and unstructured training scheme arranged for a definite period of time, which youth undergo so as to gain a desirable aspect of entrepreneurship skill through the development and automation of the ITAS in order to earn themselves a business of a life time ([Dibia, 2013](#)).

Business mentoring, nwa boy could be regarded as an aspect of Igbo culture for training in entrepreneurship. The process commences from each community in South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria and it involves youths or their parents or siblings or friends identifying successfully entrepreneurs in their communities and approaching them for mentoring. If the proposal is accepted, the prospective entrepreneur will present his parent or guidance to sign the agreement form. As soon as the agreement document is signed, the youth begin to serve his mentor in his business

till the end of his mentoring. Afterwards, he receives his financial settlement to start his own business. In the process of time, another youth could be introduced to him for mentoring and he has the obligation of training him.

The scheme has been in existence for a long time in the South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria ([Udeze, 2014](#)) and it seems to have been responsible for the root or foundation of many successful entrepreneurs.

2.2. The Concept of Small-Scale Enterprise

Over the years, small-scale enterprise has been perceived differently among scholars due to the fact that the concept varies from one country, state and institution to another and also depends on the level of economic development per time ([Agbo, 2018](#)). Similarly, its fundamental concepts are not the same as it involves asset valuation, net profit, annual sales, the totals balance sheet, size of the business and membership ([Kehinde et al., 2016](#)). In addition to the above, the composition of each of the above fundamental concepts is never unique ([Agbo, 2018](#)) and it could be attributed to different perceptions of various scholars and schools of thought. For the purpose of this study, a few of such is considered below:

The [Central Bank of Nigeria \(1983\)](#) in its credit guidelines, considers small-scale enterprises as enterprises that have a yearly profit or asset worth half of a million naira. This view corroborates the perception of The [Federal Ministry of Industries \(1973\)](#) which defines small scale enterprises as those enterprises that cost not more than #500, 000, including working capital used to set up the business. It equally concurs with the understanding of the Federal Government of Nigeria in its 1990 budget that says small scale enterprises for the purpose of commercial loan, are enterprises with a yearly revenue not more than half of a million naira for merchant loan while those in the category of commercial loan as businesses with capital investment not more than two million. In contrary to the above, The Federal Government Small Scale Industry Development Plan of 1980 cited in [Ayozie \(2006\)](#) states that small scale enterprises are manufacturing processes or service industries with an investment not beyond one hundred and fifty thousand naira in manufacturing and equipment alone.

However, it could be observed that the perceptions presented above only focus on the capital aspect of the business but the figure is never unique: it ranges from the perception of one author to another. Besides, none of these perceptions highlights the specific number of employees required for operations. The possession of capital alone cannot ensure the success of the business, other resources are needed and manpower is one of such. Thus, The 3rd National Development Plan of Nigeria cited in [Ayozie \(2006\)](#) posits that small scale enterprises are industrial or engineering organisations that employ not more than 10 persons to carry out work related activities and whose asset in equipment and machinery is not more than #600,000.00. Although, this view considers ten employees appropriate for a small-scale enterprise but its suitability could depend on the size and the nature of services the enterprise is into. In a big small-scale enterprise with several activities, the perception of [The small-scale industries association of Nigeria \(1973\)](#) which says small-scale enterprises is an organisation that own assets (equipment, building and capital), up to six hundred thousand naira and employs less than 50 workers could be considered more essential.

Apart from the above diverse perceptions of small-scale enterprise, studies have shown that it takes different forms. These include sole proprietorship, partnership and cooperative enterprise ([Asaolu, 2005; Oyeleran, 2012](#)).

2.3. The Concept of Entrepreneurship

Dwelling on [Reynolds et al. \(2001\)](#), the concept of entrepreneurship means efforts geared at establishing new enterprises in order to be self-employed. These authors believe that it involves a new organization or the enlargement of current business by an individual or a group of individuals or established businesses. In contrary to the above, scholars such as [Segal et al. \(2005\)](#) contend that entrepreneurship involves an intricate and dynamic activities which engender mental processes that enable persons to contemplate about forthcoming results and decide the attractiveness and viability of such results.

