



Youth entrepreneurship empowerment in South-East Geopolitical Zone, Nigeria: Assessment of Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025

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Abstract

This study examined youth entrepreneurship empowerment in South-East Nigeria through analysis of the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025. It focused on apprenticeship practice, youth entry into informal enterprise and state regulation of trade-based training systems. The Igbo apprenticeship model remains a key pathway for skill acquisition, business formation and capital development among youths in commercial centers in the study area. The study adopted a doctrinal research method with data were drawn from the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law 2025, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and relevant case law. It examined the transition from informal oral agreements to a statutory framework introducing written contracts, registration of participants and a regulatory commission. Key provisions reviewed include rights and duties of masters and apprentices, dispute resolution mechanisms and enforcement structures under the law, as well as the interaction between customary practice and formal legal regulation. Findings of the study showed that youth unemployment and limited access to formal employment sustain reliance on apprenticeship as a major route to income generation. However, the new legal framework introduces compliance requirements such as documentation standards, educational entry conditions and administrative procedures that affect participation. Challenges identified include weak enforcement capacity, compliance burdens on small traders and tensions between statutory control and traditional market structures. The researchers recommended that Anambra State Government, regulatory commissions and agencies involved should strengthen awareness campaigns in markets, establish registration centers, strengthen monitoring, involve market associations in dispute resolution, integrate business literacy and record-keeping support in the apprenticeship systems.

Keywords: Youth, entrepreneurship, Igbo, apprenticeship, skill

Introduction

Youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria reflects movement of young people into self-owned business activity due to limited formal employment. Entrepreneurship involves identifying business opportunities, using available resources, taking risks and creating value through commercial activity as a means of generating income outside salaried work (Nakajima & Sekiguchi, 2025) [20]. Small businesses dominate informal economic activity and support household income (World Bank, 2022) [35]. Small and medium enterprises form a large part of Nigerian informal economy and support youth participation in trade and production (Ogunsanya, 2021) [28]. Youth unemployment and poverty remain high despite various government programmes, with major barriers including low job availability, slow industrial growth, limited access to finance (Diyoke, 2014) [11] and the weak alignment between education and labour market needs. Digital apprenticeship models appear in ICT-based SMEs where youths learn skills in service firms (Azubuike, Olubejide & Jeje, 2024) [6]. Uneven access to education affects participation in informal apprenticeship. Disputes arise from power imbalance between masters and apprentices, settlement disagreements and lack of formal training exposure (Olulu & Udeorah, 2018) [30]. To induce industry by the youth, Nigeria embarked on Government programmes such as N-Power, You-WIN and YES (Kalagbor & Harry, 2018; 2019) [17]. ICT policies include NPICE and NDEPS (Bello & Ajao, 2024) [7]. Youth unemployment remains high despite these interventions (Unini, 2024) [34].

African indigenous entrepreneurial systems rely on mentorship, observation and market participation, with skills transferred through interaction between experienced traders and learners in business environments (Obi & Agha, 2016; Olulu & Udeorah, 2018) [25, 30]. Family and social networks influence access to training and economic opportunities, while skill acquisition centres enhance employability and promote business creation (Okeke & Osang, 2021) [29]. In the South-East geopolitical zone, high population density and active commercial centres support informal trade and small-scale services as major sources of income for youths (Fajobi *et al.*, 2017) [13]. After the Nigerian civil war, the system expanded as Igbo communities relied on informal trade networks for recovery, leading commercial centres like Onitsha, Aba and Nnewi to grow through mentorship, settlement and reinvestment in small businesses (Orugun, Johnson & Akeem, 2014; Kanu, 2019) [18, 32]. The Igbo apprenticeship system (IAS), known as Igba-boyi, Imu'ahia, or Imu Oru, operates through agreement between a master trader (Oga) and an apprentice (Nwaboi) (Adekola, 2013; NN News Media, 2025) [1, 23]. IAS operates across Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, supporting business knowledge transfer and continuity of family enterprise systems (Igwe *et al.*, 2018) [15]. IAS is an informal business incubation system in South-East Nigeria where apprentices, admitted through family agreements, engage in trading activities such as buying, selling and stock management, with training lasting about four to seven years (Olulu & Udeorah, 2018) [30]. At

completion, settlement involves financial or material support from the master to enable the apprentice to start independent business activity (NN News Media, 2025; Ndeke, 2025) ^[21, 23].

