

Innovations

Passing the Torch: Evaluating the Challenge of Intergenerational Shifts in Career Paths for Igbo Apprenticeship System and the Implications for Business Succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria

Linus Adama¹, *Chris Chukwuebuka Emeali²,
Helen Ijeoma Nwachukwu³, Chidinma Adanso Onyemachi⁴

¹Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria,

^{2;3}Coal City University, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria,

⁴University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Abstract: *The study investigated the challenge of intergenerational shifts in career paths for the Igbo apprenticeship system and its implications for business succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. Using a survey research design, the study encompassed a total population of 300 SMEs operating under the Igbo apprenticeship model. The entire population was sampled using census sampling, with stratified sampling method employed to cover different states in the Southeast Region. Data were analysed using regression analysis at a 5% significance level. Results indicated that intergenerational shifts in career paths among Igbo youth negatively impact the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for business succession in SMEs. The study recommended that stakeholders in the Igbo apprenticeship system develop and implement policies to revitalise the traditional system, making it more attractive to the younger generation through modernised training and incentives.*

Keywords: *Intergenerational Shifts in Career Paths, Igbo Apprenticeship System, Business Succession of SMEs.*

1.0 Introduction

The Igbo apprenticeship system, known as "Igba-Boi," has long been a cornerstone of economic and social structure in Southeast Nigeria, fostering entrepreneurship and facilitating the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region (Emeali, Agbaeze, Oganeze & Achilike, 2023). Rooted deeply in the Igbo

culture, this system involves young individuals, or "boys" (often young men), who undergo an intensive period of apprenticeship under established business owners (Emeali, Agbaeze, Oganeze & Achilike, 2023). At the end of this apprenticeship, they are set up in business by their masters, a practice that not only ensures the transfer of skills and knowledge but also promotes self-reliance and economic stability within the community (Chukwu, 2021; Nwaubani, 2018).

The Igbo apprenticeship system is lauded for its unique model of mentoring and business incubation, which starkly contrasts with Western models of formal education and corporate internships. Its success hinges on a robust cultural foundation that values kinship, mutual support, and community development (Okeke, 2020). Apprenticeship under this system is not merely a vocational training but a holistic grooming process that instills discipline, business acumen, and a strong sense of responsibility in the apprentice (Eze, 2019).

However, the contemporary economic landscape presents significant challenges to the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system. Rapid globalization, technological advancements, and shifts in socio-economic structures have led to changes in career aspirations among the younger Igbo generation (Uzoigwe, 2022). Many young people now seek formal education and professional careers over traditional apprenticeships, which they perceive as less prestigious or financially rewarding. This shift poses a threat to the continuity of the Igbo apprenticeship system and, by extension, the sustainability of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria (Obi, 2021).

The challenge of intergenerational shifts in career paths is a critical issue that requires in-depth analysis. The declining interest in traditional apprenticeship among the youth could result in a vacuum of skilled successors to take over existing businesses. This potential gap threatens the business succession plans of many SMEs, which rely heavily on the apprenticeship system to identify and groom future business leaders (Okoye, 2017). Without a steady influx of young apprentices, the transfer of business knowledge and operational skills from one generation to the next becomes compromised, potentially leading to the decline of these enterprises (Ogunyemi, 2018).

Furthermore, the dynamics of business succession in SMEs are complex and multifaceted. Effective succession planning is crucial for the survival and growth of family-owned businesses, yet it remains a significant challenge, particularly in the context of cultural and economic transformations (Adigun, 2020). In the Igbo context, the reliance on the apprenticeship system as a primary mechanism for succession underscores the need to adapt this traditional model to contemporary realities. Addressing this issue involves understanding the factors driving the shift in career preferences among the youth and devising strategies to make apprenticeship attractive and relevant in the modern economy (Aneke, 2019).

One of the critical factors influencing this shift is the perception of apprenticeship as an inferior alternative to formal education. The increasing importance placed on formal qualifications and white-collar jobs has diminished the appeal of traditional apprenticeship, which is often viewed as a fallback option for those who lack academic opportunities (Nnamani, 2021). This perception is exacerbated by the socio-economic rewards associated with professional careers, which are often seen as more lucrative and socially prestigious (Ibekwe, 2018). Consequently, many young people are drawn to urban centers in pursuit of higher education and corporate jobs, leaving behind the apprenticeship opportunities in their local communities (Nwankwo, 2020).

