

Timeless research: A convergence of past and present in indigenous entrepreneurship development

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Abstract: This paper discusses the lasting impact of research on indigenous entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, Africa. Through primary data and content analysis, it examines the contributions of prominent scholars to the infinite nature of research. It looks at mentorship in the field of entrepreneurship in connection with the ancient guild system and indigenous Igbo business mentorship. It contrasts the nature and stages of the ancient guild system with Igbo indigenous business mentorship and highlights the benefits of knowledge-sharing and collaboration. Also, the paper showcases the importance of African culture in indigenous Igbo business mentorship and its ability to shape human understanding in human capital development and entrepreneurship. Lastly, it discusses the cultural relevance of the transition of the guild system to indigenous Igbo business mentorship and hereby challenges the prevailing Western narratives concerning the value of African cultural practices, long misunderstood or condemned, and their potential to enrich entrepreneurship and national development.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Indigenous, Past, Present, Research.*

1. Introduction

Globally, research has proven to be a timeless treasure trove of knowledge, with seminal studies continuing to influence and inspire new generations long after their publication. The works of pioneering authors on social life realities, inventions, and innovations have had a profound and lasting impact across various spheres of life, transcending their creators through validation, critique, or revision of their findings, accentuating the evolving nature of knowledge.

When knowledge is updated, flaws inherent in existing literature are corrected, and often serve as catalysts for further investigation, driving the pursuit of knowledge and understanding forward. This process renders research infinite, as new discoveries lay the groundwork for further exploration. Through well-conducted research and insightful writing, the world has continued to build upon existing knowledge, providing a foundation for future studies and offering timeless insights into human behaviours, social structures, and technological innovations.

Enduring research spans a diverse array of disciplines. These include classical sociological theories [1-3] timeless philosophical works [4-6] ground breaking scientific discoveries [7-9] influential psychological theories [10-12] and seminal works in technology and innovation [13-15] among others. These examples underscore the profound and lasting impact of research on human understanding, demonstrating its ability to transcend time and continue to shape knowledge and perspectives.

This study draws on classical sociological theories of human capital development and recent research on entrepreneurship [16-19] to investigate the enduring legacy of the ancient guild system [1] and its parallels with indigenous Igbo business mentorship in contemporary Nigeria. It explores the

potential applications and implications of this intersection in modern African contexts grappling with pressing issues of human capital development, unemployment, poverty, and economic underdevelopment.

The guild system of the medieval period is recognized for providing training and skills development through apprenticeship and thereby contributed to human capital formation [20]. Beyond skill development, guilds offered multifaceted support to members, including financial assistance, healthcare, and social services [21]. It also facilitated social mobility, enabling individuals to enhance their socio-economic status [22]. These aspects of the guild system laid the groundwork for industrial capitalism by establishing standardized production processes, quality control mechanisms, and structured apprenticeship programmes [20].

In contemporary Nigeria, where unemployment, poverty, and economic underdevelopment are pressing concerns, it appears indigenous Igbo business mentorship has emerged as a potential solution, drawing parallels with the medieval guild system. This mentorship model, emphasizing apprenticeship, skills development, and entrepreneurship [23-25] that offer a viable solution to addressing these developmental challenges in Nigeria and fostering a thriving capitalist environment. The synergy between the guild system and indigenous Igbo business mentorship in Igboland, Nigeria, remains a largely underexamined area in academic literature, presenting opportunities for innovative research and insights into traditional and modern entrepreneurial practices. While [26] explored the relationship between the two concepts, these scholars analysis neglects the vital role of cultural engagement in this synergy. This oversight was addressed by [27] who demonstrate that incorporating local wisdom is essential for achieving sustainability and national development. However, the study was restricted to Indonesian fisheries, with no consideration for African contexts, leaving a significant knowledge gap in understanding the applicability of this approach in African settings. This research aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the significance of cultural engagement in the synergy. Probably, the synergy could serve as a paradigm-shifting example for other cultural groups in Africa to adopt indigenous solutions to solving social problems, rather than relying on unfruitful and imposed foreign approaches.

By examining the enduring relevance of the ancient guild system and indigenous Igbo business mentorship, this research seeks to demonstrate the transformative power of research and tradition in shaping future generations to preserve the legacy of this medieval institution in contemporary society. The synergy may continue to exhibit a strong positive correlation, underscoring the significance of mentorship, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration in fostering entrepreneurial spirit and innovative pursuits in Africa.

1.1. Mentorship

Throughout academic and non-academic histories, mentorship has remained a dynamic component for growth and development [28]. It is a schooling and learning prospect, not only designed for the mentees but also for mentors and professionals, aiming to increase their satisfaction and professionalism [29]. Similarly, it is a process of transforming knowledge (formal or informal), social capital, and psychosocial backing or skills from an expert (mentors) to the beneficiary (protégé) to enable them to function effectively in human society at the end of mentorship [30].

