



Influence of Igbo Model of Apprenticeship on Employment Generation in FCT Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract	Original Research Article
The Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) is one of the most perennial local systems in Africa for transferring skills, fostering entrepreneurship, and generating jobs. Although its importance has been recorded extensively in southeastern Nigeria and key commercial regions, there has been minimal academic focus on its impact in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, which serves as Nigeria's administrative hub and it's among the rapidly expanding informal economies. The study investigates the effects of the Igbo apprenticeship approach on job creation in FCT Abuja, utilizing a mixed-methods strategy that includes a thorough literature review, analysis of secondary data, and semi-structured discussions with Igbo business owners, apprentices, and leaders of trade associations in significant markets throughout the area. Guided by Human Capital Theory and Social Capital Theory, this study examines how the IAM promotes skills development, business formation, and employment multiplication effects within the informal sector. The results demonstrate that the IAM plays a crucial role in job creation through an established cycle involving mentorship, knowledge transfer, and financial settlement, with around 60 to 65% of commerce-based enterprises in leading commercial areas linked back to this system. In FCT Abuja, the model has established an employment network where each master entrepreneur typically provides three to five direct job opportunities via apprenticeship programs, along with further indirect jobs emerging through supply chain connections and market systems. Nevertheless, the study also uncovers significant challenges such as exclusion based on gender, a reduction in the duration of training for apprentices, a weakening of trust frameworks, and minimal coordination with formal vocational education. The paper concludes that, although the IAM continues to be an effective local tool for generating employment, its ongoing success is contingent on strategic policy coherence, institutional recognition, and reforms that include gender considerations. Suggestions are presented for policymakers, trade organizations, and development experts aiming to utilize local entrepreneurial frameworks for enduring job creation in urban Nigeria. Keywords: Igbo Apprenticeship System, Igba-Boi, Employment Generation, Informal Economy, Entrepreneurship, FCT Abuja, Youth Unemployment, Skills Transfer, Social Capital, Nigeria.	

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is confronting one of the most urgent challenges of youth unemployment in the developing world. Although official reports provide differing

statistics, with the National Bureau of Statistics indicating youth unemployment rates vary between 5.3 and 42.5% depending on the methods used, the reality for countless young Nigerians is marked by



underemployment, informal work, and economic instability (Afrobarometer, 2025; Statista, 2025). The formal job market has failed to accommodate around 3.5 million young individuals entering the workforce each year, pushing many into informal jobs that are known for their low productivity, scarce resources, and minimal social security (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2024).

In the midst of this situation, local entrepreneurship practices have surfaced as vital, albeit underrepresented, sources of job creation. A leading example is the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM), referred to in local terms like Igba-Boi, Imu Ahia, or Nwa Boy. This traditional approach enables young individuals to learn trade skills, business knowledge, and build social connections through guidance from experienced entrepreneurs. Typically lasting between five to seven years, this apprenticeship culminates in a financial capital settlement that supports trainees in launching their own businesses, thus fostering a continuous cycle of economic growth and job creation that has supported Igbo commercial groups for many years (Familoni, 2024; Eze, 2023).

The significance of the IAM rose notably after the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970), during which the federal government's twenty pounds compensation plan for returnees from the Igbo ethnicity fell far short of rebuilding their lost livelihoods. In response, communities began directing young men from rural areas towards urban commercial centres, where they acquired trading, craftsmanship, and management skills under the guidance of experienced mentors. This initial survival tactic transformed into a highly organized economic institution, which is estimated to account for 60-65% of trade-oriented business in southeastern Nigeria and key commercial areas like Lagos (Sabo, 2026).

Although it holds great importance, academic research on the indigenous Apprenticeship Model (IAM) has been largely focused in southeastern Nigeria and Lagos, resulting in minimal empirical investigation concerning the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. This absence is crucial for three main reasons. Firstly, Abuja features one of the most vibrant informal economies in Nigeria, with significant markets such as Wuse, Garki, Utako, and

Nyanya, which attract Igbo merchants and apprentices from various regions of Nigeria, the FCT Abuja draws in a varied population of youth in pursuit of economic prospects, making it an important environment for analysing the functioning of traditional apprenticeship models within cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic urban areas. Lastly, comprehending job creation in Abuja has policy ramifications that surpass the local territory, considering its status as a standard for urban planning and development across Nigeria.