Additionally, the rise of technology and digital innovation presents both challenges and opportunities for the Igbo apprenticeship system. On one hand, technological advancements can disrupt traditional business models and require new sets of skills that may not be covered in traditional apprenticeships. On the other hand, integrating modern technology into the apprenticeship curriculum could enhance its relevance and appeal, preparing apprentices for the demands of the contemporary business environment (Okafor, 2022). Embracing technology could also open new avenues for business expansion and diversification, making SMEs more competitive and sustainable in the long run (Okechukwu, 2021).

Another aspect to consider is the role of family dynamics and societal expectations in shaping career choices. In many Igbo families, there is a strong emphasis on academic achievement and professional success, often at the expense of traditional vocational paths. Parents and guardians may discourage their children from pursuing apprenticeships, favoring instead the perceived stability and prestige of formal employment (Umeh, 2017). This cultural shift highlights the need for a reevaluation of societal values and the recognition of the vital role that SMEs and traditional apprenticeships play in economic development and job creation (Onwuka, 2018).

Given these challenges, it is imperative to explore innovative strategies that can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity in the Igbo apprenticeship system. One potential approach is the integration of formal education and vocational training, creating a hybrid model that combines the strengths of both systems. Such a model could offer apprentices a well-rounded education, equipping them with both practical business skills and formal qualifications, thereby enhancing their career prospects and societal standing (Njoku, 2020). Moreover, fostering partnerships between SMEs and educational institutions could facilitate the development of curricula that are responsive to the needs of the local economy and the global market (Ogbu, 2021).

The sustainability of the Igbo apprenticeship system also hinges on the active involvement of community stakeholders, including business owners, policymakers,

and educational leaders. Collaborative efforts are needed to promote the value of apprenticeship and to create an enabling environment that supports the growth and development of SMEs. Policies that incentivize apprenticeship participation, provide financial support for apprentices, and recognize vocational achievements can play a crucial role in revitalizing the system (Anyanwu, 2019). Additionally, community-based initiatives that celebrate the successes of apprentices and showcase the entrepreneurial opportunities within the SME sector can help shift societal perceptions and attract more young people to this career path (Onyeji, 2018).

Therefore, it appears that the Igbo apprenticeship system stands at a crossroads, facing the dual challenges of intergenerational shifts in career paths and the need for effective business succession planning in SMEs. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the cultural, economic, and technological factors influencing career choices among the youth. By adapting the traditional apprenticeship model to meet contemporary demands and fostering a supportive ecosystem for SMEs, Southeast Nigeria can ensure the continuity and growth of its entrepreneurial legacy. The integration of formal education with vocational training, the active involvement of community stakeholders, and the implementation of supportive policies are critical steps in this direction. Through such efforts, the Igbo apprenticeship system can continue to thrive, contributing to economic development and social stability in the region. Thus, the study was guided by the following research question:

RQ: How do intergenerational shifts in career paths impact the sustainability of the Igbo apprenticeship system, and what are the implications for business succession in SMEs in Southeast Nigeria?

To address the above research question, the study aimed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the factors driving intergenerational shifts in career preferences among Igbo youth, focusing on socio-economic, cultural, and educational influences that lead young people to favor formal education and professional careers over traditional apprenticeships. By evaluating the current state and sustainability of the Igbo apprenticeship system, the research will identify the challenges and opportunities within this traditional model, examining how modern economic conditions and societal expectations impact its continuity. Additionally, the study will assess the implications of declining interest in apprenticeships for business succession in SMEs, exploring how the lack of a steady influx of apprentices affects the transfer of business knowledge and operational skills, and subsequently, the survival and growth of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. It aims to propose innovative strategies to modernize the Igbo apprenticeship system by integrating formal education, technological advancements, and creating a hybrid model that aligns with contemporary economic demands and career aspirations.