Apart from the online audio version of mentorship [31] it entails face-to-face formal/informal communication within a sustained period between individuals considered to possess cognate knowledge and those who are novices (protégés) [32]. In other words, it is a process that involves time, assistance, and a relationship of self-development between a mentor and mentees. Generally, the mentor, in diverse areas of human endeavours provides expert knowledge for the novices (protégés) and helps them develop their potential fully. Previous studies have shown that mentorship has been successfully engaged as a valuable private development instrument in both business and academic environments [33] as it bridges between businesses and academia.

Mentorship aligns with the cognitive theory of apprenticeship developed by [34] as both involve a process where a skilled professional teaches or imparts skills to an intern through various stages to develop their potential. Five of such processes were identified by [35]. These include: initiation (6 months to 5 years), cultivation (6 months to 2 years), separation (6 months to 2 years), and redefinition, where the relationship is redefined and partners see each other as contemporaries. However, in the context of indigenous Igbo business mentorship, existing literature has typically focused on three stages [36, 37] which largely aligns with [35] model, albeit with slight variations in the duration of mentorship.

In the various stages, mentors fulfill two primary functions [35] career development and provision of psychosocial support [38]. Mentees are expected to be punctual, attentive, and obedient to instructions from their mentors. However, while the works of [36, 37] includes financial support which is a major requirement for entrepreneurship establishment in developing societies where access to resources is scarce, the financial aspect is ignored in the submission of [35] and [38]. The orientation of [35] and [38] is hinged on Western culture, where such is lacking and it may likely be responsible for the neglect, but it is evident in business mentorship programme in Igbo society, Nigeria. Despite that, it should be noted that successful mentorship requires both parties to invest exclusive attention and willingness to continually cultivate trust, empathy, rapport, mutual respect, and effective communication, resulting in positive outcomes [39].

Mentorship is carried out in formal and informal settings, adapting to the unique needs of society and human capital development [40]. Formal mentorship follows structured programmes with clear objectives and processes, whereas informal mentorship emerges through organic relationships and interactions, often rooted in human cultural practices and experiences. This article delves into the informal dimensions of mentorship in two informal mentorship systems; the ancient guild system and indigenous Igbo business mentorship, highlighting the cultural and historical contexts that shape entrepreneurial practices.

1.2. Entrepreneurship

The concept of entrepreneurship has its roots in the 18th century, dating back to 1732, when eminent scholar, Richard Cantillon cite in [41] defined it as the willingness to take financial risks in business, whether existing or new ventures. Although Cantillon's perspective doesn't specify the particular type of business and risk taken, later works explicitly linked entrepreneurship to new business ventures [42]. Nonetheless, a common thread in both views is the inherent risk-taking aspect of entrepreneurship, applicable to both new and established businesses.

Scholars such as Weber [2] and Schumpeter [43] contributed significantly to the development of entrepreneurship. However, [44, 45] argue that early economic discussions primarily focused on capital, land, and labour, overlooking the distinct role of entrepreneurship. This omission highlights the neglect of entrepreneurs as a crucial factor of production in traditional economic theories. Despite extensive discussions on capital by earlier economists, the role of entrepreneurs remained marginalized. Moreover, the positive impact of indigenous entrepreneurship on the global significance of business studies has been particularly overlooked [46].

Since the onset of the 21st century, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of entrepreneurial activities among scholars, government officials, policymakers, and investors (46). This acknowledgment stems from their potential to stimulate economic growth and facilitate job creation to reduce poverty. Inspired by the documented successes of entrepreneurship in Western and Southeast Asian nations, a surge in studies aimed at unravelling its contributions to economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation has emerged, particularly in developing countries grappling with high levels of unemployment and poverty.

Various authors have offered diverse perspectives on entrepreneurship. These perspectives are centered on seizing business opportunities despite resource constraints [47]. According to [48] entrepreneurship involves identifying business prospects that yield long-term benefits, requiring trade-

offs between present comforts and future gains. In contrast, [49] defines it as a decision-making process focused on inclusive strategies and leadership styles that facilitate opportunity recognition.

Meanwhile, [50] views entrepreneurship as an entrepreneurial spirit characterized by a willingness to challenge and take risks in commercializing innovative opportunities. For [51, 52] entrepreneurship entail activities driven by insight and judgment, rather than just a psychological state. In contrary [53] describes it as the creation of new businesses through innovative and managerial expertise, reflecting the daring nature of the entrepreneurial spirit. These definitions highlight the contextual, cultural, and individual nuances that shape entrepreneurship. However, [53] perspective combines resource reallocation, innovation, enterprising spirit, and risk-taking to create value, resonates with the practice of indigenous Igbo business mentorship. Nevertheless, the perspective of [54], like others, overlooks the significant role of cultural practices in entrepreneurship.