After settlement, apprentices establish independent businesses (Ogunleye, 2022; NN News Media, 2025) ^[23, 27] and IAS supports youth entry into business without capital, reduces training costs and provides settlement capital (Igwe *et al.*, 2021). According to Neuwirth (2018) ^[14, 22], Iwueke, Alhassan and Okparaku (2020) and Ejiofor and Otika (2024) ^[12, 16], apprenticeship combines shop-based learning with market exposure, promotes wealth circulation; and builds trade competence that produces independent traders as a form of business incubation, while entrepreneurial orientation involves risk-taking and innovation (Serrano-Bedia *et al.*, 2019) ^[33]. Recent trends show declining youth participation in apprenticeship, as many now prefer short-term income activities such as commercial driving instead of long training periods (Anigbogu & Okoli, 2019; Obuseh *et al.*, 2024) ^[4, 26]. Limited recognition restricts access to finance (World Bank, 2022) ^[35] and mistrust, absence of written contracts, weak financial literacy, low digital skills and lack of business registration contribute to disputes and poor post-settlement business survival (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020) ^[24]. Reports of theft, exploitation and misconduct involving apprentices and masters affect trust and participation. IAS operates without state funding, depending on masters and families (Omoredede & Omoredede, 2017) ^[31].

Despite these challenges, the Indigenous Apprenticeship System (IAS) continues to support youth economic activity in South-East Nigeria by reducing youth involvement in crime through access to training and income-generating pathways (NN News Media, 2025) ^[23]. The Anambra State Government introduced the Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025 ^[2] to regulate the system while retaining its cultural base (ASHA, 2025) ^[21]. The objectives of this study are to study examines youth entrepreneurship empowerment in South-East Nigeria through assessment of the law; determine how business financing, innovation, skills and wealth creation can be harnessed from the youth through mentorship and the effectiveness of the legal existing policy and legal framework of IAS.

Methodology

The study adopted doctrinal or library-based method used to draw data from the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law 2025 ^[2], Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and case law. The method examined statutory shift from oral apprenticeship agreements to written contracts, registration of masters and apprentices and creation of a regulatory commission, based on statutory texts, judicial authorities and scholarly writings. Information from substantive law, legal rules, doctrines, judicial decisions, legislative materials, parliamentary debates on policy history as well as from secondary sources like textbooks and journals were analyzed, interpreted and synthesized to propose reforms instead of a physical fieldwork. (Bhagyamma, 2023) ^[8].

Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025 ^[2] Analysis

The Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025 ^[2] introduces rules for apprenticeship relations in trading and

craft training under Igba boi and trainee arrangements. Ejike Okechukwu (Anaocha Constituency 2) sponsored the Bill (Ndeke, 2025) ^[21]. Market leaders and apprenticeship representatives made submissions during hearings in support of formal recognition of the system. Section 1 of the law states that the Anambra State House of Assembly enacted provisions regulating agreements between masters and apprentices, administrative supervision and rights and duties of parties. Commencement date stands at 10 September 2025. The law contains Parts A to D, 34 sections and two schedules. Section 2 contains definitions. “Boi” refers to a person entering an apprenticeship agreement with a business owner for training over a fixed period. “Oga” refers to the master or business owner. “Igba boi” refers to a practice where a master trains an apprentice in business activity, provides welfare support during training and gives start-up capital or goods after completion. “Trainee apprenticeship” refers to paid training under a master in a trade. “Commission” refers to the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Commission set up under the law for administration and oversight. Other definitions include Magistrate Court as court of reference; permanent address as verified hometown identity and the State Ministry as Ministry of Trade and Commerce.

Section 3 applies the law to apprenticeship relations between oga and nwa boi and trainee arrangements in Anambra State. It covers Igba boi practice and structured trainee agreements under one legal standard. Section 4 lists objectives as regulation of apprenticeship relations, creation of a database of masters and apprentices, dispute resolution processes, reduction of abuse in apprenticeship practice and support for trade activity in the state economy. Sections 5 (1) regulate Igba boi agreements. Section 5 requires written contracts containing full identity of parties, addresses, guardians for minors, guarantors for adults and at least two witnesses from each side. Section 5(2)(f) requires terms, commencement date and duration. Duration must not exceed seven years. The Child Rights Act 2003, Nigerian Labour Act 2004, Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 and NAPTIP Act 2015 apply to minors to prevent exploitation and forced labour. This written requirement responds to gaps in oral arrangements discussed in *Chukwuemeka Onyedika v. G-Ossy Company Drugs Ltd* [2018] ^[9]. Section 6 requires Basic Education Certificate before entry into apprenticeship. Section 7 and 8 set parties as apprentice (*nwa boi*), oga, guardian, guarantor and witnesses. Section 9 assigns duties to *nwa boi*: service to oga, assistance in business operations, domestic tasks linked to training and compliance with lawful instructions. Section 10 sets rights of *nwa boi*, including accommodation in safe conditions, meals, welfare support, structured training hours, fair treatment and respect for human rights (NN News Media, 2025) ^[23].

