

Gender Differentials in Igbo Apprenticeship System on Entrepreneurial Capacity of Igbo Women in Akure, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed women exclusion practices in Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) and its effects on the entrepreneurial capacity of Igbo women in Akure, Nigeria. The study is based on primary data and the major questions asked were what is the level of female gender exclusion from the IAS and what is the effect of excluding the female gender in IAS on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in Akure, Nigeria? The objectives of the study were to examine female gender exclusion in Igbo Apprenticeship System and investigate the effects of excluding the female gender in IAS on the entrepreneurial capacity of Igbo women in Akure Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed exclusion of female gender in IAS and female gender exclusion in IAS affects the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area. The study concludes that there are culturally assigned roles for men and women in Igbo society and this affects the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area. The study, therefore, recommends that significant steps should be taken by all stakeholders to incorporate women into

the IAS as way of encouraging economic empowerment and entrepreneurship among Igbo women.

Keywords

Gender differentials; Entrepreneurial capacity; Women entrepreneurs; Igbo apprenticeship system; Nigeria

1. Introduction

For a long time, communities in Southeastern Nigeria have embraced an approach similar to what is now termed stakeholder capitalism — a business philosophy that prioritizes the well-being of society, workers, consumers, and the environment alongside the interests of shareholders. This process has been driven majorly by a unique system of entrepreneurship called the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS). IAS is a communal business model in which established businesses mentor and support new ones, providing capital and transferring customers to help them grow. Over time, this system prevents any single business from becoming overwhelmingly dominant, as market share is continually redistributed. The result is a more balanced community where opportunities are available to all, regardless of scale (Ekekwe, 2021).

Apprenticeship has long been recognized as one of the earliest methods for passing down skills and knowledge. In essence, it is viewed as a blend of hands-on experience and theoretical learning. According to Olulu and Udeorah (2018) cited in Ekesiobi and Dimnwobi (2020), apprenticeship is considered a method of instructing individuals in a specific trade or craft, aimed at preparing them for imminent well-being and livelihood. The authors additionally outlined three categories of apprenticeship practices which are, traditional, informal, and modern models. Apprenticeship has long been recognized as one of the earliest methods for passing down skills and knowledge. In essence, it is viewed as a blend of hands-on experience and theoretical learning.

According to Olulu and Udeorah (2018) cited in Ekesiobi and Dimnwobi (2020), apprenticeship is considered a method of instructing individuals in a specific trade or craft, aimed at preparing them for imminent well-being and livelihood. The authors additionally outlined three categories of apprenticeship practices which are, traditional, informal, and modern models. The Igbo society is essentially patrilineal. However, as noted by Foster (1996) in Kitching and Woldie (2004), as nations progress toward greater democracy, gender inequalities tend to decrease, creating a more equitable and productive environment for both men and women. Although the general outlook for female entrepreneurs in Nigeria looks promising as highlighted by the PwC (2020) report, it is not so under the Igbo Apprenticeship System which seems to remain the exclusive preserve of the male gender.

The implication of excluding the female gender in IAS has ensured that much of the economic development activities that are currently taking place in other regions of the country, as a result of active female participation in entrepreneurship, will continue to elude the South Eastern region of Nigeria considering the population breakdown (101.67- female: 107.15 -male) and its implication for economic development (O'Neill, 2022). Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

- i. What is the level of female gender excluded from the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS)?
- ii. What are the effects of excluding the female gender in IAS on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in Akure, Nigeria?

To address the research questions, the objectives of this research are to:

- i. examine female gender exclusion the IAS; and
- ii. assess the effects of excluding the female gender in IAS on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in Akure Nigeria.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Igbo Apprenticeship System

The Igbo Apprenticeship System has been in existence for several decades. As noted by Abubakar et al. (2021), the system involves experienced entrepreneurs taking young boys and girls from their families to provide hands-on, practical training in a specific trade. In return, the entrepreneur typically supplies the apprentice with food and other essential needs throughout the training period. During the period of apprenticeship, no salary is paid to the apprentice. The period of time usually varies according to the vocation or occupation. Ekekwe (2021) agrees that the IAS, also known as "igba boi" or "imu ahia", has been practiced by the Igbos for many centuries. He claims that the IAS is regarded as the world's largest business incubator, with thousands of new ventures being created and launched annually through the system. The Igbo ethnic group, well known for success in business and entrepreneurship, have continued to record remarkable successes in business across Nigeria and beyond through the "Igba boi" system .