In their submission, [Binks and Vale \(1990\)](#) contend that entrepreneurship is a spontaneous amalgamation of economic resources initiated by the indefinite prospect of passing and sustaining monopoly profits while [Tijani-Alawiye \(2004\)](#) considers private enterprise as the procedure engaged to increase the existing stock of businessmen in a given society. This scholar argues that such an effort usually creates and promotes businessmen who are willing to run enterprises, raising or growing them and preserving them in an attempt to achieve national development to sustain employment features significantly. Besides, authors such as [Pinelli \(2015\); Uhlancer and Thurik, \(2007\)](#) cited in [Ojiaku et al. \(2018\)](#) have argued that it provides opportunities for youth to develop their own ideas.

Dwelling on the foregoing, entrepreneurship means creating a new business or enlarging / reforming the existing ones, to create job opportunities, provide avenue for people to engage their idea of creativity to better their lots and to ensure national development.

The importance of entrepreneurship in addressing youth unemployment has been expressed in several literature but the challenges confronting its engagement has prevented it from addressing its target [Olokundun et al. \(2014\)](#). It is the responsibility of any government through its policymakers to formulate policies that foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and encourage new business creation among youth ([Giacomin et al., 2011](#)) considering the fact that entrepreneurial attitudes and attributes are favourably disposed to the youth.

Such policies, among other things should include the drive for success, self-motivation, effective decision making, capacity to take initiative, efficiency in risk-taking, boldness, creative and innovative disposition (Gouws cited by [Isaacs et al. \(2007\)](#)). Besides, most youths are very rich in entrepreneurial skills such as adequate communication, effective resource and time management as well as planning, self-knowledge, strategy formulation and sound bargaining power ([Olokundun et al., 2014](#)).

2.4. The Concept of Unemployment

According to the [Bureau of Labour Statistics \(2018\)](#), unemployment is considered as individuals who are physically fit for work but lack the opportunity of being employed despite their searching for one in the last four weeks. [Amadeo \(2018\)](#), contends that it includes the category of persons who were provisionally laid off from work and want to be recalled to their jobs. This view considered unemployment as the movement of employees from work to unemployment and it corroborates [DiPrete and McManus \(2000\)](#), who expressed the same idea using different terms as an indicator of unemployment (transition from job to no work). In contrary, [Dieese \(1984\)](#), contends that unemployment is the state of persons who engage in involuntary non-work situations, due to dearth of opportunities for a better employment. Although, this view is also vital to this discourse, it ignores the persons who engage in temporary jobs with the view of having a better offer in the nearest future. Thus, [Bendassolli et al. \(2016\)](#) posits, unemployment is the state of people who engage in irregular work with a strong desire for a change.

In-spite of the useful submission of [Bendassolli et al. \(2016\)](#) to this discussion, it could be realized that his view undermines persons who voluntarily resigned from work and persons who are just stepping into the labour market. The former could be attributed to intentional turnover and other factors while the latter defines the situation of school leavers or graduates who are just stepping into the labour market Schneer (1993) cited in [Gowan \(2014\)](#).

However, it should be noted that either school leavers or those relieved from their previous employment opportunities, unemployment is a critical problem in Nigeria that should be addressed. Its critical level can be associated with the study of the [Central Intelligence Agency \(2018\)](#) which ranked Nigeria 52 out of the 215 countries sampled globally. The above description of unemployment presented by scholars of difference clime could be applied to different age category within the country, but the focus of this study is on 61.6% youth who are either school leavers or uneducated that constitutes the largest percentage of unemployed in Nigeria Nigerian Labour Statistics, cited in [Taiwo \(2017\)](#).

2.5. The Concept of Youth

Previous studies have shown that youth is best defined as the period of evolution from dependency to adulthood and awareness of interdependence as affiliates of a given community ([UNESCO, 2018](#)). Of all classifications, age is the simplest way of defining youth, most especially as it relates to education and employment ([UNESCO, 2018](#)). Thus, youths are generally specified as persons between the age of leaving compulsory education and entering their first employmen.

