

## **Democratizing the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model through Communication in Nigerian Pidgin English: A Strategy for Boosting Human Capital Development in Multicultural Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

In Nigeria, there has been a surge in low living standards due to several factors, including limited practical skills and rapid population growth in urban areas. This has made it difficult to transfer vocational training across ethnic groups, given the country's high illiteracy rate and over 400 languages. To address this challenge, the study proposes the democratization of the successful Igbo Entrepreneurship Model (IEM) using Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) as a communication tool. NPE is the most widely spoken interethnic language in Nigeria, and unemployed citizens of multicultural cities may consider participating in the IEM if it adopts NPE. The proposed study uses in-depth interviews to explore the willingness of Igbo entrepreneurs to adopt NPE and the potential for unemployed citizens to participate in the IEM. The study reveals that Igbo entrepreneurs communicate mostly in Igbo to train their apprentices but would consider adopting NPE and other ethnic groups if the right incentives are in place. The findings also suggest that the use of NPE can democratize the IEM, making it accessible to a wider population and boosting Nigeria's human capital development. In summary, the study proposes the use of NPE as a communication tool to democratize the IEM and improve vocational training across ethnic groups in Nigeria. The findings of the proposed study could have significant implications for Nigeria's economy, as a well-trained workforce is crucial for sustainable economic growth.

**Keywords:** Human capital development, Vocational training, Nigerian Pidgin English, Igbo Entrepreneurship Model, Culture, Languages.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria has the highest population on the African continent, with over 57% of the population below the age of 35 (UNDP, 2020), making it possible for a large and productive workforce capable of achieving self-sufficiency. However, the country's high youth unemployment rate, which rose from 29.7% in September 2018 to 35% in June 2020, and a high number of unemployed youths at 14 million (NBS, 2020), has hindered the country's growth and development. Transferring information and skills effectively is critical to enable inclusive growth in many Nigerian communities. Still, the country's over 400 languages (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig, 2019) and a high illiteracy rate make it challenging to transfer skills across the various ethnic groups, reducing poverty and unemployment rates in the country.

Effective communication is essential for growth and development in multicultural societies (Sharma et al., 2021). Although Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) holds promise as the most widely spoken language of inter and intra-communication among Nigerians (Balogun, 2012), it has not been officially implemented as a national policy and instruction language. Nigeria's unemployment, poverty, and low living standards have resulted from limited job opportunities,

practical skills, rising rural-to-urban migration, and rapid population growth. These factors have also led to social vices and insecurity (UNDP, 2020).

This study proposes a practical method of fast-tracking Nigeria's human capital development by democratizing successful local vocational and technical models. It examines the role of NPE as the primary language for transferring the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model's (IEM) technical skills in multicultural cities. While the positive impact of inclusive languages like NPE in multicultural societies has been well documented, the use of NPE for the transfer of critical skills requires further exploration.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How can Nigerian Pidgin English enhance the intercultural adoption of the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model in a multi-cultural city like Lagos?
2. To what extent will Lagos residents adopt Nigerian Pidgin English as a suitable language for the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model?
3. What factors besides language hinder Igbo Entrepreneurship Model skills transfer within Lagos?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and Society**

The language a person speaks can affect their understanding of their environment. Pidgin, which emerged in the 17th century and was initially called "bastard jargon," has become Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), the most widely spoken language for inter and intra-communication among Nigerians and diverse ethnic groups and entrepreneurs without a common language. The attitude and use of different languages, especially NPE, can affect entrepreneurial models in multicultural communities.

Some studies have examined the practical use of NPE in advertising and political campaigns. Still, research on how it can improve technical and vocational skills adoption in a multicultural city is limited and inconclusive. Ofuani (2009) suggests that NPE is somewhere between a pidgin and a creole and that its communicative function can be determined through examples from journalism. Ativie (2010) investigates the cultural inputs of Nigerian spoken English and recommends NPE as a uniform language for national integration since it performs multiple roles for different citizens. Akande and Salami (2010) analyze the attitudes towards NPE among Nigerian university students and demonstrate that speakers' attitudes contribute to its marginalization, which is also affected by government policies. Osoba (2014) analyzes the use of NPE in multicultural cities such as Lagos, Kano, and Port-Harcourt, particularly in military, police, and air-force barracks, stranger communities, and slum areas like Ajegunle and Mushin. The study concludes that NPE exhibits informal features of human language and is associated with informal contexts.