Gender Differentials in Igbo Apprenticeship System

Gender is a concept employed to signify the distinction between masculinity and femininity, shaped by societal constructs and instilled through socialization and education. In contrast to ascribed sex, gender is an attained status since it is acquired through learning Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Uduma (2015). According to Gebara (2002) as cited by Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Uduma (2015), gender is a concept acquired through social learning, expressed, established, and passed down through generations. It necessitates people to fulfill their roles according to gender with regards to cultural expectations. Gender serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the dynamics of male/female relationships, shaping roles in areas such as power distribution, decision-making, labor allocation, access to development benefits, and resource control are influenced by gender. Likewise, the different cultural, physical, institutional, social, and economic challenges faced by men and women arise from the specific gender roles assigned to each sex.

According to the World Health Organization (2019), gender encompasses the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys. This includes the norms, behaviors, and roles associated with each gender, as well as their relationships with one another. Being a social construct, gender varies between societies and can evolve over time. The WHO (2019) also noted

that gender is hierarchical and contributes to inequalities that intersect with other social and economic disparities. Discrimination based on gender intersects with various other forms of discrimination, including those related to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This phenomenon is known as intersectionality.

Oyekanmi (2004) cited in Buruji et al (2014) believes that the term gender is a social construct that delineates the roles of males and females within each society. Each gender is assigned specific roles and is subject to socially determined criteria for recognizing these roles. The concept of gender primarily focuses on comparing the status and treatment of women relative to men. Although it is positive that older women have access to skill development opportunities, there are still fewer young women than men securing suitable apprenticeship positions. Okebukola (2008) in Agbogu and Igbokwe (2015) observed that gender profiling in Nigeria reflects an imbalance, inequality, bias, and discrimination between genders. Collectively, these practices involve favoring males over their female counterparts.

In a country like Nigeria, where governance is largely dominated by men, they use their positions to accumulate power and wealth, often to the disadvantage of marginalized women. As such, women face limited representation in decision-making roles, often encountering discouragement when aspiring to political offices. In regions such as Igbo land, positions like the Head of the clan ("onye isiala") have consistently been held by the masculine gender. Throughout Igbo history, there is no recorded evidence of a reigning queen or a titled female clan leader.

Entrepreneurial Capacity of Women in Igbo Apprenticeship System

Nigeria is faced with serious unemployment challenges in spite of her huge investment potentials in all sectors of the economy and abundant human and material resources. Agriculture, mining, finance, oil and gas, etc., are some of the largely under-utilized sectors of the Nigerian economy that entrepreneurs can tap into driving the economy. Aladejebi (2020) had noted that entrepreneurship continues to be a crucial avenue for achieving sustainable wealth creation in Nigeria.

While both women and men encounter similar challenges in starting their own businesses, women often face greater and more difficult obstacles. These challenges are compounded by factors such as inadequate supportive laws, a lack of gender-sensitive policies, and limited access to financial services for women entrepreneurs. Ekpe *et al.* (2014) observed that in Nigeria, businesses owned by women are generally less economically developed compared to those owned by men.

Tillmar (2016) cited in Bowei (2020) maintained that in Tanzania, just like in Nigerian and several other African countries, entrepreneurship and self-employment often carry a strong male connotation, which divides men and women into distinct business sectors and creates a hierarchy that places men, particularly husbands, at the top.

Campos *et al.* (2017) have argued that although women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities differs by region, the disparities in productivity and growth between male- and female-owned businesses are significant and persist even in wealthy nations. The scholars maintained that although female participation in entrepreneurship in Africa ranks as the highest in the world, particularly with women accounting for half of non-farm business ownership, these entrepreneurial opportunities have not yet resulted in equal earnings between women and men. The challenges women face in entrepreneurship may be due to institutional barriers that prevent them from actively taking part in entrepreneurship activities like their male counterpart.

The dominant cultural values and beliefs in the society also play a huge role in determining the level of women participation in entrepreneurship. For instance, in societies with strict views of traditional male and female roles like the Igbo society, the opportunities for women to actively engage in paid employment or starting up businesses are often very slim, (Aladejebi, 2020).