This research explores the following inquiry: In what ways does the Igbo apprenticeship model affect job creation in FCT Abuja, Nigeria? More specifically, it investigates (a) the structural processes through which the IAM fosters employment, (b) the extent and characteristics of the jobs that are produced, (c) the obstacles faced by the system in the context of an urban capital territory, and (d) the implications for policies aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of employment.

The subsequent sections of this document are structured as follows. Section 2 examines pertinent literature surrounding apprenticeship frameworks, the IAM, and job dynamics within Nigeria. Section 3 outlines the theoretical basis. Section 4 details the research methodology. Section 5 presents and analyses the results. Section 6 concludes with findings and recommendations.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Apprenticeship and Employment Generation

Apprenticeship serves as a method for sharing skills and preparing the workforce, existing in a debated area between official education and casual learning. The International Labour Organization (ILO) describes apprenticeship as a training framework that is governed by law or tradition, merging practical workplace experience with theoretical education to ready individuals for skilled jobs or entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, this definition tends to emphasize state-governed, contact-driven models typical of developed nations, which may overshadow the importance of traditional apprenticeship model

found throughout the Global South.

Within the African setting, apprenticeship includes a wider array of arrangements, from family-based craft teaching to organized commercial training frameworks. In contrast to formal vocational education, traditional apprenticeship is often intertwined with social connections, influenced by cultural practices instead of credential attainment (Meagher, 2009). The potential for generating employment through these systems relies not only on the skills they provide but also on the financial resources, access to networks, and entrepreneurial insights they offer.

Studies concerning job creation differentiate between direct employment (positions established within a company) and indirect employment (positions arising from supply networks, ripple effects, and ecosystem overflow). Strong apprenticeship programs create both forms: direct employment through the eventual business endeavours of the apprentices, and indirect employment through supplier networks, market growth, and the education of future apprentices (Familoni, 2024). The Igbo Apprenticeship System highlights this dual approach to job creation.

2.2 The Igbo Apprenticeship System: History Evolution and Structure

The Igbo Apprenticeship System is an economic framework deeply rooted in cultural practices that develops inexperienced youth into self-sufficient business owners through a defined process of service, skill acquisition, and obtaining capital. Although it has historical roots that existed before colonial times, the system evolved into its current structure following the Nigeria Civil War, a period during which Igbo communities' encountered extensive economic ruin and minimal assistance from the government (Sabo, 2026).

The IAM functions via several distinct yet interconnected approaches. The Igba-Boi model consists of a young male, generally between 14 and 21 years old, who resides with a master tradesman for a specific duration wherein he develops trade-related abilities, customer relations, stock

management, and ethical business practices. The Imu Ahia (learning trade) variety focuses on the commercial skills required in sectors like textiles, electronics, automotive parts, and general goods. Meanwhile, the Imu Oru Aka (learning craft) model is centered around hands-on-skills in fields such as tailoring, carpentry, metal fabrication, and car maintenance (Atueyi, 2025).

The typical phases of the IAM include:

- a. **Introduction and Bonding:** An apprentice is linked to a master through family connections, community relationships, or religious groups. Either a formal or informal agreement outlines the length of service, mutual expectations, and terms of settlement.
- b. **Service and Skills Acquisition:** During this time, the apprentice lives with the master, taking on business-related responsibilities while steadily gaining skills. This stage prioritizes hands-on learning through observing, engaging, and gradually increasing responsibilities in the business.
- c. **Evaluation and Graduation:** At the end of the contracted period, the master assesses the apprentice's skills, character, and suitability for independence.
- d. **Settlement (Mkpa Aka):** The master provides financial support, which can range significantly from hundreds of thousands to several million naira, based on the trade and the generosity of the master, allowing the apprentice to start an independent business. This support may consist of cash, merchandise, retail space, or introductions to suppliers.
- e. **Alumni Network and Reciprocity:** Graduates maintain connections with their masters, often seeking advice, credit, or business collaborations. Those who achieve success often become masters themselves, continuing the cycle.

This framework changes the apprenticeship from simple training into a full-fledged system of developing financial inclusion. Studies show that the settlement phase is especially important as it tackles

the financial barriers that usually stop young people from moving from paid employment or joblessness to business ownership (Ileka-Chioma, 2023).

2.3 The IAM and Entrepreneurship Development in Nigeria

The connection between the Igbo Apprenticeship Model and the growth of entrepreneurship in Nigeria has gained increased interest from researchers. Familoni (2024) explored how the IAM affects the development of entrepreneurship and youth job opportunities, revealing that it plays a crucial role in the establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The findings indicated that in 2022, SMEs represented 46.3% of Nigeria's GDP, constituted 6.21% of total exports, and employed over 84% of the national workforce. The IAM was identified as an essential pathway for creating SMEs, especially within the informal economy.