#### **Culture and Entrepreneurship**

To explore the linkages between the headlined subjects, Hayton, George, and Zahra (2002) conducted a review of research on the relationship between cultural characteristics and entrepreneurship over the last decade, with a focus on empirical analysis. They found that many empirical studies had used Hofstede's conceptualization of national culture and other prominent

domains, which had not been fully developed. Additionally, the authors reviewed culture and its impact on entrepreneurship over the past thirty years, highlighting the complexity of culture and the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurship.

In a separate study, Albert and Onodje (2016) explored the migration and cultural identity retention of Igbo migrants in Ibadan using an exploratory research design. The researchers gathered data from association meetings and other cultural activities, finding that the Igbo migrant association actively promoted Igbo cultural identity among its members. Despite showing high levels of integration into the host culture, the migrants retained certain cultural elements of their community of origin.

Ajekwe (2017) investigated the effect of culture on entrepreneurship in Nigeria and found that cultural values and practices can hinder the development of an entrepreneurial culture. The study suggested that a change in values and mindset is necessary to foster a culture of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Meanwhile, Akanmu et al. (2018) studied the cultural orientation of entrepreneurial cluster initiatives in Kwara State using quantitative data analysis. The researchers concluded that cultural orientation must be taken into account when implementing entrepreneurial cluster initiatives.

In recent literature, Oyewunmi et al. (2020) assessed the centrality of enterprise in Igbo culture and evaluated entrepreneurial activities. The study analyzed the processes, opportunities, and challenges of the Igbo traditional business apprenticeship and recommended broad-based strategies for sustainability and leveraging across cultures and contexts. Similarly, Dheer and Lenartowicz (2018) analysed the factors that influence multiculturalism and entrepreneurial intentions. The study developed two hypotheses. The first hypothesis focused on the factors influencing the entrepreneurial intentions of bicultural individuals, while the second hypothesis investigated the role of cognitive and metacognitive cultural intelligence in managing the relationship. The study's empirical analysis based on survey data supported these hypotheses, which shed light on the influence of psychological and cognitive factors in determining intentions.

Abimbola, Adekeye, Ajayi, and Idowu (2011) conducted focus group discussions to investigate the influence of the extended family system and gender on entrepreneurship among the three main tribes in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), which make up more than half of Nigeria's total population. The study started by examining various programs introduced to encourage entrepreneurship in Nigeria, using both local and international sources. The study found that despite the Nigerian government's efforts to promote entrepreneurship, the achievements recorded have been disheartening.

Onwudiwe (2016) aimed to examine the declining use of the Igbo language and culture through the adoption of UNESCO's 2002 and 2003 nine-point criteria of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages as the basis for their study and recommendations. It was revealed that the cause of the decline of the Igbo language and culture is due to the attitude of the Igbo towards their assets and people, as well as their attraction to foreign cultures. Ajekwe and Ibiamke (2019) investigated the effect of ethnicity and entrepreneurial inclinations using an explanatory study of

TIV of North Central Nigeria. The result revealed that the non-Tiv group is more inclined to be entrepreneurial than the Tiv ethnic group. The study recommended that policy initiatives should instil entrepreneurial spirit and competencies in the Tiv group.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study explored theories such as the Communication Accommodation Theory and the Social Marketing Theory.

Communication Accommodation Theory, which Howard Giles proposed, provides a wide-ranging framework to predict and explain many adjustments individuals make to create, maintain, or decrease the social distance in interaction (Giles and Ogay, 2007). The theory explores how we accommodate others in our communication, the motivations for accommodation, and the consequences. In other cases, it is fueled, partly or almost entirely, by our social identities as members of groups (Giles and Ogay, 2007). Since its inception, Communication Accommodation Theory has undergone several conceptual refinements and theoretical elaborations, exemplified by moving from speech into non-linguistic and the term convergence (Zhang and Giles, 2018). In addition, Nigerian Pidgin English could serve as a language of accommodation and convergence, particularly for skills transfer in a diverse city like Lagos.

Social Marketing Theory by Andreasen (1994) argued that social marketing differs from other marketing areas by seeking to influence consumers' social behaviours for the benefit of the audience and society as a whole rather than for the advantage of the markets. The target audience can be a group, an individual, or the general society. The success of the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model in improving living standards has been demonstrated by Igwe et al. (2018) and Onwudiwe (2016). However, transferring these technical and vocational skills to other ethnicities through the National Policy on Education requires significant behavioural changes through social marketing.