This study will fill a significant gap in the literature by providing empirical data and insights into how traditional apprenticeship systems can adapt to remain relevant in the 21st century, offering valuable cultural and economic insights specific to Southeast Nigeria. It will generate actionable policy recommendations aimed at supporting the Igbo apprenticeship system and the SME sector, which will be valuable for policymakers, educational institutions, and community leaders working to promote vocational training and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the development of a theoretical and practical framework for SME development through effective business succession planning, highlighting the importance of integrating traditional apprenticeship with modern education and technology to create a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem. Through the provision of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of integrating modern elements into the traditional apprenticeship system, the study will serve as a reference point for further research in the fields of vocational training, entrepreneurship, and SME management, thereby making significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge and offering insights that can help sustain and evolve traditional vocational training models in Southeast Nigeria and beyond. In line with the research question formulated above, the study proposed the following hypothesis:

Ha: Intergenerational shifts in career paths among the Igbo youth negatively impact the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for business succession in SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

The Igbo apprenticeship system, a cornerstone of entrepreneurial development in Southeast Nigeria, has been extensively studied for its unique ability to foster economic self-reliance and community cohesion. Achebe (2010) delves into the foundational elements of these traditional business practices, emphasizing their communal approach and the inherent strengths in promoting solidarity and mutual support. However, Achebe also notes the challenges in scaling these practices to meet modern market demands, highlighting a critical area for contemporary research and intervention.

Okeke (2012) expands on these themes by identifying specific obstacles faced by SMEs in Nigeria, particularly those led by Igbo entrepreneurs. His study underscores issues such as limited access to modern financial systems, inadequate infrastructure, and the reliance on traditional business models that are increasingly misaligned with current economic realities. This dichotomy between traditional practices and modern business requirements is a recurring theme in the literature.

Eze (2014) explores the cultural underpinnings that shape business operations in Southeast Nigeria, arguing that traditional values like trust and communal responsibility, while beneficial, often clash with modern business practices. This clash results in inefficiencies and growth limitations for SMEs. Eze's findings highlight the need for a nuanced approach that respects cultural heritage while incorporating modern business strategies. This perspective is echoed by Nwankwo (2015), who advocates for the modernization of Igbo business practices. He suggests that adopting contemporary management techniques, marketing strategies, and technologies is essential for these businesses to remain competitive. Nwankwo's research emphasizes the potential for growth and enhanced competitiveness through modernization, providing a clear pathway for SMEs looking to thrive in the modern economy.

The role of technology adoption is further examined by Onyeji (2016), who finds a low adoption rate among Igbo SMEs due to high costs, lack of technical skills, and resistance to change. Despite these barriers, Onyeji points out the significant benefits of technology, such as improved operational efficiency and expanded market reach. Overcoming these challenges is critical for the modernization and sustainability of traditional business models. This technological perspective is crucial for understanding how Igbo SMEs can integrate modern tools to enhance their competitiveness.

Financial constraints are another significant barrier, as discussed by Ike (2017). He points out that traditional funding methods, such as family loans and community contributions, are often inadequate for scaling operations. Ike underscores the necessity of modern financial solutions, including access to banking services and investment capital, to support the growth of SMEs. This financial perspective aligns with the broader need for structural changes to facilitate business expansion and sustainability.

The importance of entrepreneurial education is highlighted by Amadi (2018), who evaluates its role in shaping successful SMEs in Nigeria, specifically in Igboland. Amadi argues that modern business education equips entrepreneurs with the skills necessary to navigate contemporary challenges and leverage new opportunities. Bridging the educational gap is essential for the modernization of traditional business models, suggesting that education is a critical component of sustainable business development.

Obi (2019) examines how market dynamics influence business strategies in Igbo communities, noting that traditional market practices are often rigid and slow to respond to changing conditions. He recommends adopting more flexible and adaptive strategies that incorporate modern market analysis tools to enhance competitiveness. This recommendation underscores the need for dynamic business strategies that can respond to the rapidly changing market environment. Nkem

(2020) explores the impact of globalization on traditional Igbo businesses, finding that while globalization offers opportunities for expansion and access to broader markets, it also poses significant threats to traditional practices. Nkem highlights the necessity of a balanced approach that integrates the beneficial aspects of both traditional and modern practices to ensure competitiveness. This balanced approach is crucial for navigating the complexities of a globalized economy while preserving cultural heritage.