Bowei (2020) also agrees that gender differences reveal the distinct dimensions of entrepreneurship and demonstrate how men and women are differently affected by its traditionally masculine framework. This influence manifests through various challenges and factors that shape their experiences in unique ways, including family dynamics, available opportunities, business choices, motivations, and entrepreneurial success. Perceptions of family responsibility poses a

challenge to women's participation in entrepreneurship with patriarchal attitudes, which confine women's roles to domestic and family duties, limit their ability to act independently (UNIDO, 2014).

Some of the push factors that drive women to go into entrepreneurship in Nigeria may include economic demands especially at home exacting tremendous pressure on the male breadwinner and the need to support family income. Other contributing factors include the pursuit of personal goals and the drive to alleviate poverty. Many Nigerian women participate in low-risk, informal, and unplanned entrepreneurial activities that allow them to maintain a balance between traditional female roles and family responsibilities. These limitations strongly influence the kinds of businesses women establish and where they are located (Moses et al., 2015).

Women entrepreneurs differ significantly in terms of traits from their male counterparts. Traits such as aggressiveness, goal oriented, proactiveness, competitiveness, innovativeness etc. required for running successful entrepreneurial ventures are assumed to be masculine in nature and high demanding (Moses *et al.* 2015). Dionco-Adetayo (2004) cited by Abasilim (2015) identified the factors that influence entrepreneurial success to include personality factors, management skills/abilities, motivation, environmental factors and education. Others are personality traits such as hardworking, resourcefulness, risk taking, socio-economic factors, and organizational factors.

There is a growing acknowledgment that women entrepreneurs play a crucial role as catalysts for inclusive and sustainable industrial growth, emerging as key contributors to the economies of developing countries (UN Report, 2002). In 2012, the World Economic Forum underscored the

significance of women entrepreneurs as "the way forward." Despite this recognition, women entrepreneurs continue encountering challenges in attaining their rightful position in economic spheres. While the number of women initiating businesses worldwide is on the rise, they still oversee fewer enterprises than men. Moreover, these businesses often operate in less profitable sectors, experience slower growth, and face a higher likelihood of failure. These gender disparities result in tangible societal costs.

When women's participation in entrepreneurship is not equitable, economies miss out on the advantages of innovative products and services, additional revenue, and new employment opportunities. The long-term negative effects on workforce skills and education are significant when half of the potential labor force remains underdeveloped. The visible consequences of women's economic marginalization highlight the critical need for gender equality and the economic empowerment of women.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on two main theories, namely, Stakeholder Capitalism Theory and the Social Exclusion Theory.

Stakeholder Capitalism

The Stakeholder capitalism theory is the notion that a business entity should focus on creating values in such a way that they meet the needs of all of its stakeholders. It highlights the interconnectedness between a business and its various stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, investors, and the broader community. The theory came into prominence through the works of Freeman et al. (2020).

The underlining idea of the IAS is shared prosperity. Participants' competitive market advantages are continuously adjusted and balanced through the dilution and surrendering of market share, fostering social resilience and the development of sustainable communities. This process is driven by key players who provide financial support to their competitors.. Under this system, success is not measured by how much a single individual is able to dominate the market but on the measure of support offered to others to thrive.

Social Exclusion Theory

Social exclusion refers to a process in which specific groups are systematically marginalized due to discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status, or geographical location, (DFID Policy Paper, 2005). Discrimination occurs within public institutions, such as the legal system, education, and healthcare, as well as within social institutions like the family. Levitas et al. (2007) describe social exclusion as a complex, multi-faceted process that involves the deprivation or denial of resources, rights, goods, and services, along with the inability to engage in the relationships and activities that are accessible to the majority of society. This exclusion spans economic, social, cultural, and political spheres, impacting both individual quality of life and the overall equity and cohesion of society (Levitas et al., 2007, as cited in DFID Report, 2005).

Burchardt et al. (1999) observed that an individual is considered socially excluded if they do not engage in the essential activities of the society in which they live. Birchal (2019) highlights that in Nigeria, women and girls encounter various formal and informal barriers to social inclusion. These barriers stem from limited access to employment, education, healthcare, legal rights, and participation in public life, as well as from gendered social norms that define women and girls as caretakers and wives, while men and boys are seen as decision-makers and primary earners.