Eze (2023) evaluated the IAM throughout Nigeria, underscoring its importance in promoting entrepreneurship and skill acquisition. The findings disclosed that it lessens the frequency of business failures attributed to experimentation by equipping apprentices with essential market insights, connections with suppliers, and access to customers that formal education typically lacks. Master artisans act as practical examples, showcasing business tactics, strategies for managing risks, and methods for adjusting to market changes.

Kingsley (2024) studied the IAM as a “disruptor” of contemporary economic beliefs, contending that its dependence on trust-based interactions, informal commitments and norms upheld by the community challenges traditional development economics. The research noted that the IAM accomplishes what several government programs aimed at youth employment do not: offering sustainable self-employment opportunities without requiring significant public investment.

The IAM has also gained global recognition. American reporter Robert Neuwirth commended the system as a model for indigenous economic organization, highlighting its ability to generate

entrepreneurs independently of external funding or government support. The system's focus on mentorship, stepwise responsibility, and eventual self-sufficiency reflects leading practices in business incubation, yet in functions through cultural practices rather than established institutional structures (Sabo, 2026).

Nevertheless, the reviewed literature also reveals notable issues. Gender exclusion remains widespread, with the system traditionally tailored for and led by men. Societal norms, fears for safety, and the presumption that young women will marry and have children during the usual apprenticeship timeframe have restricted women's involvement (Sabo, 2026). Moreover, the reduced lengths of apprenticeship training, shortened from the customary seven years to as few as two to three years in some instances have raised concerns regarding the adequacy of skill transfer (Eze, 2023). The integrity of the system is further jeopardized by trust decay, urban individualism, and the temptation of fast-money options.

2.4 Youth Unemployment and Informal Economy in FCT Abuja

FCT Abuja offers a unique scenario for the exploration of job creation through apprenticeships. Established as Nigeria's intended capital, Abuja was built as an administrative hub featuring a relatively small local populace. Nevertheless, rapid urban growth, migration from rural areas, and the proliferation of government offices have turned it into a significant commercial centre with a large informal economy.

Prominent markets in the area, such as Wuse Market, Garki International Market, Utako Market, Nyanya Market, Zone 3 Neighbourhood Centre and the Arts and Crafts Village attracts traders from all over Nigeria. Igbo businesspeople from a considerable segment within these markets, leading areas such as electronics, textiles, auto parts, construction materials, and general retail. These markets function not just as trade centres but also as places where apprenticeship bonds are established, carried out, and sustained.

The issue of youth unemployment in FCT Abuja reflects national patterns while also showcasing specific local traits. While the high presence of government offices and formal jobs suggests available job opportunities, these are inadequate for the increasing number of young people entering the job market. Many young individuals migrating to Abuja typically have little formal education, come from rural environments and lack financial resources, which makes the informal apprenticeship route one of the most viable options for engaging in the economy.

It is believed that the informal sector in FCT Abuja hires a vast majority of those working outside the government, yet it remains largely unrecorded, poorly regulated, and primarily overlooked by policy discussions. This lack of visibility affects apprenticeship systems, which function without official agreements, social protections or ways to resolve conflicts. Apprentices in Abuja encounter distinct challenges, including high living expenses, insufficient familial support, and the risk of exploitative conditions due to the absence of community oversight that typically exists in apprenticeship systems in their southeastern hometowns.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two interrelated theoretical viewpoints: Human Capital Theory and Social Capital Theory. Collectively, these concepts shed light on the way the Igbo Apprenticeship System creates job opportunities by converting personal skills and social connections into effective economic results.

3.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, introduced by Becker in 1964 and Schultz in 1961, suggests that an individual's abilities, expertise, and wellbeing are a type of capital that can yield economic benefits. By investing in human capital through education, training and practical experience, individuals can boost their productivity and income potential. Within this perspective, apprenticeship acts as a direct

investment in human capital, where resources such as time, effort, and having expenses are provided by both the master entrepreneur and the apprentice's family in anticipation of future economic gains.

The IAM implements Human Capital Theory by using a thorough model for skill enhancement. In contrast to traditional vocational training, which often divides theoretical learning from practical experience, the IAM combines both within a real-world business setting. Apprentices not only gain specific technical skills relevant to their trades but also learn implicit knowledge about customer behaviour, negotiation strategies, inventory management, credit oversight, and adapting to crises; skills that can only be acquired through direct experience (Eze, 2023). This implicit knowledge represents a unique aspect of human capital that lowers the likelihood of business failures among IAM graduates in comparison to those who have not undergone apprenticeship training.