At the core of entrepreneurial activities lies a proactive energy that responds to changing environments with innovation and creativity [55]. The resilient response of the Igbo community post-civil war, seeking solutions and forging ahead through innovative business practices, suggests an inherent entrepreneurial mindset. This indigenous apprenticeship model, reminiscent of [43] vision of economic and social leaders driven not only by profit motives but also by a commitment to serving family, community, and national interests, reflects a potent avenue for entrepreneurship in addressing youth unemployment and poverty, as well as revitalising economic growth in developing countries like Nigeria, Ghana etc.

The next section of this article discusses the guild system and its stages which can be used to compare with indigenous Igbo business mentorship. The section intends to delve deeper into the specifics of the guild system, its historical context, and the nuances of indigenous Igbo business mentorship in order to facilitate a rich comparative analysis.

1.3. The Guild System

The guild perspective is a prominent theory among the various evolutionary frameworks of entrepreneurship, as noted by [56]. The guild system is strongly associated with [1]. Based on his notion, the system connotes the amalgamation of craftsmen for communal support and strengthening of professional benefits or a union of craftspeople in a certain profession or trade. The system aimed at training "a new generation of traders" in the medieval period, between the 11th and 16th centuries in Europe. Its emergence could be traced to the need to protect commerce and industry in places that were not under the control of feudalism and therefore, had no specific laws guiding its operations.

In pre-industrial towns and communities, the guild model enabled craftsmen to form unions specific to their trade. Historical examples include ancient India during the Vedic era (2000-500 BCE); China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) and Sui dynasty (589-618 CE) [57].

In the Roman Empire, [57] argues further that guilds were known as "ars". "Zunft" in Germany, "métiers" in France, "craft gilds" in England, "senf" in Iran, "sinf" in Arabia, and "futuwwah" or "futuvvet" in Turkey. In traditional Yoruba and Nupe societies, located in Nigeria's southwest and Middle Belt regions, it is called "egbe" and "efako" respectively.

The foregoing shows the prevalence of variations in nomenclature across regions but share similarities with the guild systems that thrived in Medieval Europe, where it played a significant role in shaping human capital development and the growth of entrepreneurship [57]. The "egbe" (Yoruba) and "efako" (Nupe) unions exemplify the presence of similar cooperative structures in pre-colonial Nigeria, showcasing the ingenuity and organizational prowess of African societies.

However, Rodney cited in [90] argues that colonialism disrupted the development of these systems and hindered their evolution into more formalized organizations. In contrast, guild systems in medieval Europe developed over time into larger, more structured entities with standardized membership requirements, quality control, pricing regulations, and formal training platforms for young craftsmen to acquire skills from experienced masters [58]. Apart from that, the system made adequate provision for social and economic support in the evolution of capitalism from feudalism.

Despite the decline of the traditional guild system with the advent of industrialization and capitalism, its influence is still seen in modern cooperative organizations within the crafts and trades sector [57]. The continuity of independent craftsmen, employers, and master artisans remains significant in regions like Central Europe, Germany, Habsburg, and Denmark. [59] suggests that this tradition has evolved, with similar cooperative structures emerging in other countries, where artisans and craftsmen continue to work together and support one another.

1.3.1. Stages of The Guild System

The guild system was operated through the following three stages [1].

1.3.1.1. Master

The Master, according to [1] represents the pinnacle of the guild system. This stage was occupied by highly skilled and experienced craftsmen in their respective fields. These entrepreneurs possessed the necessary business acumen and financial resources required for others to venture into business. [1] argued that individuals aspiring to attain the position of mastery needed to undergo a training or schooling process, known as apprenticeship, which preceded the journeyman stage.

Upon completing their apprenticeship and gaining experience working in their master's business, journeyman apprentices were recognized as master craftsmen by their mentors. Additionally, they received financial support and goods to aid them in starting their businesses [60]. At this stage, the journeyman had mastered the basic techniques of the craft and had earned the trust of their colleagues and mentors, thereby being conferred the title of master craftsman [61].

2.3.1.2. Journeyman

The second stage of the guild system is the journeyman stage. This stage is pivotal in the training within the guild system, offering apprentices the opportunity to become second in command within the hierarchy of the guild system after completing apprenticeship. [58] notes that journeyman apprentices would typically receive certificates allowing them to travel to various towns to further their learning under different masters. [58] further argues that modern professionals in fields such as natural sciences (engineering, architecture, land surveying, geology, etc.) have adopted and replicated guild structures and operations to enhance the success and longevity of their professions. Possession of such certifications is considered significant and carries legal weight, serving as a major prerequisite for professional practice [58].

As a journeyman, the apprentice is entitled to work for compensation. However, a journeyman who demonstrates exceptional skill and produces a masterpiece may be allowed to progress to the stage of a master craftsman. Advancement to the rank of master craftsman affords individuals certain privileges, including the right to vote and stand for election during guild elections.