Section 11 gives oga authority to assign tasks, delegate operations linked to training and terminate apprenticeship for misconduct such as theft, subject to dispute processes. The oga carries responsibility to follow dispute procedures before disciplinary action. Sections 12 to 17 cover trainee apprenticeship. Section 12 sets written agreements that include identity of master and trainee, guardians where applicable, guarantors, witnesses, terms, start date and training fees. The trainee system differs from Igba boi due to payment for training. Section 13 requires Basic Education

Certificate for enrolment. Section 16 lists trainee duties: obedience to lawful instructions, adherence to workplace rules, respect for the master, attendance at training hours and payment of agreed fees. Section 17 assigns duties to the master, including instruction in trade practice, exposure to business operations through errands and external postings and humane treatment of trainees during training periods. Sections 17(4) and 18(5) refer to dignity obligations in training relations. In *Andrew Ugo v. Livinus Oqualiri* [2016]^[3], the claimant failed to prove seizure of an international passport and alleged domestic labour abuse. Completion certificates apply to both Igba boi and trainee systems (NN News Media, 2025)^[23]. A settlement stipend exists for registered nwa boi after completion as startup support. Section 19 establishes the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Commission as a body with legal capacity and perpetual succession. Section 22 assigns functions such as registration of masters and apprentices, maintenance of a statewide database and enforcement of apprenticeship standards. Membership includes a chairman with business experience, three members from each senatorial district, a representative of the Commissioner, chairman of the State Market Association or nominee and a Chartered Arbitrator appointed by the Governor. Section 18 sets dispute resolution stages. Initial stage involves family members and witnesses from both sides seeking settlement. Market leadership intervenes when initial talks fail and issues a written decision (Ndeke, 2025)^[21]. Mediation under the Commission follows where disagreement continues and decisions at this level bind parties under Section 18(3). Final appeal rests with courts of competent jurisdiction. Section 18(5) restricts theft allegations against apprentices or trainees where the master lacks proper stock records during the period of loss. Section 33 states enforceability of apprenticeship contracts in court. Minors act through guardians ad litem or next friend as seen in *MTN v. Abdullahi* [2023]^[19]. Magistrate Courts and High Courts handle disputes within jurisdictional limits. In *Arkgee Computers Ltd. v. Yakubu Jeremond* [2020]^[5], the court ordered payment of one year rent, stock supply and N500,000 under a written apprenticeship agreement within 30 days. The law places apprenticeship agreements within enforceable legal and judicial channels. Commentary describes the legislation as part of state efforts to regulate wealth creation practices linked to apprenticeship systems (NN News Media, 2025)^[23].

Discussion of Findings

The Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025^[2] establishes a formal framework for apprenticeship through written contracts, registration, dispute resolution and state supervision (ASHA, 2025)^[2]. The findings of the study showed that the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025^[2] introduces a shift from informal oral agreements to written contracts with identity verification and registration requirements (ASHA, 2025). This aligns with international legal research standards that emphasize documentation, traceability and enforceability of contractual relations in economic systems. However, the reliance on oral trust-based arrangements in existing trading practice reflects long-standing indigenous commercial culture in South-East Nigeria (Kanu, 2019)^[18]. While formalization improves legal clarity and accountability, it conflicts with entrenched

informal structures that sustain apprenticeship stability, thereby creating a dual system of legal compliance versus customary practice. The requirement for written contracts and Basic Education Certificate introduces structural barriers for low-literacy and economically disadvantaged youths, potentially limiting access to apprenticeship opportunities (ASHA, 2025)^[2]. This finding is consistent with earlier studies showing that poverty and educational inequality shape participation in informal skill systems (Diyoke, 2014; Olulu & Udeorah, 2018)^[11, 30]. From an international standard equity perspective, regulatory frameworks must balance formalization with inclusiveness. Although the law strengthens institutional control, it unintentionally reproduces exclusion patterns by limiting entry for vulnerable youth, contradicting inclusive labour development principles promoted by global development frameworks (World Bank, 2022)^[35].