The settlement mechanism, known as Mkpu Aka, expands upon Human Capital Theory by acknowledging that just having human capital is not enough to create jobs; financial backing is essential to leverage it. By supplying initial funding along with skills training, the IAM guarantees that human capital investments lead to genuine business development rather than just improved job readiness. This combined method of integrating skills with financial support sets the IAM apart from standard training programs that produce graduates who are skilled yet financially limited.

3.2 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, as defined by Bourdieu in 1986 and Putnam 2000, highlights the financial significance of social connections, trust, and mutual aid. Social capital is found within relationships, allowing individuals to gain access to resources, insights, and chances that might not be accessible otherwise. Within the realm of apprenticeships, social capital functions on various levels.

Initially, the connection between the master and the apprentice forms a unique pair of social capital. The master grants entry to supplier connections, customer

groups, market knowledge, and institutional insights. The apprentice contributes labour, commitment, and a promise of future reciprocity. Trust sustains this connection with the assumption that the master will meet their obligations, and the apprentice will respect business secrets and financial resources (Kingsly, 2024).

Next, the IAM cultivates collective social capital among trading communities. Apprentices who successfully complete their training and start their own business remain tied to networks of previous apprentices, mentors, and community members. These connections promote the exchange of information, shared credit, cooperative negotiations with suppliers, and community-driven enforcement of ethical business practices. In FCT Abuja, where Igbo traders face competitive and at times adversarial situations, this collective social capital offers mutual support and access to markets.

Lastly, the IAM facilitates the transfer of social capital across generations. Families with a background in apprenticeships have connections to possible mentors, established alumni who may offer investment or partnerships, and community insights regarding which trades and mentors provide the most promising opportunities. This generational transfer of knowledge helps to clarify why specific communities produce a high number of successful entrepreneurs, despite having limited formal education.

The integration of Human Capital Theory with Social Capital Theory creates a strong analytical framework for exploring how the IAM fosters job creation. Human capital accounts for the skills and productivity aspect, while social capital addresses the network, trust, and opportunity elements. Job creation happens when these two types of capital intersect, as skilled individuals with solid networks launch businesses that offer jobs for future apprentices and staff.

4. Methodology

The study utilizes a combination of methods that includes a thorough literature review, analysis of existing data, and qualitative exploration in the field.

This strategy is suitable for investigating a multifaceted socio-economic occurrence that encompasses cultural behaviours, economic results, and implications for policy.

4.1 Research Design

The research employs an exploratory sequential framework, initiating with a thorough review of existing literature and analysis of secondary data to set empirical benchmarks and conceptual outlines. This is succeeded by qualitative fieldwork aimed at understanding context-specific interactions in FCT Abuja. The framework emphasizes comprehensive insight rather than statistical generalization, acknowledging that the IAM functions through culturally rooted processes that cannot be entirely understood through quantitative approaches.

4.2 Study Area

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja was chosen for four key reasons. Firstly, it embodies a diverse urban environment that contrasts with the southeastern Nigerian region where the IAM was established, allowing for an exploration of how the system adjusts to multi-ethnic settings. Secondly, the prominent markets in Abuja features considerable Igbo trading communities, offering a solid representation of skilled entrepreneurs and their apprentices. Thirdly, as the capital of Nigeria, FCT Abuja serves as a significant location for policy influence, making the results valuable for shaping national employment initiatives. Lastly, the territory's swift urban expansion and trends in youth migration position it as an essential area for analysing the creation of informal job opportunities.

Research concentrated on five key business hubs: Wuse Market (General goods and textiles), Garki International Market (electronics and home items), Utako Market (food products and supplies), Nyanya Market (suburban general commerce), and the Area 10 Crafts Village (handcrafted items). These markets were chosen to reflect a range of sectors and geographic variation throughout the territory.

4.3 Data Sources and Collaboration

Secondary Data: The study examined secondary information sourced from the National Bureau of statistics (NBC), the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), reports from PricewaterCoopers Nigeria, data from the Afrobarometer survey, and relevant academic studies regarding the IAM and employment trends in Nigeria. This information offered comparative insights into unemployment figures, the impact of SMEs, and the scale of the informal sector.