1.3.1.3. Apprentice

The first stage of the guild system involves an aspiring entrepreneur enrolling in the system and serving as an apprentice to a master craftsman for a period typically ranging from two to seven years. During this apprenticeship period, the apprentice resides with the master and their family, learning the fundamental skills of the trade. Upon completion of this stage, the apprentice advances to the second stage known as the journeyman.

Stages in [1] were unfolding and unilinear in nature. Thus, the completion of one stage led to the next till the end of the training. This aligns with the stages of economic development developed by [83], and it may likely share a common boundary with indigenous Igbo business mentorship. The connection to indigenous Igbo business mentorship could be intriguing, and the upcoming section promises to explore this possibility further.

1.4. Indigenous Igbo Business Mentorship (IIBM)

The indigenous Igbo business mentorship, prevalent in southeast Nigeria, is regarded as an apprenticeship model designed to foster job creation and wealth generation within Igbo communities. In the existing literature, this system has been described using various terms, such as the "Igba-Boi Entrepreneurship/Apprenticeship Model" [36] "Igbo Apprenticeship System" [62] "Nwa Boy" [63] "Igba bọyi" [64] "Igba-Boi" [37], "Imu Ahia" (Igbo Traditional School of Business), "Igba-Odibo" (Traditional Business School) [65] "The Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM)" [66] and igba oso ahia (acting as a middleman in the market) [67] alongside the term indigenous Igbo business mentorship of [41].

The work of [68] differentiate between "Igba-boi" and "Imu Ahia," asserting that while "Igba-boi" involves free training for apprentices, "Imu Ahia" requires apprentices to pay a fee to the master for the skills or handiwork learned. Additionally, the duration of training in "Igba-boi" is typically longer compared to "Imu Ahia" and "imu oru," another form of Igbo apprenticeship. These distinctions highlight the diverse forms and practices within the Igbo apprenticeship systems, reflecting its adaptability and complexity as a traditional method of skill acquisition and economic empowerment.

In contrast to other apprentice systems focused primarily on hands-on training for proficiency, the IIBM system prioritizes the initial training of mentees' brains and minds. Within this framework, mentors at IIBM adhere to the philosophy of the University of Okonkwo, emphasizing the establishment of a mutual worldview, belief system, and values with mentees before progressing to train their minds. This approach is aimed at cultivating a personal passion and love for the trade or craft among mentees before proceeding to train their hands. The rationale behind this approach lies in the understanding that unless the heads and minds of the apprentices are trained alongside their hands, the apprenticeship process and its intended goals may lack meaningfulness. Therefore, IIBM emphasizes holistic development, recognizing the interconnectedness of mental and physical training in achieving proficiency and success in entrepreneurship.

Given this, it can be argued that the IIBM system has revealed a significant oversight in apprenticeship systems across Nigeria, as well as in various skill acquisition and economic empowerment programmes. This revelation may provide insight into the success of Igbo apprenticeship compared to other apprenticeship models in Nigeria.

The distinctive feature of IIBM therefore, lies in its emphasis on training the brains and minds of mentees, instilling in them the spirit of economic independence, self-reliance, and awareness of the social and economic risks associated with idleness. This approach sets IIBM apart from other forms of apprenticeship in Nigeria, as it addresses not only the technical skills required for a trade or craft but also the mindset and attitudes necessary for entrepreneurial success and economic empowerment.

The origin of IIBM remains uncertain due to discrepancies in the literature regarding its emergence. For instance, [69] traces its roots back to the pre-colonial period when the economy of Igbo communities revolved around subsistence agriculture, crafts, and trade, with no formal education system in place. At that point in time, [64] suggests that apprenticeship served as a vital means of transferring skills and knowledge from skilled craftsmen to the youth across generations. Thus, young individuals, predominantly boys, would serve as apprentices to skilled craftsmen who would mentor them, and provide accommodation, and meals throughout the training period to sustain and support them. In return, the apprentices would work diligently for their mentors, learning the trade. Upon completion of their apprenticeship, the mentors would grant them the freedom to establish their workshops, thus becoming independent craftsmen in their own right. This practice persisted through the colonial era and continued after independence, showcasing its enduring significance in Igbo communities.

However, authors such as [70] offer a different perspective on the emergence of Igbo business mentorship, tracing its origins to the post-civil war era and the pressing need for survival among the youth population in Igbo land. They attributed its development to the acute problem of starvation experienced during and after the war, caused by food blockades implemented as a strategy by the

Nigerian government. This situation prompted intensified efforts to develop the existing Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System (ITAS) as a means for establishing personal businesses for survival [71].

While the view of [70] could be seen as a radical reaction to address the post-war starvation crisis, it is important to consider the broader context which acknowledges the significant impact of starvation on the Igbo population during and after the war [72] suggesting that efforts to strengthen the ITAS for entrepreneurship may have been a pragmatic response to these challenges.

In this context, the concept of displacement, considered a driving force behind entrepreneurship by [73] and [74] becomes relevant. It highlights how group dynamics and economic circumstances spur entrepreneurial endeavours. Specifically, economic displacement resulting from the war and its aftermath likely played a crucial role in the emergence and development of Igbo business mentorship.