Andreasen (2002) proposed three levels of social marketing practice for social media marketing: downstream, upstream, and midstream. Encouraging people to adopt more sustainable behaviour patterns is a crucial issue today. When individuals are requested to reconsider their behavioural patterns, they are, in essence, asked to change their identity. People adopt changes that work best for them in the long run (Resnicow and Page, 2008). However, since societal systems are complex, the outcome of change depends on various factors and planned behavioural change can be systematically achieved.

### **Methodology**

This study was a content analysis which the researcher considered most suitable because it will guide in the attainment of the study objectives. Usually, the choice of a research design is determined by its aim (Folayan, 2021; Ogunjobi 2022; Ogunjobi et al., 2022). This qualitative study uses in-depth interviews to investigate the role of Nigerian Pidgin English in promoting economic inclusion. The study was conducted in three overlapping phases: data collection, data analysis, and identifying themes and patterns. The population of the study was Nigerians living in a multicultural city like Lagos. According to the Lagos State Government (2021), the population of Lagos is above 24 million people. However, the research sampled two groups:

middle-aged residents of Lagos who have acquired technical and vocational skills via the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model and unemployed or underemployed youths in Lagos. The study used non-probability sampling methods to recruit participants, focusing on purposive sampling for the first group and quota sampling for the second group. The snowballing technique was also utilised to identify suitable participants. The study’s goal was to reach saturation and redundancy, with a recommended minimum sample size of 20-30 participants for in-depth interviews.

## Results

The conversations were recorded and then transcribed using Microsoft Word, making it easier to analyse and categorize. The transcriptions were then uploaded to Nvivo 11 for further analysis, identifying several themes, sub-themes, and frequency counts. Tables and charts were used to display these frequency counts. The study was conducted using a thematic approach, which allowed for the interpretation of the results and the drawing of valuable conclusions

The study involved interviewing eleven Igbo entrepreneurs to investigate how NPE could be utilised for skills transfer in a multicultural city. The results showed that 37% of the interviewees were between 26-30 years old, with 4 participants falling within this age range. The age group of 41 years and above represented 27% of the interviewees, while 18% were between 31-35 years old, and 18% were between 36-40 years old. The Southeast states, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo, were considered, with one participant identifying as Delta Igbo.

Table 1: Names, Demographics and Geographic information for Group 1 respondents.

S/No	Entrepreneur's Name	Sex	State of Origin	Age
1	Ugochukwu	M	Abia	29
2	Ebubechukwu	M	Abia	38
3	Miracle	M	Imo	27
4	Christian Ogu	M	Imo	47
5	Chukwudi Eze	M	Enugu	33
6	Elisha Ogbuenyi	M	Imo	36
7	Lucky Amos	M	Delta	28
8	George Ugwu	M	Enugu	42
9	Jude Egbe	M	Imo	47
10	Amaechi	M	Enugu	34
11	Hyacinth	M	Anambra	29

The results measure the NPE of IEM entrepreneur’s proficiency into three levels: basic, intermediate, and expert. The study found that 45% of the participants spoke NPE at the intermediate level, 9% spoke at the basic level, and 45.5% spoke at the expert level. Additionally, 100% of the participants understood NPE, with 18.2% understanding at the basic level, 36.3% at the intermediate level, and 45.5% at the expert level.

Table 2: State of Origin, Participants and Demographics for Group 2 respondents.

S/ N	Citizen's Name	Sex	Age	Geopolitical Zone	Educational Qualification
1	Abiola Kazeem	M	20	SW	Tertiary
2	Timothy Ojo	M	22	SW	Tertiary
3	Mariam Salako	F	21	SW	Secondary
4	Hakim Salami	M	31	NC	Secondary
5	Oluwasegun Olanrewaju	M	32	SW	Tertiary
6	Ekene Joshua	M	25	SE	Secondary
7	Isaac Ekweremadu	M	23	SE	Secondary
8	Shakirudeen Abiola	M	31	NC	Secondary
9	Sunday Aku	M	22	NE	Primary
10	Doyin Aiyeola	F	26	SW	Secondary
11	Onyanta Adama	F	29	NC	Tertiary
12	Michael Osai	M	28	NC	Primary
13	Joseph Ada	M	23	NC	Secondary
14	Marcy Eze	F	21	SE	Secondary
15	Gabriel Junior	M	29	NW	Secondary
16	Einda Praise	M	19	SS	Secondary
17	John Okato	M	28	NE	Tertiary
18	Rasheedat Adedotun	F	18	SW	Secondary
19	Ayishat Abu-Amin	F	22	NW	Tertiary
20	Olakunle Omidiji	M	25	SW	Tertiary