Primary Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three distinct groups of participants: (a) experiences entrepreneurs (Ogas) who had mentored several apprentices, (b) both present and past apprentices, and (c) leaders of marketplace associations and Igbo community groups in Abuja. The interviews examined the length of apprenticeships, skills developed, settlement methods, job results, difficulties faced, and outlooks regarding the future of the system.

Key Information Interviews: Officials from the FCT Department of Commerce, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and various non-governmental organizations that focus on youth employment offered organizational insights regarding connections and deficiencies in policies.

4.4 Data Analysis

Secondary information was examined using descriptive statistics and trend analysis to outline the employment landscape. Qualitative interview data underwent analysis via thematic analysis, adhering to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme evaluation, theme definition, and report creation. The themes were structured based on the research inquiries and theoretical frameworks. Information gathered from various respondent groups was triangulated to improve validity and highlight either converging or differing viewpoints.

4.5 Ethical Consideration

The research followed ethical guidelines relevant to

social studies. Consent with full awareness was acquired from everyone who participated in the interviews. Participants' identities were kept confidential, with them recognized solely by their job titles and overall length of experience. Due to the informal nature and occasionally unclear legal standing of the apprenticeship setups, extra precautions were implemented to safeguard participants from any possible legal or institutional consequences.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Characteristics of Apprenticeship Ecosystems in FCT Abuja

The apprenticeship system among the Igbo community in FCT Abuja shows both a connection to its southeastern Nigerian roots and an adaptation to the unique urban setting of the capital. According to field research, apprenticeship dynamics in Abuja span various industries, with the greatest number found in electronics and telecom accessories (28%), textiles and apparel (22%), auto parts (18%), general goods (16%), and segments include food production, leathercraft, and printing services.

Entrepreneurship in Abuja indicated that, on average, they have mentored around eight apprentices throughout their business lives, while some successful merchants have trained twenty or more. This represents a notable trend in job creation: each master introducing ten apprentices who then start their own businesses has indirectly led to at least ten new enterprises being formed, each having the potential to hire employees and train further apprentices.

The apprentice demographic in FCT Abuja shows some deviation from standard patterns observed in southeast Nigeria. Although the apprenticeship model remains mostly male (about 85% of apprentices), there is greater geographic diversity within Abuja. Apprentices hail not only from Igbo speaking regions (Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi) but also from surrounding southern states and, to a lesser extent, from northern and central Nigeria. This geographic variety indicates that the Igbo apprenticeship model is moving beyond its

ethnic origins, with non-Igbo youth pursuing apprenticeship chances in markets dominated by the Igbo.

The age at which individuals enter apprenticeship has increased in comparison to past trends. Historically, apprentices would begin between the ages of 12 and 16; however, interviews conducted in the field reveal that in Abuja, this age now commonly ranges from 17 to 24. This change is indicative of a higher rate of minimum basic education completion, escalating living costs in urban areas that postpone family planning decisions, and the rising appeal of formal education pathways. The increase in the age of entry influences both the length of the apprenticeship and when businesses are launched.

5.2 Skills Acquisition and Transfer Mechanisms

The IAM in FCT Abuja presents a diverse array of skills that encompass much more than just technical abilities. An examination of the interview data indicates four separate types of skills transfer:

Technical Trade Skills: This category includes knowledge of products, quality evaluation, pricing strategies, inventory oversight, and expertise specific to certain sectors. For instance, apprentices in the electronics field learn to distinguish between authentic and fake items, negotiate with suppliers from China and Dubai, and troubleshoot common issues with devices. In tailoring, apprentices become proficient in measuring, cutting, sewing, and adapting designs to meet client specifications.

Commercial and Financial Skills: Apprentices develop essential financial management abilities, such as overseeing cash flow, managing credit provision and recovery, practicing savings discipline, and understanding basic accounting principles. These skills are gained through actual involvement in business activities rather than through classroom learning. One experienced entrepreneur shared insight into this method: “They don’t get their education from textbooks. They observe the inflow and outflow of money, learn how to save for future inventory, and understand how to deal with clients who request credit.”

Social and Relational Skills: The ability to manage

customer relationships, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and maintain networks form a vital yet frequently neglected set of skills. Apprentices learn to interpret customer needs, handle grievances, foster repeat business, and navigate the interpersonal dynamics of market settings. Such relational skills hold significant importance in Abuja’s diverse markets, where vendors engage with clients from a variety of ethnic, economic, and linguistic backgrounds.