Unlike the formal apprenticeship system, the IIBM model is an informal business training and mentorship approach designed to equip youth with entrepreneurial skills within a defined timeframe [75]. This system that was developed through the modernization and enhancement of the ITAS, serves as a platform for economic, social, and national development, as observed by [36] and [76].

The significance of IIBM within communities in Igbo land is underscored by traditional ceremonies that mark two key occasions.

Firstly, the ceremony involves the induction of an apprentice into the process of business mentorship, where the apprentice's parents hand him over to the 'Nna Ukwu' (mentor) in a brief meeting.

Secondly, the graduation ceremony sets the apprentices free from mentorship. In that ceremony, Nna Ukwu formally settles the apprentice, releasing blessings upon him and granting him the freedom to commence his own business.

These ceremonies typically require the presence of family members from both parties, highlighting the communal and familial importance of the business mentorship process in Igbo culture.

1.5. The Nature of Indigenous Igbo Business Mentorship

As observed in practice, the indigenous Igbo business mentorship operates with certain distinct characteristics that hold significant influence on entrepreneurship, often hidden from the wider world. The term "nature" in this context refers to how indigenous Igbo business mentorship is conducted in alignment with the customs and traditions of Igbo land.

The mentorship programme is designed with a residency requirement, allowing mentees to immerse themselves in the local culture. Therefore, prospective entrepreneurs are expected to reside with their mentors in their residential quarters, along with the mentor's family, for the duration of the mentorship, typically spanning 6 to 8 years, depending on the terms of the agreement [36]. This arrangement permits easy transfer of social, cultural, financial, and economic responsibilities from the mentees' biological parents to the mentors, who assume immediate responsibility upon the signing of the mentorship agreement. Consequently, mentors begin to exert significant influence on the mentees, as they hold the key to their future success in entrepreneurship, an occupation highly valued in Igbo culture as a means of acquiring wealth, status, and prestige.

Given the residential arrangement, its operationalization tends to favour one gender, as it is dominated by male entrepreneurs, thereby limiting opportunities for female participation. This issue is further compounded by cultural factors in Igbo culture that discourage women's involvement. In this vein, Nnonyelu, et al. [80] state that a prominent characteristic of the Igbo apprenticeship system is its male-dominated or male-specific nature. This implies that the scheme primarily involves male children, as the term "boyi" inherently refers to young males and the associated tasks and expectations of dedicated service. In alignment with this view, [81] note that Igba boyi apprenticeship is entirely devoid of female apprentices. While the findings of Nnonyelu, et al. [80] and Madichie [81] are based on empirical studies, it's worth noting that their conclusions may not universally apply to all businesses.

Aside that, its nature involves both mature and immature individuals, married and single, adult youth, and younger individuals. This setup raises concerns about the potential for sexual immorality

between mentees' and mentors' wives and daughters, as cohabitation has been associated with increased instances of sexual immorality in developing countries, contrary to cultural norms [77]. However, the operationalization of business mentorship appears to have persisted without significant concern, potentially due to the prevalence of marital stability in Igbo culture, which is rooted in cultural reverence (78). Then, the potential degradation of African culture in contemporary societies, which could negatively impact business mentorship [79], is a concern that warrants attention to prevent any adverse developments.

Moreover, the nature of business mentorship is characterized by early age enrolment due to the significant duration of training, business startup, and nurturing. This prolonged training period may have negative implications for marriage, as mentees are often expected to remain single while living with their mentors' family. Although, prospective entrepreneurs enrolling in business mentorship at early age, that often falls below the customary age for marriage, but the concern is where mature individuals participate in the training. They may need to delay marriage until they complete their training due to the financial, social, economic, and psychological responsibilities associated with the mentorship, which mentors may not be able to support adequately.

In terms of education, the timeline for indigenous Igbo business mentorship intersects with the period allocated for primary and post-primary education, covering the initial stages of mentorship. Subsequently, the final stage of mentorship, graduation, and business commencement coincides with the period designated for university education. However, entrepreneurs who have completed secondary education before enrolling in mentorship may still choose to pursue higher education at the university level if they desire to do so. Ultimately, the decision regarding further education is left to the entrepreneur's discretion and aspirations.

Further to the above, the nature of indigenous Igbo business mentorship involves imparting foundational business knowledge to "Igba-boi," which is essential for establishing personal businesses. However, the process of transmitting this knowledge from one generation to another involves coaching, guidance, and instilling socio-cultural practices by the "Nna Ukwu," which are crucial for success in business and life in general [36]. In this regard, it is considered a rational economic decision to utilize inexpensive labour to build human resources for self-employment and self-sufficiency [83].

