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Igba-Boi: Historical Transitions of the Igbo Apprenticeship Model

Adebukola E._Oyewunmi, Olabode A._Oyewunmi, Chinonye L._Moses

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Abstract

Being Igbo is synonymous with being enterprising. This is perhaps the most popular impression that many people have about the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria. Historical antecedents indicate that prior to colonisation, the Igbo engaged actively in trade and agriculture. However, the events of the Nigeria Civil War (1967–1970) had an indelible impact on the economic activities and achievements of the Igbo. Since then, this ethnic nation has risen from economic ashes, and evidence abound in different commercial spaces across the globe. A critical driver of this economic renaissance is the Igba-Boi/*Imu Ahia* traditional business apprenticeship model. Founded on the Igbo philosophies of communality, co-prosperity and interdependence, the model is characterised by the transgenerational transfer of entrepreneurial skills and the reproduction of business champions. In this chapter, we assess the centrality of enterprise in the Igbo culture; appraise entrepreneurial activities of the Igbo during the pre-colonial and colonial periods; discuss the consequences of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), as well as the post-civil war economic revival. Specifically, we analyse the processes, opportunities and challenges of the Igbo traditional business apprenticeship. Broad-based recommendations highlight imperatives for sustainability and leveraging across cultures and contexts.

Keywords

- Igbo
- Ethnic group
- Igba-Boi
- Imu Ahia
- Entrepreneurship
- Apprenticeship

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