3. Methodology

The exploratory research design has been used to ascertain the effect of exclusion of women in the IAS on the entrepreneurial capacity of Igbo women in Akure, Nigeria. The study uses both primary and secondary data . Primary data generation was through questionnaire while secondary data were from books, journals and Newspaper publications. The population of the study comprised Igbo Business men and women from the five Eastern States of Nigeria namely; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo within the Igbo business clusters in Arakale, Ilesha Garage and Carr Street in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria. These three business clusters have a total of one thousand, two hundred and seventy three (1,273) recognized Igbo business owners in the following order: Arakale - 557; Ilesha garage – 327; and Carr Street has - 389. This population (1,273) of the study was obtained from registration of Igbo shop-owners in three business clusters in Akure.

The sample size for the study

The sample size of three hundred and four (304) was obtained using the Taro Yamane (1973) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

population (N) = 1,273

margin of error = 5%

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{1272}{1 + 1273 (0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{1273}{1 + 1273 (0.05)^2} \end{aligned}$$

$$= \frac{1273}{4.1825}$$
$$= 304$$

Therefore, the total sample size is 304.

Hypotheses

The study uses the following hypotheses:

- i. There is no exclusion of the female gender in the Igbo Apprenticeship System
- ii. There is no relationship between exclusion and the entrepreneurial capacity of women in Akure, Nigeria.

Analyzing the data

The study deploys both the descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data and address the objectives of the study. The first objective is analyzed using mean ranking, frequency and percentages. The second objective involves the use of regression analyses. These methods of data presentation and analysis were adopted because they met the requirement of relating the variables involved.

Study Indicators

The indicators used to capture the independent variable (exclusion factors) were tradition, culture, patriarchy and religion. While the indicators used to capture the dependent variable (women entrepreneurship capacity) were ownership of micro, small and medium enterprises, (MSMEs), women's ability to take independent financial decisions and access to credit facilities.

Model Specification

The ordinal logit regression equation is stated below:

$$EC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EFG + e \quad (1)$$

Where, β_0 is intercept, β_1 is regression coefficient, e is error term, Exclusion of Female gender is EFG, Entrepreneurial Capacity of women is EC.

The ordinal logit regression model, with a significance level of 0.05 and a 95% confidence interval, assesses the factors influencing respondents' agreement with the statement that "excluding women from the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) has no impact on their entrepreneurial capacity in the area."

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Female Gender Exclusion in IAS

This section seeks to achieve objective one. It investigates female gender exclusion in the Igbo Apprenticeship System. A five-point Likert scale has been used to obtain the percentage and frequency of the respondents' awareness of female gender exclusion in the IAS. Adapted from Wanjohi and Syokau (2021), the range of interpretation of the Likert scale is given as; 1.0 – 2.4 (negative – minor exclusion), 2.5 – 3.4 (Neutral – moderately exclusion) and 3.5 – 5.0 (positive – major exclusion).

Table 1 presents respondents views on the gender roles among the Igbo people. Majority (69.2%) agree that Igbo men play dominant roles as breadwinners while 23.5% disagree while 7.3% are undecided. Also, the mean of value of 3.6, shows that the respondents agree with the statement that Igbo men play dominant roles as breadwinners. Their views agree with the earlier submission by Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Uduma (2015) that the traditional Igbo society had a conception of masculinity which consisted in the men’s duty to provide food for and protect their families while the female was groomed to be domestic, industrious and supportive of her husband.

Although there are individuals who believe, according to Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Uduma (2015) that the idea of female breadwinning among the Igbos, in any form it may come, is not only a taboo but an assault on masculinity, data in Table 1 seem to suggest that these traditionally held views are beginning to change. Research results showed that respondents who disagreed with concept of male dominance (and traditional male breadwinning) constituted a significant 23.5% while those that were undecided made up 7.6%.