According to [36], this teaching process can be categorized into the following three stages:

1.5.1. The Stage of Talent Identification

This is the first stage of the IIBM. It starts with parents or guidance identifying business skills inherent in their wards. Afterwards, such parents or guidance look for successful business persons in a certain area of innovation, usually relatives or community members to hand over their children to for mentorship. When such persons have been identified, a short traditional meeting or ceremony is held to hand over the children to the mentors. In the course of the ceremony, an agreement will be made between the mentor and mentee and endorsed. Based on the culture, traditional colanuts and plamwine are shared with persons who attended the ceremony. Prayer is also organized for both parties depending on their religion. At the end of the ceremony mentees depart their parents' house for the Nna Ukwu residence to commence mentorship. Thus, mentees begin to reside with Nna Ukwu and become integral part of their families till the completion of mentorship.

1.5.2. The Stage of Human Capital Development

In this stage, mentees initiate practical entrepreneurship by engaging in small household chores, following the practices of the Nna Ukwu household. Under the guidance of Nna Ukwu, mentees begin to learn the responsibilities expected of them within the household before transitioning to the shop to begin skill acquisition. This early phase is considered a trial period for mentees, during which they are assessed for their suitability to undergo further training and are exposed to the intricacies of the business.

At this stage, three key factors are paramount: (1) willingness to learn, (2) resilience, and (3) trustworthiness. Mentees demonstration of these qualities determine their fitness for training. Those who exhibit these traits successfully proceed with the training, while those who fail to meet expectations are sent home and excluded from further participation, though, in a rare case. Successful mentees are introduced to fundamental aspects of business training, including customer relations, market language, bargaining strategies, and competitiveness etc.

1.5.3. The Stage of Graduation, Settlement and the Commencement of Business

This final stage marks the culmination of the Igba-boi apprenticeship system, signifying the mentees' freedom from apprenticeship and their opportunity to establish their businesses. During this stage, the Nna Ukwu typically organizes a graduation ceremony to formalize the apprenticeship process for their mentees. Parents of both parties are usually invited to witness the occasion and to receive settlement accrued to their wards.

At the graduation ceremony, the Nna Ukwu settle their mentees, a process that involves handing over financial benefits accrued during the apprenticeship. The settlement is not predetermined and varies depending on the generosity of each Nna Ukwu, often including monetary compensation or a shop stocked with goods, or both. These settlements may also be derived from the profits generated by igba boi during their final year of service.

As evidence in the above discussion, it appears elements of Igbo culture play crucial roles in indigenous Igbo business mentorship. These shall be uncovered in the subsequent section of this article.

1.6. The Significance of Culture in Igbo Business Mentorship

Culture encompasses the complex whole of human experiences, including knowledge, beliefs, ideological practices, social norms, art, law, morals, customs, and acquired capabilities and habits [82]. By this, humans have the understanding that culture represents the way of life of a people or group, and it significantly influence how they organise and manage economic activities, with both positive and negative consequences. However, Western authors have tended to focus on the negative aspects of culture in developing countries, ridiculing their practices while overlooking the positive aspects.

Recognising that no culture is entirely free from negativity is crucial. However, the major concern arises when a group of people deliberately focus on the negativity and ignore the positivity in discussions on national development. Particularly, Western authors such as [2] and [83] overlooked this critical fact in their otherwise insightful works. In contrast, the Igbo culture exhibits positive aspects that foster business mentorship and ownership, which are essential for economic growth and development.

Prior to the commencement of business mentorship, the Igbo culture places a strong emphasis on parental involvement in children talent identification and nurturing, echoing traditional African values in parenting. Concerned parents take active roles in recognising their children's potential and guiding them towards realising their abilities, particularly in business. This proactive approach orients children into the igba-boi system, fostering their development and fulfilment in the career of their choice in life. This strategy also solidifies the parent-child relationship and determines the children's future and well-being.

Following agreements with successful entrepreneurs in their localities, parents formally hand over their children to the Nna Ukwu during the mentorship take-off ceremony. At this juncture, the Nna Ukwu assumes full responsibility for the child's mentorship, superseding the biological parent's role until the completion of the mentorship. This further emphasises respect for tradition and customs, with rituals such as colanut breaking and sharing of palmwine (African popular drink) to every attendee. Prayers are offered to invoke the blessings of the divine and ancestral spirits, seeking their guidance and favour for a successful endeavour in entrepreneurship as a career. This practice reflects a deep connection to spiritual traditions and cultural heritage. Also, elderly advices are given to both Nna Ukwu and mentees on virtues like diligence and uprightness [84]. This shows that elderly wisdom

plays a significant role in guiding both Nna Ukwu and mentees, emphasizing essential virtues such as conscientiousness and honesty. These values are crucial for personal growth and development. The mentorship provided by Nna Ukwu helps shape character and decision-making, fostering a strong foundation for future success of mentees. These rituals and practices reinforce the importance of cultural heritage and community values in the mentoring process, fostering a sense of responsibility and accountability among participants.