However, [UNESCO \(2018\)](#) engages several perspectives when observing its strategy on youth but the strategy depends largely on the context. For instance, in events at global or region level, such as the African Youth Forum, UNESCO applies the universal definition of the United Nations to youth. According to [UNESCO \(2018\)](#) therefore, youth are persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. This means while executing local community youth activities, the definition of every member state comes to the fore. In Africa therefore, the perspective of the [African Youth Chapter \(2006\)](#) which says youth are persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years is generally considered and the same applies in the present study.

Of all age groups in a given economy, youth could be considered more crucial than any other categories because they are indispensable in terms of time and energy. Time has to do with long period of engagement in work organisations while energy connotes the power to be actively involved in the production of goods and services for national development. Although, youth may lack the cognate experience needed to function in work organisations, but with time, such cognate experiences could be acquired but the time and energy at the disposal of youth are no longer on the side of other age groups and when such resources are being wasted to unemployment, the nation could be at lost.

2.6. Various Forms of Unemployment

As the rate of unemployment has been skyrocketing in Nigeria, studies have shown its forms in different forms Ojo (1998) cited in [Ogunmefun \(2017\)](#). These include structural unemployment, cyclical unemployment, frictional unemployment, classical unemployment, residual unemployment and seasonal unemployment among others.

Structural unemployment arises when workers are being replaced with machines due to the advances in science and technology. Such workers are often sacked in the economy and youth could be affected. It can also be triggered off by incongruity of skills of employees from the underlying jobs. Youths who find it intricate to update knowledge or engage in capacity building may likely be affected when complex machineries are being introduced in work settings. Cyclical Unemployment is also known as Keynesian unemployment and it usually occurs when the total demand of the economy is inadequate to provide work for every job seeker. Cyclical unemployment usually arises when the total supply of goods and services cannot march the total demand for such goods and services. When the demand for goods and services is very low, certainly the production will be dampened and it will affect national economy. When such a situation occurs, workers, which could be vibrant youth are drastically reduced.

Frictional unemployment is very similar to structural unemployment in areas of mismatched of skill with underlying jobs. This usually arise when the skills of the workers are mismatched with the underlying jobs. Such situations arise when graduates, because of high rate of unemployment engage in work that belittle their status (underemployment). However, it could be observed that the effect of frictional unemployment is usually short while that of structural unemployment is long lasting. The situation of classical unemployment arises when the government set the wage rate above the equilibrium prices. This usually prompts workers to rush for works in the labour market that exceeds the existing vacancies. While other age groups may not be affected, youth could be badly affected

simply because they possess the strength needed to pursue works where ever such works are available for their engagement.

Residual unemployment largely affects physically challenged persons in the society. Their challenge or deformity in one way or the other prevents them from engaging in active productivity in work organisations and apprenticeship. Some youth are in this category in Nigeria and they have little or no means of survival. Although, studies have shown that most of such persons are successful in developed nations, largely because the developed world make environment conducive for them to meaningfully contribute to productivity. While the developed society welcomes them and encourages them to develop their potentials, they are ridiculed and deprived of contribution in most developing societies. Lastly, seasonal unemployment mainly caused by the season. There are jobs that are seasonal in nature. Such include agricultural activities. When the season of planting and harvest are over, workers become redundant and relieved of their duties. This type of unemployment could also affect youth, mostly the uneducated ones.

2.7. Causes, Implications and Interventions to Unemployment

Apart from various forms of unemployment discussed above, factors causing unemployment have also been discussed in the literature. Some of them include recession [Noko \(2016\)](#) and poor economic growth [Adu et al. \(2019\)](#), job sourcing and financial crisis [Amadeo \(2018\)](#), absence of synergy between production and employment opportunities [Ogege \(2011\)](#), absence of national employment policy, poor political governance [Longe \(2017\)](#), erratic power supply [Uddin and Uddin \(2013\)](#), corruption, as the resources meant for national development are often siphoned [Okafor \(2010\)](#) cited in [Uddin and Uddin \(2013\)](#).

Besides, [Anyadike et al. \(2012\)](#) have associated unemployment with rapid population growth, obsolete school syllabuses and lack of employable skills among job seekers, rapid expansion of the educational system which directly leads to increase in the supply of educated manpower above the corresponding demand for them by the weak economic reality.