The study included 21 individuals aged between 18-34 years living in Lagos state who are either underemployed or unemployed. The sub-section analysed the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents who answered in-depth questions regarding their socio-demographic information, including their name, sex, age, geo-political zones, education level, understanding of Nigeria Pidgin English, type of job, preferred language, and proficiency in Nigeria Pidgin English. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between critical parameters such as language comprehension and education level.

The study interviewed individuals of different age groups, geo-political zones, and educational levels to collect data. The results showed that the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 20-29, with those aged 20-24 and 25-29 having the highest frequency of reference. Southwesterners represented the highest percentage of reference among geo-political zones,

while respondents with a secondary school education level had the highest reference frequency among educational levels.

## **Discussions**

### **How can Nigerian Pidgin English enhance the intercultural adoption of the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model in a multicultural city?**

The results indicate that NPE can facilitate the adoption of the IEM across different cultures, particularly among young people of various ethnicities who can learn skills from Igbo entrepreneurs in Lagos. Communication accommodation frameworks are necessary to explain the adjustments that individuals and IEM communities must make to reduce the social distance in productive dialogues. For example, according to a respondent who is underemployed and holds a tertiary degree, NPE has significant potential, as per her view:

“Absolutely. Pidgin might become that central language to converge people from other ethnic groups to co-ideate and co-learn. Not everyone understands queens English. Pidgin might help” (Onyanta, personal conversation, August 28, 2021). The entrepreneurs in the field of IEM share a comparative perspective regarding the possibility of NPE contributing to the acceptance of IEM. “Pidgin is very suitable. I speak it well and can have most conversations in that language. In Lagos, where I run my business, many ethnicities are here. I don't expect them to be proficient in Igbo” (Chukwudi, personal conversation, August 22, 2021).

However, even though all the research respondents comprehended the NPE when it was spoken to them, a smaller percentage of them could speak the language fluently beyond a basic level compared to their comprehension ability. Hence, apart from policies and curricula promoting IEM adoption, formal and informal approaches are necessary to train individuals to become proficient in speaking and comprehending IEM at an advanced level. One of the respondents provided information about her proficiency level in the language: “Yes, it can be a problem. I don't speak Igbo; I understand pidgin, but not very well. Maybe we can speak English or Yoruba. Some Igbos speak Yoruba; if the person will treat me well, then I will go” (Mariam Salako, personal conversation, August 23, 2021).

There is currently a mixed change in the status of the NPE. This study has confirmed that NPE is a language of contact where individuals from various Nigerian ethnic groups can understand each other. One of the responses gathered expressed a viewpoint: “Pidgin can be the middle point where people from different ethnic groups meet. Particularly in Lagos where different ethnicities reside.” (John Okato, personal conversation, August 23, 2021).

In essence, NPE can serve various limited communication needs for individuals who do not share a common language. It is viewed as a means of achieving national integration, sustainable development, and national objectives. As it is challenging to understand Standard English, incorporating NPE into important sectors is necessary for the rapid growth and participation of the Nigerian population. For example, the government and educational institutions should adopt and promote NPE for inter-ethnic technical and vocational training. This can be achieved through the inclusion of NPE in the technical and vocational education (TVET) policy of Nigeria. It is no longer surprising that educated and uneducated individuals use the language, so

it could become a functional language with proper polishing and opportunities. In conclusion, if barriers are developed, lesser-known languages could help resolve language barriers hindering progress.

### **To what extent will Lagos residents adopt Nigerian Pidgin English as a suitable language for the Igbo Entrepreneurship Model?**

The study found that Lagos residents are willing to adopt NPE as the language for IEM as long as it is accompanied by clarity of purpose and social marketing strategies. The use of NPE among the Igbo and other ethnic communities in Lagos was preferred by residents who want to understand and speak with stakeholders within the state easily. The study also established a likelihood ratio between a youth's level of education and their tendency to speak or understand NPE. One of the respondents surveyed expressed their opinion: "We communicate mostly in Pidgin daily. This is Lagos, my customers are from all parts of the country, and even Indians and Lebanese people come to trade. I speak my Pidgin to them, and they understand." (Miracle, personal conversation, August 26, 2021). Gardener (2000) confirms the connection between the use of NPE in IEM and the ability to speak and understand the language, highlighting three factors necessary for learning or adopting a language: effort, positive emotional attachment, and the motivation to learn.