Moreover, the importance of Igbo culture is also brought to bear in the 'graduation/business kick-off ceremony' that marks a significant milestone in human capital development in entrepreneurship. The igba boi's' successful completion of apprenticeship and transition to independent entrepreneurship is celebrated on a joyous occasion, attended by family, business associates, and community members, showcasing the strong bond of faithfulness between the 'Nna Ukwu' (mentor) and 'igba-boi' (mentee). The 'Nna Ukwu' is honoured for human capacity building and fundraising efforts, which align with the principles of human capital theorists such as [85] and [86] as well as resource-based entrepreneurship theorists like [87]. In contrast, the 'igba-boi' is commended for dedication and loyalty in serving 'Nna Ukwu' throughout the apprenticeship. As stipulated in the principle of sharing, an Igbo cultural ideological practice that supports mentorship, the 'igba-boi' receives 'Idu-Odibo' to commence their businesses. This may take the form of cash rewards or even the establishment of a new business venture, further solidifying their independence and entrepreneurial spirit.

Unlike the Hausa apprenticeship system, where apprentices lack the freedom to become independent entrepreneurs, the Igbo apprenticeship system grants mentees the autonomy to establish and run their businesses. This aspect of the Igbo apprenticeship system is similar to the Yoruba system, although the latter does not provide financial support for business startups [65, 88] it offers human capital training beyond traditional cultural practices, including arrangements where mentees reside with mentors and mentors assume quasi-parental responsibilities for the mentees' well-being from the start to the end of the mentorship.

The Igbo system reinforces the philosophy of umunna in human capital development for entrepreneurship, personal and societal development, due to the fact that enrolment in business mentorship for business establishment is leveraged on communal solidarity and cohesion. By implication, the sense of brotherhood and oneness to assist each other which was actively in place in traditional African societies is actively engaged in entrepreneurship [41]. This is consistent with [89] who discovered that the extended family system, umunna, plays a vital role in nurturing young entrepreneurs. [89] advances that through the system of mentorship, successful entrepreneurs take in young nephews or cousins as interns, teaching them the skills of the trade and guiding them in the same line of business.

This approach not only preserves social capital but also redirects potential delinquents away from criminal activities [89] which hinder human development, and instead channels them into productive entrepreneurial pursuits. The mentorship lasts for a couple of years until prospective entrepreneurs can freelance on their own with the seed settlement or endowment capital that the Nna Ukwu invested in them. While on their own, igba boi continues the chain by recruiting another set of mentees after graduation and business ownership to mentor, and the group develops entrepreneurially.

Contrary to the traditional Western view that entrepreneurs are born, not made Gartner, cited in [90], the Igbo indigenous business mentorship model demonstrates the development of entrepreneurship through a combination of genetic predispositions, environment, kinship system, and learning. The practice supports [91] research in Bangladesh and corroborates [92] conclusion that kinship systems provide essential support networks, social identity, and a sense of belonging, which are vital for entrepreneurship and development. However, it contradicts [93] argument that traditional values like kinship systems hinder social mobility and national development. In contrast, [92] position suggests that these systems are valuable assets that can complement modernisation and national development, fostering more inclusive and sustainable growth.

Hence, the integration of cultural umunna in Igbo culture for human capital and entrepreneurship development has dispelled the myth of solo entrepreneurship, revealing a complex phenomenon that can be nurtured as evident in the emergence of successful Igbo entrepreneurs through indigenous business mentorship [41], underscoring that entrepreneurship can be learned and developed.

The Igbo culture has exemplified the value of communalism in business mentorship, challenging the conventional wisdom of entrepreneurship as solely individualistic, as often posited by Western authors [94]. Communalism is built on the philosophy of "ubuntu" or "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which translates to "a person is a person through other people" [95] - [96]. In African communalism, therefore, collective ownership is a key aspect of life, ensuring equal access and distribution. Shared responsibilities and cooperative economics are also essential features, fostering a sense of shared prosperity and reducing economic inequality [97].

Social support, as manifested in umunna, is integral to communalism, providing care and support for vulnerable members. This cultural approach to business mentorship highlights the importance of community involvement, mutual support, and shared knowledge in indigenous Igbo entrepreneurial practices. The kinship support ensures that the young can leverage on the strength of elders especially in business and other vocations to gain mastery and become independent. This corroborates Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* [98] who requires the assistance of another successful farmer to start off with seed yams that form the foundation of his business success.

The foregoing discussion accentuates the fact that culture does not have to be Western in origin to have a profound impact on lives and transform societies and it contests the outdated notion of [83] who argued that developing countries must adopt Western culture to foster development. The question then is what happens to the unique value of each society's culture, its transiting from one generation to another and endless nature of research? This raises important queries about preserving cultural uniqueness and values, ensuring intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage and the role of indigenous knowledge in entrepreneurship development.