Since the Nigerian population is growing rapidly without much improvement in the old curriculum to reflect modern day economic situation and quality education, most graduates lack employable skills that are needed for effective and efficient services in work settings. Apart from the fact that the population of Nigeria is increasing, educational institutions are also increasing due to the large number of students seeking admission into higher institutions yearly. Thus, the number of graduates entering the labour market has equally been increasing and since the Nigerian economy is too weak to absorb the large number of graduates, the problem of unemployment has persisted ([Utomi, 2011](#) cited in [Anyadike et al. \(2012\)](#)).

In another development, studies have shown the negative effects of unemployment, mostly on youth population in a developing society like Nigeria where social security and welfare package are not in existence ([Bromman et al., 1996; Gleeson, 2018; McClelland, 2000](#)). The concern for the youth population is borne out of the energy at their disposal which could be used for production of goods and services for exportation and home consumption but when job opportunities are not available such valuable contributions could be wasted.

Also, unemployment could have an adverse effect on youth career development. To acquire cognate experience in work settings long years of service is needed and it is better to commence the career at early age. However, if they find it intricate to secure employment on time, career development could be delayed or not actualized, which could have negative effects on family settings-marriage and child upbringing.

The failure to effectively engage the youth population in work related activities has been strongly connected with the escalation of criminal activities in studies such as [Ogali \(2016\)](#), [Uddin and Uddin \(2013\)](#). In a poverty ridden society like Nigeria, the proverbs that says ‘an idle hand is the devils workshop’ could be applied to the escalation of criminal activities among youth, most especially the problem of book haram in the North-West and North-East and youth insurgency in the South-South.

Apart from the above, the desire to acquire wealth among youth, mostly in a country like Nigeria, where people worship money irrespective of its sources is very high. And when the legitimate means of acquiring wealth via employment opportunity is not in view as argued by [Merton \(1938\)](#), illegitimate means of acquiring wealth via criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing, smuggling, stealing, etc. becomes inevitable ([Mpofu and Chimhenga, 2016; Omoniyi, 2017](#)) and it could provide a fertile ground for the escalation of such crimes in Nigeria.

In order to reduce the high rate of unemployment, the following strategies have been employed by the Nigerian government ([Abimbola, 2011](#) cited in [Adeleke \(2017\)](#)). Objectives of each of these strategies are also provided in [Table 1](#) below:

Table-1. Strategies to Set Up to Reduce Unemployment in Nigeria and their Objectives

SN	Strategies to Reduce Unemployment	Aims and Objectives of Strategies
1	Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)	To kindle the expansion of small, medium and large scale enterprises
2	National Empowerment (NE) & Economic Development Strategy (EDS)	Abolition of unemployment and abject poverty
3	State Empowerment & Economic Development Strategy (SEED)	Eradication of joblessness and abject poverty
4	National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP)	Provision of vocational skills development and other programmes to reduce unemployment
5	Better Life Programme (BLF) / Family Support Programme (FSP)	Provision of micro facilities for entrepreneurial development
6	Peoples Bank (PB), Micro Finance Bank (MFB) & Community Bank Initiative (CBI)	Extension of banking services to the poor
7	Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	Establishment of micro facilities for entrepreneurial development
8	National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND)	Provision of long-term loans at concessionaire interest rates to support entrepreneurial development
9	National Directorate of employment (NDE)	Provision of vocational skills on small scale enterprises to combat unemployment
10	Agricultural Development Project (ADP)	Stimulating increased in food production and enhancement of rural population's income
11	The Nigerian Industrial Bank (NIDB)	Harnessing skills and capital from local and foreign sources for expansion and development of industries
12	Small-Scale Industries Credit Scheme (SSICS)	Provision of grants to assist in meeting the credit needs of small scale enterprises.
13	The Rural Banking (RB)	To address insufficiency of funds for entrepreneurial development
14	Industrial Development (ID) <i>Adu et al. (2019)</i> and Others	To address the problem of unemployment

Source: Abimbola (2011) cited in Adeleke (2017)

In-spite of the above stated efforts geared towards skill empowerment and job creation, unemployment has been on the increase in Nigeria. Its rate increased from 14.2% in the 4th quarter of 2016 to 16.2% and 18.8% of the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2017 respectively ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2017](#)). The data also revealed that unemployed and underemployed Nigerians increased from 13.6 million and 17.7 million in the 2nd quarter and 3rd quarter of 2017 to 15.9 million and 18 million respectively.