Chukwu (2021) looks into the future prospects of Igbo SMEs by examining the balance between tradition and innovation. He argues that a hybrid approach, which retains valuable traditional practices while incorporating modern innovations, offers the best path forward. Chukwu provides a strategic framework for SME development that respects cultural heritage while embracing modern efficiencies. This hybrid approach is seen as a viable solution for bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. Collectively, these studies underscore the inherent strengths of traditional Igbo business practices in fostering community support and trust.

However, they also highlight persistent challenges such as limited scalability, financial constraints, and low technology adoption. The consensus among scholars suggests that while tradition provides a strong foundation, integrating modern business practices, technology, and education is essential for the sustainable growth of SMEs in Igboland. By adopting a balanced approach that combines traditional values with modern innovations, Igbo SMEs can enhance their competitiveness and ensure their sustainability in an increasingly globalized economy. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and potential strategies for the future development of the Igbo apprenticeship system and the broader SME sector in Southeast Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Strategy

This research adopted a quantitative analytical approach, systematically gathering, organizing, and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, trends, averages, predict outcomes, test causal relationships, and generalize findings, as defined by Bhandari (2023). Quantitative research is extensively applied across natural and social sciences, including psychology, economics, sociology, management, and marketing. In contrast, qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio. For this study, structured Likert scale questionnaires were used to collect data from experienced rural entrepreneurs in southeastern villages, renowned for their expertise. According to Doringer (2021), experts are individuals with substantial domain-specific knowledge. Schoonenboom (2023) notes that while

quantitative research can measure outcome differences, supplementary tools like questionnaires are often needed to capture participants' subjective experiences.

The study employed a multimethod-quantitative approach, utilizing structured Likert scale questionnaires administered online via Google Forms. Quantitative methods offer flexibility and can be employed in descriptive, correlational, or experimental studies. Descriptive research systematically organizes variables, correlational research explores variable relationships, and experimental research investigates causal relationships. Both correlational and experimental methodologies allow for hypothesis testing and prediction using statistical tools. The correlational and quasi-experimental design of the study made the quantitative approach particularly suitable. This approach's strengths include standardized data collection, facilitating replication, enabling direct comparisons across different contexts, accommodating large sample sizes, and supporting hypothesis testing.

Data collection was conducted through field surveys in five southeastern states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Respondents were identified through trade unions, with additional input from retired business owners knowledgeable about rural enterprises. For ethical reasons, only volunteers were sampled using convenience and purposeful sampling techniques. The study focused on SMEs engaged in the traditional apprenticeship business model of the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria. To achieve the study's objectives, 300 SMEs practicing the traditional apprenticeship model were surveyed, with 60 participants from each state. The research instrument was validated for face and content validity, achieving reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha statistic exceeding 90%. Primary data were analyzed statistically using regression analysis with SPSS.

The choice of a quantitative approach was driven by the need to systematically analyze and generalize findings across a broad population, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends within the traditional apprenticeship system of the Igbo SMEs. Bhandari's (2023) definition underscores the structured nature of quantitative research, which is crucial for drawing accurate and reproducible conclusions. By focusing on experienced rural entrepreneurs, the study ensured that the data collected was rich with practical insights and expert opinions, as highlighted by Doringer (2021). The use of Likert scale questionnaires facilitated the capture of nuanced subjective experiences, aligning with Schoonenboom (2023) observation about the need for supplementary tools in quantitative research.

The multimethod approach, incorporating both descriptive and correlational analyses, provided a comprehensive view of the variables affecting the sustainability and growth of Igbo SMEs. Descriptive research helped in systematically organizing the variables, while correlational research explored the relationships between these variables. The quasi-experimental design further strengthened the study by allowing for the investigation of potential causal

relationships. This methodological rigor was essential for testing hypotheses and making predictions, critical aspects of quantitative research as emphasized by the study design.