Strategic and Adaptive Skills: One of the most valuable aspects is that apprentices acquire strategic business insights related to growth, diversification, risk management, and timing in the market. They observe how experienced tradespeople respond to fluctuations in currency, alterations in policies, disruptions in supply, and competitive challenges. This learning experience enables graduates to adjust to varying circumstances rather than simply replicate mentor’s business strategies.

The extent of skills acquisition depends significantly on the length of the apprenticeship, the expertise of the master, and the commitment of the apprentice. Interviews highlighted concerns regarding the shortening of apprenticeship periods in recent times, with some arrangements lasting only two to three years in contrast to the traditional five to seven years. Masters identified this reduction as a result of apprentices’ impatience, family expectations for quick financial returns, and the emergence of alternative earning avenues, such as motorcycle taxi services and online trading. Shorter apprenticeship spans raise concerns about the adequacy of skills transfer and the readiness of graduates for managing their own businesses.

5.3 Settlement Patterns and Business Creation

The phase of settlement (Mkpu Aka) marks a crucial point for job creation in the IAM. In the Abuja FCT, the methods of settlement differ greatly, influenced by the financial strength of the master, the performance of the apprentice, and the customs associated with various trades. The analysis led to the identification of three distinct settlement model:

Cash Settlement: The master gives a one-time payment, which usually falls between N500,000 and

N5,000,000 contingent upon the type of trade and the quality of their relationship. This model grants the graduate significant freedom but necessitates disciplined financial management to turn cash into viable business assets.

Goods-in-Kind Settlement: In this case, the master supplies goods equivalent to a preset value, often including connections to trustworthy suppliers. This arrangement minimizes the risk of fund misallocation and helps ensure that the graduate has start-up goods that can be sold.

Integrated Settlement: This model merges cash, products, and logistical assistance (like rental for shop space, necessary equipment, or credit from suppliers), offering the most thorough support package but demanding a significant financial commitment from the master.

Evaluation of the settlement results reveals that graduates benefiting from integrated settlements have better business sustainability rates during their initial three years compared to those who only receive cash settlements. The extra assistance, including supplier connections, strategic market positioning, and ongoing guidance, helps address the risks that lead to failure for many startups.

The impact of job creation can be on several tiers. On an individual level, each successful graduate shifts from being unemployed or underemployed to become a business owner, achieving financial independence and frequently assisting family members. At the enterprise level, new ventures create jobs for helpers, porters, and over time, apprentices. At the market level, the growth of businesses enhances commercial interactions, draws suppliers, and creates employment opportunities in sectors like transportation, food vending and finance.

A cautious estimate grounded in interviews and market observations indicates that an average master entrepreneur in the major markets of FCT Abuja is responsible for generating three to five direct job opportunities through the apprenticeship process over a decade. With numerous active master entrepreneurs in the major markets across the territory, the overall contribution to employment is significant, despite being largely unrecorded in formal labour market statistics.

5.4 Employment Multiplier Effects

Beyond simply creating jobs through the establishment of new businesses, IAM significantly influences the economy of FCT Abuja through extensive multiplier effects. These effects manifest through various avenues:

Expansion of Supply Chains: Graduates who launch their enterprises generate a need for vendors, wholesalers, and logistic services. For instance, in electronics markets, new retailers tend to place greater orders with wholesalers from Lagos and other international sources, which in turn bolsters employment opportunities in sectors like importation, storage and distribution.

Boosting the Service Sector: Graduates from apprenticeship programs who succeed typically drive an increase in the demand for services such as banking, transportation, housing, and consumer products. The capital they generate often reinvests back into the local economy through expenses associated with rent, purchasing equipment, and stock acquisition.

Flow of Knowledge: As graduates develop and refine their business methods, expertise spreads across market networks. Innovations in marketing strategies, product modifications and enhancements in customer service brought forth by former apprentices enhance overall productivity within the market system.

Transfers of Remittances: Graduates and apprentices based in FCT Abuja frequently send money back to their families in their home regions, thereby supporting rural expenditures and investments. Many interviewees noted constructing homes, financing education for their home states using profits derived from businesses located in Abuja.

Revenue Generation through Tax and Informal Means: Despite the challenges associated with taxing the informal sector, revenues derived from market fees, association memberships, and local government charges attribute to local financial resources, vital for sustaining infrastructure and services.

These multiplier effects indicate that the employment outcomes attributed to the IAM reach well beyond the straightforward master-apprentice

relationship. Each apprenticeship connection triggers an economic wave that impacts suppliers, services providers, families, and communities. This multiplier phenomenon holds particular significance in FCT Abuja, where the informal economy serves as the main source of livelihood for many residents outside of government jobs.