Table 1: Female Gender Exclusion in IAS

	SA	A	N	D	SD	
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	
Statements	%	%	%	%	%	Mean
Women are allowed to participate in IAS like their male counterparts	15	52	32	109	95	2.31023
Male children are preferred over female children in Igbo societies	4.9	17.2	10.6	36	31.4	
	74	100	41	58	30	3.43894
	24.5	33	13.5	19.1	9.9	

Igbo women and men play the same roles in Igbos societies	15	35	32	132	89	2.19472
Igbo men play dominant roles as heads and breadwinners of their families in Igbo societies	5	11.6	10.6	43.6	29.4	
	84	125	23	42	29	3.60726
	27.8	41.4	7.3	13.9	9.6	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Effects of excluding Women from IAS

The second objective evaluated the effects of excluding female gender from the Igbo Apprenticeship System on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area. The proxies used to measure entrepreneurial capacities of women in the study area were; ownership of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), ability to make independent financial decisions and access to credit facilities for business. This was done using both descriptive and inferential analysis (regression).

Majority of the respondents (67.6%) disagree that Igbo women in Akure own more Small, Micro and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) than men while 12.3% agree, and those that are undecided make up about 20.1%. The mean score of 2.58 indicates that respondents agree that Igbo women in the study area do not own more MSMEs than their male counterparts.

On whether Igbo women solve their financial challenges without recourse to the men, majority of the respondents (71%) also disagreed while 12.9% agreed and undecided was 16.1%. The mean score of 2.1 shows that respondents disagree that Igbo women solve their financial challenges without recourse to their husbands which implies that Igbo women are not able to make independent financial decisions.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents (77.2%) disagreed that Igbo women pay their children's school fees easily or buy properties (76.2%) without recourse to their husbands. Both questions

have a mean score of 2.1 implies that that Igbo women in the study area are not able to make independent financial decisions.

Finally, 71.3% of the respondents disagreed that Igbo women in the study area have more access to business loan facilities than men. A mean score of 2.1 indicates that women in the study area have less access to business loan facilities/credits than men.

On the effect of exclusion on entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area, the result however revealed that majority of the correspondents (51.9%) disagreed, while 21.4% agreed and 26.7% were neutral.

Table 2: Effects of exclusion on entrepreneurial capacity of women in the Study area

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Igbo women in Akure operate MSMEs than Igbo men	5 1.7	32 10.6	61 20.1	97 32	108 35.6	2.58086
Igbo women in Akure own MSMEs than Igbo men	7 2.3	23 7.6	34 11.2	125 41.3	114 37.6	2.07591
Igbo women in Akure solve their financial challenges without recourse to the men	2 0.7	37 12.2	49 16.2	116 38.3	99 32.7	2.08911

Igbo women in Akure easily buy properties without recourse to their husband	5	30	37	124	107	2.09901
	1.7	9.9	12.2	40.9	35.3	
	8	23	38	144	90	2.05611
Igbo women in Akure pay their children's school fees with ease without recourse to their husband	2.7	7.6	12.5	47.5	29.7	
Igbo women in Akure have more access to biz loan facilities than Igbo men	0	23	64	126	90	2.06601
	0	7.6	21.1	41.6	29.7	
Excluding women from IAS negatively affects the entrepreneurship capacity of Igbo women	21	44	81	115	42	2.60396
	6.9	14.5	26.7	38	13.9	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis one – there is no exclusion of female in IAS. This was tested using descriptive statistics.

The table reveal that majority (67.4%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that women are allowed to participate in IAS like their male counterparts. Also, the mean of 2.3 shows that the respondents disagree with the statement which implies that there is exclusion of women from IAS.

Table 3: Distribution

Women are allowed to participate in IAS like their male counterparts		
	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	15	4.9
Agree	52	17.2
Non - response	32	10.6
Disagree	109	36
Strongly Disagree	95	31.4
Total	303	100
Mean	2.31023	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Hypothesis two - There is no relationship between women exclusion from IAS and the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area. This was tested using regression analysis.

Table 4 revealed the result of regression analysis for the second hypothesis stated in the null form: “There is no relationship between exclusion and the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area”. The ordinal logit regression model reveals the factors that reflect respondents’ choice on the statement that “exclusion of women from IAS does not have any effect on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the area”.

The table shows that statement “there are culturally assigned roles for women in traditional Igbo societies” is significant at one percent level while the statement that religion is important in Igbo society is significant at five percent level. This implies that cultural and religious beliefs have significant effect on the choice of the respondents towards their agreement to the statement – exclusion of women from IAS negatively affects their entrepreneurial capacity.