Studies have attributes the failure to achieve success in the above strategies to the endemic nature of corruption challenging sustainable development, poor or lack of implementation, poor maintenance culture of Nigerians, lack of patriotism, poor leadership and bad followership, lack of transparency and non-accountability of public policy making ([Ayedun et al., 2018](#); [Daoud et al., 2018](#); [Durodola et al., 2018](#); [Sarker et al., 2018](#)). Consequently, many youth have been roaming the streets meaninglessly searching for a living ([Ali and Salisu, 2019](#)).

2.8. Factors Influencing Igbo Business Mentoring (Nwa boy) for Establishing Small Scale Enterprise

In the past and in contemporary times, studies have shown decline in the economic development of Nigeria ([Adebayo, 2016](#); [Fapohunda, 2012](#); [Farayibi, 2016](#); [Magaji, 2016](#); [Noko, 2016](#); [Onuba and Okon, 2016](#)). The last recession contributed immensely to the closure of some industries and the relocation of others to neighbouring countries ([Agri et al., 2017](#)). Consequently, many employees have been laid off while many others are yet to be employed ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2017](#)). Hence, most youth in the South-East may want to engage in Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) to acquire skill and raise money to start small-scale enterprise for their survival.

In addition to the above, the work of [Osinubi \(2005\)](#) shows that underdeveloped economy correlates abject poverty and since the Nigerian economy is characterized by underdevelopment, it seems to have aggravated high level of poverty among Nigerians and it may not be unconnected with reasons why most youth in the South East Geopolitical Zone turn to Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) to set up their businesses to be self-employed in order to avoid the scourge of abject poverty.

Apart from the above, the desire to be successful in life irrespective of any unpleasant situation such as poverty, unemployment, lack of help, political instability, insecurity, underemployment etc. could be responsible for the adoption of the Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy). In this zone, it appears people cherish wealth because it accords honour, chieftaincy titles and respect on people. In order to be successful therefore, most youths might want to engage in such a strategy which seems to be striving in the region for establishing small-scale enterprises in order to acquire wealth. Moreover, Green (1947) cited in [Olutayo \(1999\)](#) argued that the Igbo venerate the man of energy, the highflier and qualities such as belongings, money, uprightness, and allegiance to kinsmen which people normally stressed in children's upbringing. In order to acquire these qualities, most youth might want to adopt business

mentoring (nwa boy) for establishing small-scale enterprise so as to become highfliers' in-spite of the unfavourable circumstances for achieving success in Nigeria.

In another development, due to its diverse ethnicity, language, religion, and culture, several occupations / economic activities have been associated with different geo-political zones in Nigerians as shown below:

- South-South Geo-Political Zone-Agriculture and trading;
- South-East Geo-Political Zone-Business transaction, small, middle and large-scale enterprises and agriculture;
- South-West Geo-Political Zone-Agriculture and white-collar jobs;
- North Central Geo-Political Zone-Agriculture;
- North-West Geo-Political Zone-Agriculture and cattle rearing; and
- North-North Geo-Political Zone-Agriculture and cattle rearing, ([Olawale, 2018](#)).

Since studies have identified trade and commerce as parts of the major occupations of the Igbos ([Green, 1947](#); [Isichei, 1976](#); [Olawale, 2018](#)) and since business mentoring is seemed to be restricted to Igbo land, it could be averred that mentoring is a major strategy for commencing entrepreneurial activities in the region. Across Nigeria, either in towns or villages, hardly can any Igbo entrepreneur be found without a mentee in his business. This is because 'Ndigbos' consider entrepreneurship as means of engendering self-employment that bothers on uninterrupted detecting, appraising and taking advantage of opportunities inherent in business and instigating justifiable action to ensure success ([Chinweuba and Chukwudi, 2017](#)).