5.5 Challenge and Constraints

Despite its accomplishments in generating jobs, the IAM in FCT Abuja faces serious obstacles that jeopardize its long-term viability and efficiency.

Gender Exclusion: A primary issue is the persistent marginalization of women. Social customs, concerns about safety, and the societal expectation that young women will marry during the usual apprenticeship timeframe have constrained female involvement to around 15% among apprentices. Women entrepreneurs who have entered the industry report facing opposition from male employers, doubts from customers, and familial pressure to place marriage ahead of business education (Sabo, 2026). This exclusion based on gender not only raises fairness concerns but also highlights economic inefficiencies, as it limits the talent pool and maintains gender-based economic inequalities.

Trust Erosion: The IAM fundamentally depends on the trust that the master will deliver promised settlements, that the apprentice will be dedicated, and that community values will promote mutual support. In the anonymous urban landscape of FCT Abuja, these trust-building mechanisms are not as robust as in tightly knit southeastern communities. Individuals interviewed pointed out cases where masters failed to provide the settlements they had pledged, apprentices fled with goods or funds, and conflicts arose without effective ways to resolve them. The lack of formal agreements leaves both parties at risk.

Duration Compression: The reduction of the apprenticeship period from a traditional five to seven years down to two or three years in many instances diminishes the quality of skills and bonds formed. Masters have expressed frustration that contemporary apprentices seek quick settlements without developing the patience and discipline

essential for achieving business success.

Competition from Alternative Livelihoods: The presence of informal transportation jobs (okada, keke napep), online commerce, and betting and digital gig opportunities has diminished the appeal of apprenticeships for certain youth. These other options provide immediate income instead of delayed settlements, making them attractive to young individuals facing urgent financial pressures.

Regulatory Hostility: Historically, the urban development strategies in FCT Abuja have favoured formal sector employment and modern commercial development. The demolition of markets, relocation of vendors, and harassment from regulatory agencies create instability that threatens long-term investments in apprenticeship. The demolitions of several informal markets in Abuja in 2023-2024 led to the displacement of hundreds of traders and disrupted existing apprenticeship connections.

Limited Policy Recognition: Government initiatives for employment, such as the National Directorate of Employment, N-Power, and various youth empowerment programs, seldom interact with or provide support for traditional apprenticeship systems. The IAM functions in a state of policy obscurity, excluded from vocational education structures, financial inclusion efforts, and support for small and medium enterprises.

Intergenerational Tensions: Younger Igbo entrepreneurs, many possessing some formal education, often perceive the IAM as outdated or exploitative. The friction between traditional masters and younger, more educated individuals creates challenges in recruitment and retention.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The study has investigated the impact of the Igbo apprenticeship model on job creation in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The results indicate that the IAM is a powerful local approach for fostering skills, entrepreneurship, and job creation within one of Nigeria's most vibrant urban centres. Through a well-organized cycle of

mentorship, hands-on skills training, social network building, and financial support, the model effectively converts unemployed individuals into entrepreneurs who go on to provide jobs for others.

The effects on employment are extensive and multi-dimensional. On a direct basis, each master entrepreneur instructs several apprentices, leading to the formation of their own businesses. Indirectly, these new enterprises generate jobs in supply chains, the service sector, and related economic activities. At the multiplier effect, the moment of capital and the sharing of knowledge enhance wider economic interaction. Conservative estimates indicate that each master entrepreneur creates around three to five direct jobs over a ten-year period, alongside indirect and induces job effects that are challenging to measure but evidently significant.

The study further highlights that the IAM in Abuja deals with significant challenges. The exclusion of women cuts down almost half of the available talent pool. The loss of trust in anonymous urban settings weakens the social networks essential for the sustainability of the system. The shortening of apprenticeship duration limits the depth of skills acquired. Competition from other job opportunities and unfriendly regulations pose risks to recruitment and long-term viability. The lack of policy recognition prevents the system from receiving institutional support that could improve its performance.

The analytical framework that integrates Human Capital Theory and Social Capital Theory offers a strong perspective for grasping these issues. The IAM fosters employment not just by imparting technical skills (human capital) but also by embedding graduates within networks of suppliers, customers, and community members (social capital) who offer the essential opportunities, financial backing, and assistance necessary for entrepreneurial success. Job creation happens at the convergence of skilled individuals and interconnected communities.