Table 4: Regression Result

Excluding women from IAS negatively affect their entre. capacity						
Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P<=z	[95% Conf. Interval]		

			-			
Did you pass through the IAS	-0.052	0.162	0.320	0.747	-0.370	0.265
Women are allowed to participate like men	-0.036	0.049	0.730	0.465	-0.132	0.060
Igbo women and men play the same roles	0.027	0.060	0.450	0.656	-0.091	0.145
Igbo men play dominant roles as breadwinners	0.011	0.064	0.180	0.857	-0.113	0.136
There are culturally assigned roles for men in traditional Igbo societies	-0.081	0.063	1.290	0.198	-0.205	0.042
There are culturally assigned roles for women in traditional Igbo societies	0.273	0.059	4.670	0.000	0.159	0.388
Igbo permit women to go into entrepreneurship like male	-0.084	0.059	1.430	0.152	-0.200	0.031
Religion is important in Igbo society	-0.162	0.081	2.000	0.046	-0.320	-0.003
Religious beliefs define the role of women	-0.056	0.066	0.850	0.396	-0.185	0.073
	0.074	0.054	1.360	0.173	-0.032	0.179

Religious beliefs about the
 role of men

/cut1	-1.013	0.557	-2.104	0.078
/cut2	0.172	0.553	-0.911	1.255
/cut3	0.976	0.557	-0.115	2.068
/cut4	1.748	0.564	0.643	2.854
Log likelihood = -419.66842			Number of obs =	303
			LR chi2(14) =	52.2
			Prob > chi2 =	0
			Pseudo R2 =	0.0586

$P \leq 5\%$ level of significance.

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The study revealed the factors that reflect respondents' choice on the statement that "exclusion of women from IAS does not have any effect on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the area". With a positive and significant regression coefficient at 0.05 level and confidence level of 95%, it was revealed that religion ($\beta_1 = 0.162$; $P < 0.05$) has a significant influence on entrepreneurial capacity of women. The result also revealed that culture ($\beta_1 = 0.273$; $P < 0.05$) has a statistical significant level of influence on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area. The result however revealed that patriarchy ($\beta_1 = 0.011$; $P > 0.05$) did not have significant statistical effect on the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the study area.

This finding aligns with Agbogu and Igboke (2015), who noted that gender profiling in Nigeria highlights issues such as gender imbalance, inequality, bias, and discrimination. Collectively, these reflect a tendency to favor and give preferential treatment to males over females. Similarly, Bowei (2020) observed that in Tanzania, as in Nigeria and many other African countries, entrepreneurship and self-employment are predominantly associated with men. This reinforces a gendered division in business sectors, where men are typically positioned at the top, often as husbands.

5. Conclusion

Based on these findings, the study concludes that there is indeed gender exclusion in the Igbo Apprenticeship System and this exclusion bears a negative effect on the entrepreneurial capacity of Igbo women in Akure, Nigeria. The study as such recommends that efforts should be geared towards breaking all cultural and religious barriers that demean, subjugate women and limit their participation in entrepreneurship as a way of encouraging economic empowerment and entrepreneurship among Igbo women. Also Igbo women in Akure who have already braced the odds to participate in the IAS should be identified and supported by government, donor agencies and financial institutions with business loan facilities in order to encourage more women to embrace the idea.

Policy Implications of this Study

The policy implications of this study include promotion of gender-inclusive apprenticeship systems and tackling cultural and social barriers. There is dire need for policy reforms in traditional apprenticeship systems that will encourage reforms within the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) to ensure that women have equal access to mentorship and opportunities. This could involve awareness campaigns and community engagement to reduce cultural biases that limit women's participation.

Incentives can also be introduced for apprenticeship mentors who include female apprentices in their programs. There is also need to launch advocacy and education programs aimed at changing negative cultural perceptions regarding women's participation in entrepreneurship. Community leaders and traditional rulers could be key stakeholders in these efforts.

Community-based women's networks can also be used to support the creation of networks or cooperatives of female entrepreneurs in Igbo communities. These networks can provide peer support, shared resources, and advocacy platforms to help reduce gender disparities in entrepreneurship.

Declaration of interest

The authors report that there are no conflicting interest to declare.

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