Conducting field surveys across the five southeastern states ensured a diverse and representative sample, enhancing the study's external validity. The identification of respondents through trade unions and retired business owners added credibility to the sampling process, ensuring that the participants had substantial knowledge and experience. Ethical considerations, such as using volunteers and convenience sampling, were prioritized to respect participants' autonomy and willingness to contribute. The focus on SMEs practicing the traditional apprenticeship model provided a specific context for the study, allowing for in-depth analysis of a culturally significant business practice. The large sample size of 300 SMEs, with 60 participants from each state, provided robust data for statistical analysis. The high reliability of the research instrument, indicated by a Cronbach's Alpha statistic exceeding 90%, ensured the consistency and accuracy of the data collected. Primary data analysis using regression analysis with SPSS allowed for the identification of significant predictors and relationships between variables, providing actionable insights for policymakers and business practitioners. This analytical approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the sustainability and growth of SMEs within the traditional Igbo apprenticeship model.

Thus, the quantitative analytical approach adopted for this study, characterized by structured data collection and rigorous statistical analysis, provided a robust framework for exploring the sustainability and growth of Igbo SMEs practicing the traditional apprenticeship model. The integration of expert insights, systematic variable organization, and comprehensive hypothesis testing ensured that the findings were both reliable and generalizable. By addressing the challenges and opportunities within this traditional business practice, the study contributes valuable knowledge to the field of SME development and cultural business practices in Southeast Nigeria.

4.0 Data Analysis, Results/ Implication and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis

H_a: Intergenerational shifts in career paths among the Igbo youth negatively impact the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for business succession in SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

Table 4.1.1 Model Summary for Intergenerational shifts in career paths and business succession in SMEs						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.772 ^a	.596	.594	.617		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Intergenerational Shifts in Career Paths						
Table 4.1.2 ANOVA ^a for Intergenerational shifts in career paths and business succession in SMEs						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	167.298	1	167.298	439.253	.000 ^b
	Residual	113.499	298	.381		
	Total	280.798	299			
a. Dependent Variable: Business Succession in SMEs						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Intergenerational Shifts in Career Paths						

Table 4.1.3 Coefficients ^a for Intergenerational shifts in career paths and business succession in SMEs						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.467	.076		72.307	.000
	Intergenerational Shifts in Career Paths	-.656	.031	-.772	-20.958	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Business Succession in SMEs						

In the Model Summary table, the "R" column shows the correlation between the observed and predicted values. An R value of 0.772 indicates a good level of prediction. In the ANOVA table, the F-value is derived from the ratio of the Mean Square Regression to the Mean Square Residual, and its associated p-value is very small (0.000). Since this p-value is less than the alpha level (0.05), it indicates that the independent variable reliably predicts the dependent variable. In the Coefficient Table, the Standardized Coefficients (Beta) show how much the outcome variable changes with a one standard deviation change in the predictor variable. A beta weight of -0.772 for Intergenerational shifts in career paths indicates a negative impact on Business Succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. The T and Sig. columns

display the t-value and p-value for testing the coefficient's significance. With a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05), the coefficient is statistically significant.

Decision: The model is statistically significant, supporting the conclusion that Intergenerational shifts in career paths among Igbo youth negatively affect the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for business succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

4.2 Results and Implication

4.2.1 Result:

The result revealed that Intergenerational shifts in career paths among Igbo youth negatively affect the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for business succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria ($\beta = -0.772$); ($p < 0.05$).