1.7. The Guild System and Indigenous Igbo Business Mentorship: A Comparative Analysis

In stages of operation, both the Guild system and Igbo indigenous business model employ a three-stage model. During its time, the Guild system facilitated human capital development and economic growth through three stages, each with distinct roles. These corroborates stages in indigenous Igbo business mentorship model [37] and [36]. While this parallel structure highlights the shared emphasis on gradual skill development and mentorship in both systems, none of the two indicate the specific years of training in each stage.

Furthermore, just as the Guild system historically served as a platform for nurturing entrepreneurs in pre-industrial societies, indigenous Igbo business mentorship is similarly fostering the development of a new generation of entrepreneurs in contemporary times [71]. This parallel is striking, as it highlights the enduring importance of mentorship and apprenticeship in entrepreneurial development across time and context. However, the level of economic development in medieval Europe differs from the economy of the present-day Nigeria, but, both addresses the problem of unemployment, human capital development and wealth creation. This stark contrast accentuates the timeliness and relevance of replicating the Guild system's mentorship approach in contemporary Nigeria.

Moreover, both the Guild system and indigenous Igbo business mentorship share a common emphasis on empowering the youth population with essential business skills and financial support for entrepreneurial ventures, through indigenous structures and initiatives, rather than relying on external interventions or imposed Western models. This approach ensures that the development of entrepreneurial capacity is rooted in local context, culture, and resources, fostering sustainable economic growth and self-sufficiency.

Additionally, the Guild system played a significant role in social mobility during medieval times, similarly, the indigenous Igbo business model has been instrumental in creating jobs and wealth for

upward movement of the Igbos from the poor background to the affluent status in contemporary Nigeria.

Aside these, both effectively addresses the diverse needs of the population, providing essential goods and services to consumers and communities in different regions, thereby fostering economic growth and development.

Lastly, the guild system provided a theoretical framework for understanding economic and social development in medieval Europe, similarly, the indigenous Igbo business model offers valuable insights into economic and social development in contemporary Nigeria. Conspicuously, its contributions to business and academic literature are distinctive, as it challenges the dominant Western paradigm of entrepreneurship and offers a fresh perspective that highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge and cultural context in entrepreneurial development.

1.8. The Transition from the Guild System to Indigenous Igbo Business Mentorship: Cultural Relevance

Culture's dual nature, both unique and universal, is a fascinating aspect that has garnered significant attention from scholars worldwide [99] and [100]. Another crucial dimension of culture is its transmissive nature, where it is passed down from one generation to the next through socialization. This intergenerational transmission of culture has captivated scholars' minds globally, highlighting the dynamic and evolving essence of culture. Through socialization, cultural values, beliefs, and practices are shared, adapted, and transformed, ensuring the continuity and diversity of cultural heritage.

The guild system, which emerged in Europe centuries ago, has intriguingly reappeared in indigenous business mentorship models in Africa, raising questions about the connection. Given the historical context, there was no direct exchange between Europe and Africa then, except through the transatlantic slave trade. However, it is uncertain whether liberated slaves returned to Africa and replicated the guild system, as there is a significant gap in the timeline of its existence. This phenomenon warrants further investigation to understand the potential channels of cultural transmission and adaptation that may have contributed to the resurgence of the guild system in Igbo business mentorship.

Although [59] stated that cooperative organizations in the crafts and trades continued to exist in some other countries even after the dissolution of the guilds system, the possibility of the Igbo people continuing to adapt to shifting economic realities may not be ruled out, since their cultural heritage has played a pivotal role in shaping innovative mentorship approaches. The resilience and adaptability of Igbo cultural traditions have likely influenced the evolution of business mentorship in Africa, warranting further exploration into the dynamics of cultural exchange and innovation.

Interestingly, [57] noted that the 'egbe' (Yoruba) and 'efako' (Nupe) unions demonstrated cooperative structures similar to the guild system, showcasing the ingenuity and organizational capabilities of African societies before colonialism. Surprisingly, the Igbo society was not mentioned. This oversight is puzzling, as Nigeria's apprenticeship systems have not historically mirrored the guild system, except for indigenous Igbo business mentorship, which exhibits notable similarities. Perhaps [57] not being from Nigeria, may not have been familiar with the apprenticeship systems in all Nigerian communities. Alternatively, it's possible that the indigenous Igbo business mentorship emerged later, through innovation, and was not in existence at the time of the author's research.

1.9. Concluding Remarks

This article examined the lasting impact of research on indigenous entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, shedding light on the contributions of eminent scholars. It contrasted the guild system with indigenous Igbo business mentorship and unveiled the intricate dynamics of knowledge transmission and collaborative growth in indigenous entrepreneurship. The study revealed the profound significance of African cultural heritage in shaping entrepreneurial mindsets and human capital development and thereby challenged the dominant Western narratives that have long marginalized African cultural practices. Lastly, it offered a poignant testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of indigenous Igbo

business mentorship and underscored its potential to enrich entrepreneurship and national development in Africa.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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