The influence of peer groups and parents could also be relevant to the adoption of mentoring (nwa boy) for establishing small-scale enterprise among youth, considering the role which peer and parental pressure play in the lives of youth in education, occupation, marital life etc. ([Omonijo and Fadugba, 2011](#); [Ryan, 2000](#)). For instance, unemployed youth roaming the street could be advised or pressurized by his peers, brothers or relations or parents to engage in mentoring (nwa boy) to set up their businesses instead of being idle and rotten away.

The adoption of 'nwa boy' for establishing small scale enterprise may have its root in Igbo learning culture as entrenched in the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System which is regarded as a form of informal and unstructured training programme, designed for a specific period of time that apprentices undergo to acquire a desirable aspect of entrepreneurship skill [Orugun and Nafiu \(2014\)](#). ITAS, as argued by [Orugun and Nafiu \(2014\)](#) is a vivacious aspect of Igbo business culture which has been influencing the mental and intellectual quotient of youth about success in business transactions, over the years.

2.9. The Difference Between Other Apprenticeships and Igbo Business Mentoring (Nwa boy)

Previous studies have shown that apprenticeship is a special method of developing craftsman to be self-employed and it has been in existence for a very long time in both developed and developing countries ([Adekola, 2013](#); [Adetiloye, 2018](#)). Apprenticeship is the process of skill acquisition via the enrolment of youth with a master craftsman who will teach him the skill and vocation for a stipulated time ([Adekola, 2013](#)). At the expiring time of learning the apprentice is allowed to start his own business.

In precolonial Nigeria, Omole, (1999) cited in ([Adekola, 2013](#)) argues that it was the main form of informal education for going into any occupations. In the present times, such occupations include motorcycle and motor mechanics, radio/television repairs, barbing and hair dressing salon Adetiloye (2018), sewing and tailoring ([Biney-Aidoo et al., 2013](#)), bricklaying, soap making, painting ([Bardi, 2017](#)) etc. These corroborate [Uwameiye and Iyamu \(2010\)](#) who argue that traditional apprenticeship provides the main prospect for the procurement of employable skills in the informal sector.

From the review of previous studies, apprenticeship takes the form of artistry and craftsmanship ([Ekong and Ekong, 2016](#)) and it entails apprentices engaging their hands to either repair things (electricians, vulcanizes) or build houses (bricklayers, carpenters) or sew clothes (tailors) mold pots, (potters) dye clothes, drive cars (drivers) etc. for mastery after a specified period of training. Apprenticeship can also take the form of skill impartation, mentoring, service and financial support for starting a small-scale enterprise involving buying and selling. Such as takes place in selling of building and spare-part materials, sewing materials, supermarkets, provisions etc. and such could be associated with Igbo model of business mentoring 'nwa boy'.

However, other forms of apprenticeship can be differentiated from 'nwa boy' in areas of skill and financial acquisition for a startup. While apprenticeship is regarded as a mean of acquiring skill only, the Igbo business mentoring 'nwa boy' entails acquiring both skill and financial support needed for a business start-up. Hence, an apprentice who engages in 'nwa boy' stands a better chance of starting his business with the "settlement" from his master than those who engage in other form of apprenticeship who will be responsible for sourcing the resources to start their businesses themselves.

Besides, other forms of apprenticeship deal mainly with artistry and craftsmanship, while the Igbo business mentoring 'nwa boy' entails business ventures such as buying and selling. In other words, while the apprentice in artistry and craftsmanship engaged their hands in production of goods and services, 'nwa boy' involves majorly in entrepreneurship / enterprise.