For Abuja specifically, the IAM stands as a largely unacknowledged but economically crucial employment driver. In a region where formal job opportunities are scarce and government bodies are unable to accommodate the increasing youth

demographic, traditional apprenticeship frameworks provide a self-sustaining, culturally valid, and evidently successful route to economic engagement. Overlooking or undermining these frameworks while focusing on top-down employment initiatives that do not achieve widespread impact signifies a serious policy mismatch.

6.2 Recommendations

For Policymakers:

- **Official Recognition and Inclusion:** The Federal Capital Territory Administration along with national bodies ought to officially acknowledge indigenous apprenticeship frameworks as valid avenues for vocational training. By aligning these with the National Vocational Qualification Framework, certificates could be granted to IAM graduates, maintaining the integrity of cultural practices within the system.
- **Safeguarding Policy Systems:** Policies related to market dismantling and the relocation of traders should include assessments on the effects of apprenticeships. Plans for relocation must ensure that the relationships between masters and apprentices are maintained, offering alternative spaces for trade.
- **Financial Accessibility Connections:** The Central Bank of Nigeria along with microfinance institutions must create financial products that are easily available to IAM graduates, utilizing their completion of apprenticeships and transitions as indicators of creditworthiness instead of insisting on collateral, which informal business owners generally do not possess.
- **Gender Inclusion Support:** Policymakers ought to collaborate with community leaders and market organizations to establish secure and culturally fitting apprenticeship pathways for young females, promoting networks of female masters and overseeing training settings.

For Trade and Market Associations:

- ✓ Practice Standardization: Market associations should create voluntary conduct codes that outline the duration of apprenticeships, settlement practices, and methods for resolving disputes. These guidelines can reduce exploitation and foster public confidence, while still allowing cultural flexibility.
- ✓ Apprentice and Master Registrations: Keeping a record of both active apprentices and masters would supply valuable information for engaging in policy discussions, building networks, and monitoring the wellness of the system.
- ✓ Networks for Female Entrepreneurs: Establishing specialized networks for women who are masters and apprentices could combat gender exclusion while maintaining cultural respect.

For Development Practitioners and Researchers:

- Long-Term Research Needs: There is a pressing requirement for extended studies that track IAM graduates for a period of five to ten years, aiming to outline career paths, the longevity of businesses, and trends in wealth accumulation.
- Comparative Research: Studies contrasting the IAM with other local apprenticeship frameworks in Africa, such as the Jangali model in northern Nigeria, informal apprenticeships in Ghana, Eastern African approaches may reveal beneficial practices that could be adapted.
- Policy Testing: Initiatives should be undertaken to conduct pilot programs that trial policy actions like matching grants for settlement funds, mentorship initiatives aimed at female apprentices, or formal registries, evaluating their efficacy in markets within FCT Abuja.

For Master Entrepreneurs and Communities:

- Maintaining Duration Integrity: Masters should resist any pressure to shorten

apprenticeship length below what is essential for thorough skills and character formation. Immediate benefits from earlier settlements may lead to significant long-term setbacks through potential business failures.

- Incorporation of Technology: Adding digital skills, e-commerce knowledge, and financial technology training to apprenticeship programs would boost the competitiveness of graduates in changing market landscapes.
- Promotion of Ethical Practices: The Igbo business community must actively uphold ethical practices against exploitative masters and deceitful apprentices, acknowledging that individual wrongdoing can harm the reputation and sustainability of the collective system.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The study provides three valuable insights into the field of indigenous entrepreneurship and job creation within Nigeria. Firstly, it broadens the geographic focus of IAM studies from just southeastern Nigeria and Lagos to include FCT Abuja, highlighting how the system evolves within diverse urban environments. Secondly, it combines Human Capital and Social Capital theories to create a thorough analytical framework aimed at understanding employment generation through apprenticeships. Lastly, it presents policy suggestions grounded in empirical evidence that connect informal indigenous structures with formal employment strategies, advocating for cooperative involvement instead of replacement.

The Igbo Apprenticeship System is not an outstanding model of economic organization. It is an active, evolving institution that continues to foster job creation, facilitate skill transfer, and develop entrepreneurs amid one of Africa's most difficult job markets. Its challenges including gender barriers, trust issues, and lack of policy recognition, are significant and need to be addressed. Nevertheless, its accomplishments, achieved without external funding, governmental resources, or international support, merit acknowledgement and appreciation.

For FCT Abuja and Nigeria, the IAM symbolizes more than just a cultural practice; it stands as a verified method for job creation that, with international support and reforms, has the potential to make a greater impact on long-term economic growth.

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