4.2.2 Implications of the Result:

- i. **Decline in Traditional Apprenticeship:** The negative impact of intergenerational shifts suggests a decline in the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system, potentially leading to a loss of cultural heritage and traditional skills.
- ii. **Business Continuity Risks:** The challenges in business succession indicate that SMEs in Southeast Nigeria may face difficulties in maintaining continuity and operational stability, affecting long-term business sustainability.
- iii. **Economic Impact:** The disruption in the apprenticeship system and business succession could lead to economic instability in the region, as SMEs play a critical role in the local economy.
- iv. **Youth Unemployment:** With fewer youth engaging in traditional apprenticeship programs, there could be an increase in youth unemployment, as alternative employment opportunities may not be readily available.
- v. **Shift in Career Preferences:** The findings highlight a shift in career preferences among Igbo youth, potentially indicating a growing interest in modern and possibly more formal education and career paths over traditional trades.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that intergenerational shifts in career paths among Igbo youth negatively impact the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for business succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria ($\beta = -0.772$; $p < 0.05$). This finding aligns with previous research on the Igbo apprenticeship system, which has been lauded for fostering economic self-reliance and community cohesion but faces difficulties adapting to modern market demands (Achebe, 2010). Okeke (2012) highlights obstacles such as limited access to modern financial systems and inadequate infrastructure, which exacerbate the misalignment between traditional business models and current economic realities. Eze (2014) and Nwankwo (2015) underscore the clash between traditional values and modern business practices, suggesting a need for modernization to ensure competitiveness. Onyeji (2016) points to the low adoption rate of technology among Igbo SMEs, attributing it to high costs, lack of technical skills, and resistance to change, while emphasizing the potential benefits of technological integration. Financial constraints are further discussed by Ike (2017), who notes that traditional funding methods are insufficient for scaling operations, advocating for modern financial solutions. Amadi (2018) underscores the importance of entrepreneurial education in equipping entrepreneurs with skills to navigate contemporary challenges. Obi (2019) and Nkem (2020) highlight the need for flexible, adaptive strategies and a balanced approach to globalization, respectively, to maintain competitiveness while preserving cultural heritage. Chukwu (2021) suggests a hybrid approach that integrates traditional practices with modern innovations as a strategic framework for SME development. Collectively, these studies indicate that while the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system provides a robust foundation, integrating modern business practices, technology, and education is crucial for the sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs in Igboland. The current study's findings corroborate this consensus, emphasizing the importance of addressing the intergenerational shifts and modernizing traditional systems to ensure the sustainability and economic viability of Igbo SMEs in an increasingly globalized economy.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

Flowing from the findings, the study reveals that intergenerational shifts in career paths among Igbo youth negatively impact the sustainability of the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system and pose significant challenges for the business succession of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. The findings underscore the need for revitalizing traditional apprenticeship programs, strengthening SME support, and integrating modern education with traditional skills. Addressing these issues is crucial for

maintaining cultural heritage, ensuring economic stability, and providing viable career opportunities for the youth. Effective policy interventions and strategic initiatives are essential to mitigate these challenges and promote sustainable development in the region.

5.2 Recommendations

- i. **Revitalization of the Apprenticeship Programs:** Stakeholders in the Igbo Apprenticeship System should develop and implement policies to revitalize the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system, making it more appealing to the younger generation through modernized training and incentives.
- ii. **Strengthening SME Support:** Stakeholders in the Igbo Apprenticeship System should provide targeted support for SMEs to ensure smooth business succession, including mentorship programs, financial incentives, and business continuity planning.
- iii. **Career Counseling and Guidance:** Stakeholders in the Igbo Apprenticeship System should introduce career counseling and guidance programs that highlight the benefits and opportunities within traditional apprenticeship systems alongside modern career paths.
- iv. **Integrate Modern Education with Traditional Skills:** Stakeholders in the Igbo Apprenticeship System should create hybrid educational programs that integrate modern education with traditional skills, allowing youth to gain both formal education and practical trade skills.
- v. **Promote Cultural Heritage:** Stakeholders in the Igbo Apprenticeship System should initiate campaigns and programs to promote the cultural and economic values of traditional Igbo apprenticeship systems, aiming to instill pride and interest among the youth.

References

1. Achebe, C. (2010). *The Igbo apprenticeship system: A cornerstone of entrepreneurial development in Southeast Nigeria*. *Journal of African Business*, 11(1), 7-22.
2. Adigun, B. (2020). *The Dynamics of Business Succession in Family-Owned SMEs*. *Journal of Business Studies*, 15(3), 45-62.
3. Amadi, R. (2018). *The role of entrepreneurial education in SME development: A case study of Igboland*. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 21(4), 1-15.
4. Aneke, K. (2019). *Bridging the gap: Integrating formal education and vocational training*. *Educational Innovations Journal*, 8(1), 34-50.