The study revealed that documentation, registration and welfare obligations increase operational costs for masters and apprentices, especially under inflationary pressures and unstable informal income structures (NN News Media, 2025)^[23]. This aligns with findings of previous studies that small informal enterprises in Nigeria already operate under financial constraints and limited access to credit (Ogunsanya, 2021; Igwe *et al.*, 2021)^[14, 28]. Without financial incentives, subsidies, or simplified compliance systems, the law reduces willingness of masters to participate, thereby weakening apprenticeship absorption capacity and slowing youth employment generation in the informal economy. The establishment of the Apprenticeship Commission introduces formal system and dispute resolution mechanisms; however, effective implementation depends on funding, staffing and administrative capacity (ASHA, 2025). Similar policy challenges have been observed in Nigerian youth development programmes where weak institutional capacity reduces effectiveness (Kalagbor & Harry, 2018; Bello & Ajao, 2024)^[7]. Although multi-tier dispute resolution improves legal structure, it delays justice and reduce reliance on faster customary mechanisms, potentially causing parties to prefer informal settlements over statutory processes.

The findings of the study also showed resistance from market associations due to perceived interference with established apprenticeship customs and autonomy of trade governance (Kanu, 2019)^[18]. This is consistent with previous research positing that indigenous apprenticeship systems function effectively through trust, social networks and informal regulation (Obi & Agha, 2016; Olulu & Udeorah, 2018)^[25, 30]. Excessive formal regulation without cultural integration weaken compliance and reduce system legitimacy, thereby creating tension between statutory authority and indigenous economic institutions that historically sustain youth entrepreneurship. The assignment of domestic and training duties raises concerns about potential rights violations under national and international labour protection frameworks, especially where supervision is weak (ASHA, 2025). Prior studies showed risks of exploitation, power imbalance and weak safeguards in apprenticeship relationships (Nnonyelu & Onyeizugbe, 2020; Olulu & Udeorah, 2018)^[24, 30]. While the law attempts to align apprenticeship with formal labour protections, inadequate enforcement capacity still exposes apprentices particularly minors to conditions that conflict

with international human rights and child welfare standards, presenting the need for stronger monitoring and safeguarding mechanisms.

Conclusion

The Igbo apprenticeship system operates as a route for skill transfer, capital formation and business entry for youths in South East Nigeria. Practice relies on oral agreements, trust and family links. The Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law, 2025^[2] introduces written contracts, registration and a State Commission. The law shifts practice from informal arrangements to statutory regulation. It sets duties, rights and dispute steps for masters and apprentices. Youth unemployment and limited access to formal employment sustain dependence on apprenticeship for income generation. The legal framework introduces education, documentation, enforcement and settlement obligations. These requirements affect participation in informal trade spaces. Apprenticeship continues as a route for small business formation and local commerce. State regulation links customary trade practice with formal governance in youth enterprise development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. Skill Development Centers should connect with apprenticeship clusters for literacy, record keeping and business management training during apprenticeship.
2. Anambra State Government should run market-based awareness programmes for masters, apprentices and guardians on provisions of the 2025 law, rights of apprentices, fair pay, protection from forced labour, safe work conditions, equal opportunity and freedom from harassment.
3. Ministry of Trade and Commerce and Entrepreneurship Centers in Polytechnics should set registration points in markets and higher institutions to support enrolment of apprenticeship agreements into the State database, obtaining Trade Certifications, educate on stock record keeping, assist in legal business name registration and access to grants and tax incentives.
4. State Apprenticeship Commission should be properly funded and deploy field officers to monitor apprenticeship arrangements in trading clusters instead of complaint-based reporting.
5. Market unions and town unions should take part in mediation of apprenticeship disputes before cases move to courts.
6. Human rights of apprentices should be highlighted in agreements to ensure fair treatment. State Government should introduce flexible compliance options for small traders facing difficulties with documentation and record keeping while maintaining basic legal standards.
7. Market Associations as stakeholders should be partners with the government in ensuring the success of the law for the promotion and sustenance of IAS.

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