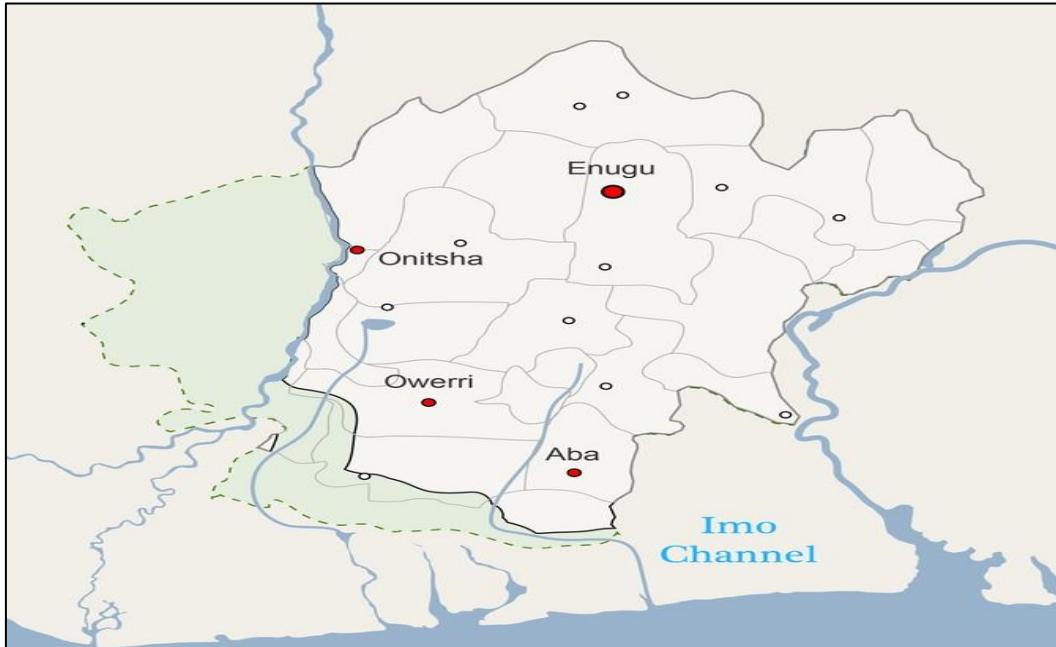
In addition to the above, it could be observed that graduating ceremony and presentation of certificates are major requirements for trainees in other forms of apprentice, the mode of operation of Igbo business mentoring 'nwa boy' does not entertain graduation ceremony and presentation of certificates for practice, it only involves registration of business with the corporate affairs.

2.10. Historical Background of Igbo, South-East Nigeria

Igbo nation occupies southeast Nigeria. As indicated in Fig. 1 it is the native country of Igbo people in the following five states: Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi and Enugu (Slattery, 2016). It is alienated by the river Niger into two uneven sections: (i) the eastern, the largest and (ii) the western, which is the smallest. The region is characterized by diverse Igbo culture and equally diverse language (Chigere, 2000).

The population of Igbo race is estimated at 40 million with the density of 400/km² (1,000/sq mi) (Chigere, 2000). Igboland is bordered on all flanks by a swarm of large rivers, and indigenous tribes such as Ibibio, Idoma, Yako, Ogoni, Tiv, Igala, Bini, Urhobo, Isoko and Ijaw Slattery (2016).

Fig-1. The Map of Igbo, South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria



Source: Ezeagu (2015).

In term of occupation, 'ndigbos' are majorly known for trade and commerce (Olawale, 2018) while some engage in farming. Many others, mostly women are career persons in Federal, State and Local Government Ministries, tertiary and banking institutions etc., across Nigeria (Chigere, 2000). Many of them who are entrepreneurially inclined spread across cultures, making waves in contributing to community, regional and national development via a business transactions.

The Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) is a distinctive form of apprenticeship, that is strongly related to trade and commerce which has been encouraging neither family nor community members, usually males in their adolescents to spend time with another family or community members entrepreneurs in term of service. Such services entitle them to settlement known as 'idu-uno' which involves provision of funds or tools for them to make a living or start another business (Chigere, 2000).

The ancient strong bonds of kinship and brotherliness among Igbo is seemed to have been playing tremendous role in ensuring the success of this type of apprenticeship in South-East Nigeria.

2.11. Contributions of Igbo Business Mentoring (nwa boy) to Entrepreneurship and National Development

Since the commencement of the Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy), several years ago, it may not be out of content to argue that many Igbo entrepreneurs have explored the scheme to establish small scale enterprise which Basil, (2005) cited in Yunusa and Paul (2018) regards as the main avenue for partnership, promotion of private sector's industrialization and national development. The skill and financial support granted to 'nwa boys' by their mentors may have greatly assisted in the development of some businesses.