5. Anyanwu, O. (2019). *Policy Frameworks for Revitalizing Apprenticeship Systems*. *Economic Development Review*, 11(2), 98-113.
6. Chukwu, L. (2021). *Balancing tradition and innovation: Future prospects for Igbo SMEs*. *Journal of African Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 12(1), 33-48.
7. Chukwu, P. (2021). *The Igbo Apprenticeship System and Its Impact on Economic Development*. *African Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 14(2), 22-38.
8. Emeali, C. C., Agbaeze, E. K., Oganezi, B. U. & Achilike, N. I. (2023). *Igbo Apprenticeship Business Model and Sustainability of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Southeast Nigeria*. *Innovations*, 75(04): 719-737.
9. Eze, C. (2019). *The Holistic Grooming Process of Igba-Boi: Beyond Vocational Training*. *Cultural Studies Review*, 10(4), 67-82.
10. Eze, O. (2014). *Cultural underpinnings of business operations in Southeast Nigeria*. *Journal of Business Anthropology*, 3(2), 216-230.
11. Ibekwe, A. (2018). *Socio-Economic Rewards and Career Choices among Nigerian Youth*. *Sociology of Work*, 6(3), 123-139.
12. Ike, J. (2017). *Financial constraints and the growth of SMEs in Nigeria*. *Journal of Development Finance*, 25(1), 77-92.
13. Njoku, M. (2020). *A hybrid model of apprenticeship: Combining practical skills and formal education*. *Vocational Training Journal*, 5(2), 55-70.
14. Nkem, E. (2020). *Globalization and its impact on traditional Igbo businesses*. *International Journal of Business Globalization*, 30(2), 123-138.
15. Nnamani, T. (2021). *Perceptions of apprenticeship and its impact on career choices*. *Youth Studies Quarterly*, 14(1), 89-102.
16. Nwankwo, A. (2015). *Modernizing Igbo business practices for competitiveness*. *Journal of African Economic Development*, 17(2), 45-60.
17. Nwankwo, B. (2020). *Urban migration and the decline of traditional apprenticeships*. *Migration and Society*, 9(2), 147-160.
18. Nwaubani, A. (2018). *Kinship and economic stability: The role of Igbo apprenticeship*. *African Economic History*, 12(3), 41-56.
19. Obi, J. (2021). *The future of Igbo apprenticeship in a globalized world*. *Global Economy and Development*, 13(1), 77-95.
20. Obi, M. (2019). *Adapting business strategies to market dynamics in Igbo communities*. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 38(3), 45-58.
21. Ogbu, E. (2021). *Educational partnerships for SME development*. *Journal of Community Development*, 7(3), 102-118.
22. Ogunyemi, S. (2018). *Challenges of business succession in Nigerian SMEs*. *Business and Management Research*, 4(4), 39-55.
23. Okafor, L. (2022). *Technology and apprenticeship: Opportunities and challenges*. *Journal of Technological Advances*, 11(1), 29-44.

24. Okechukwu, K. (2021). *SMEs and technological integration: A path to sustainability*. *Technology and Development*, 8(2), 63-78.
25. Okeke, F. (2020). *Cultural foundations of the Igbo apprenticeship system*. *Journal of African Studies*, 16(2), 58-74.
26. Okeke, U. (2012). *Obstacles facing SMEs in Nigeria: A focus on Igbo entrepreneurs*. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 2(3), Article 4.
27. Okoye, N. (2017). *Apprenticeship as a mechanism for business succession*. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Studies*, 9(3), 21-36.
28. Onwuka, G. (2018). *The role of societal expectations in shaping career choices*. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(1), 34-49.
29. Onyeji, I. (2018). *Community initiatives to promote apprenticeship*. *African Community Development Review*, 6(2), 85-99.
30. Onyeji, K. (2016). *Technology adoption among Igbo SMEs: Barriers and benefits*. *Information Technology & Development*, 22(4), 591-605.
31. Umeh, A. (2017). *Family dynamics and career choices in Igbo culture*. *Cultural Dynamics Journal*, 5(1), 47-61.
32. Uzoigwe, O. (2022). *Economic shifts and career aspirations in Southeast Nigeria*. *Nigerian Economic Review*, 14(1), 99-114.