The development of these businesses may have contributed to the growth of the Nigerian economy since scholars such as (Obi *et al.*, 2018; Orugun and Nafiu, 2014) have argued that small scale enterprises constitutes 90% of the industrial sector in enterprise and 70% of the national industrial development (Yunusa and Paul, 2018). Besides, it may not be out of point to submit that entrepreneurs who have successfully engaged mentoring (nwa boy) to establish their businesses may have been assisting in providing employment opportunities to the populace since Abbakin (2018) argues that small-scale enterprises contribute to national employment. Apart from the survival of these persons and members of their household, they can also provide other sociological obligations such as the payment of tax, which adds value to internal revenue, contribution to community development, assistance to friends, siblings etc.

Also, such entrepreneurs may have been assisting jobless youth who want to engage in mentoring 'nwa boy' for establishing their businesses continually. As soon as a set of 'nwa boy' finish their term, receive their settlement and set up their own business, their masters may want to recruit another set of persons to continue the trend.

Goods and services produced in businesses set up by entrepreneurs who explored Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) could contribute to the nation's Gross Domestic Product and also influence the welfare and people's standard of living positively ([Opafunso and Adepoju, 2014](#)). Since [Opafunso and Adepoju \(2014\)](#) have argued that small scale enterprises' contributions to the nation's GDP and exportation at 2013 stood at 48.47% and 7.27% respectively, the role of Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) in the contributions, may be difficult to ignored.

With respect to the contributions of goods derived from small-scale enterprises to exportation, [Opafunso and Adepoju \(2014\)](#) argue that Nigeria has been smoothening her balance of payment deficit through foreign exchange generation, the positive impact of mentoring (nwa boy), in this contribution may not be under estimated.

Coming to the standard of living, which could be regarded as the level of quality of life individuals in a given society enjoy, the goods and services produced in businesses created through the adoption of the Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) could be an added advantage. The standard of living in this context is not restricted to the peoples' level of income, the quality and quantity of goods and services available per time is also included. Small scale enterprises, either in manufacturing or services industry (entertainment, retailing etc.) contributes a great deal to elevate the people's standard of living in their respective locations ([Opafunso and Adepoju, 2014](#)).

Apart from the above, the revenue generated from the entrepreneurs who engaged in mentoring (nwa boy) to set up small-scale enterprises through registration, annual subscription and tax could be regarded as the booster of national economy. Where such enterprises exist in large number, like Lagos State, the revenue which could be used for the development of other sectors could be easily realized.

In another development, since authors such as [Kehinde et al. \(2016\)](#) have argued that the existence of small-scale enterprises avails people with technical innovation in a given country, ideas leading to such innovation could emerge from mentors who assisted entrepreneurs to set up their enterprises. Innovations are introduced via the establishment of enterprises which bring new ideas to the society and improvements on the economy ([Kehinde et al., 2016](#)).

3. Suggestion for Further Studies

Due to the limitation of a review article of this nature, an empirical study is suggested to critically examine the contributions of Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) to job creation, entrepreneurship and national development in Nigeria. The role of mentors and challenges being encountered by nwa boys in the course of mentoring and solutions to such challenges should also be included.

4. Summary and Concluding Remarks

As youth unemployment has continued to be a major problem in Nigeria despite the fact that it has been attracting studies from many scholars due to its connectivity with poverty and criminality which undermine national development. Youth are potential materials who should be trained in educational institutions for national development but if they cannot be employed, studies have shown that most of them divert their energy which ought to have been used for production of goods and service for the betterment of mankind to criminality which undermines national development. However, the wise ideas of some youth in the South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria to devise a way of fixing themselves up in businesses via the traditional business mentoring (nwa boy) was brought to bear in this study.

Among other things, the study illustrated factors which could prompt youth to engage in Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy) for establishing small scale enterprise. These include the culture of Igbo nation, the prevalence of abject poverty, high level of unemployment, peer group influence, the desire to succeed in life etc. and also presented the difference between apprenticeship and Igbo business mentoring (nwa boy). The study argued that if the government at all level could support the Igbo business mentoring, it could be upgraded to promote job creation drive among youth, not only in the South-East Geo-Political Zone but in other Zones in Nigeria.

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