The results also show that many underemployed and unemployed in Lagos desire to learn new skills that can lead to self-sustenance and success, even if it means learning a new language. The IEM entrepreneurs are also open to teaching apprentices from different ethnic groups as long as it benefits them socio-economically. Thus, 89% of respondents favour adopting NPE as a language for the IEM in theory. Still, social marketing strategies are needed to ensure its potential is fully realised, especially given the scepticism of some respondents: "Trust is key. I don't think many people will find an outsider trustworthy to commit their business to them." (Elisha, personal conversation, August 28, 2021). "I'm particular about the age of the potential apprentice. Anything above 20 years, I don't accept. A boy older than 20 years is too wise in his own eyes, and it will be difficult to shape his character. Also, I said boy because I can't accept a girl as an apprentice. She might marry anytime. Girls are usually in charge of sales; they earn a salary monthly." (Christian, personal conversation, August 24, 2021). "I have passed the level of apprenticeship (boy)." (Hakeem, personal conversation, August 28, 2021).

"I'm not sure I can learn a trade from an Igbo trader. No hard feelings..." (Olakunle, personal conversation, August 24, 2021).

Personal accounts from in-depth interviews and themes such as character, age, trust, and gender influence the acceptance of NPE as the language for the IEM in a multicultural city. Respondents showed bias against older people and female apprentices, which can be changed through social marketing. Andreasen (2005) suggested that social marketing can change behaviour by using the same principles used to sell products. Rational reasons must be considered for Igbo entrepreneurs to take up Hausa apprentices and for youths focused on white-collar occupations to choose vocational jobs.

The Nigerian government, educational, societal, and entrepreneurship institutions, as well as families, all have a role in promoting the acceptance of NPE as a language for the IEM.



According to Gambari et al. (2014), flexibility is the key factor in learning NPE, which is spoken mainly in the southern regions of Nigeria without any political or cultural affiliations. The researcher found that in Lagos, a multi-cultural city, 71% of IEM traders and 90% of young respondents are intermediate to expert NPE speakers. This indicates that integrating the language into Nigerian systems, especially in multicultural cities, would enhance its acceptance for the IEM.

### **What factors, besides language, hinders Igbo Entrepreneurship Model skills transfer?**

The Igbo Entrepreneurship Model is an informal apprenticeship program for acquiring entrepreneurial skills, known for shaping Igbo culture and economic intelligence. The study revealed that IEM practitioners demand commitment, honesty, optimism, youthful appearance, teachability and patience from apprentices. Therefore, the factors other than language that hinder IEM skills transfer include ageism, gender, apprenticeship duration and trust.

“Age is an important factor. The last person joined me around 19 years. I have learned that the best age to get an appreciated boy is around 15 years.” (Christian, personal conversation, August 28, 2021). “...I'm particular about the age of the potential apprentice. Anything (Anyone) above 20 years, I don't accept.” (Jude, personal conversation, August 24, 2021). “...I can't accept a girl as an apprentice. She might marry anytime. Girls are usually in charge of sales; they earn a salary monthly.” (Ugochukwu, personal conversation, August 28, 2021). “No, I cannot. I need people I can trust and live in my house. Nobody wants a stranger with his family and sweat.” (Jude, personal conversation, August 24, 2021).

Thus, the acceptance of apprentices who are 20 years old or above may be limited due to the perceived significance of age. Gender is also a challenge, with some respondents expressing reluctance to take on female apprentices because they believe women may get married and leave the program. Some entrepreneurs may only consider women for sales roles due to the perceived limited time they would be committed to the program. Others expressed a preference for male apprentices and biases towards females because they believed that females were more likely to get married and leave the business.

Conversely, some Lagos residents perceive IEM traders as extremely business conscious. A respondent said: “When money is involved, trust is a key issue. Igbo people don't play with money. I will not want to be used as a scapegoat when something goes missing” (Olakunle, personal conversation, August 24, 2021). Currently, with some security and ethnic challenges in Nigeria's economy, most entrepreneurs or would-be entrepreneurs, including the IEM practitioners, are confronted with difficult situations that hinder the IEM skills transfer. Therefore, this research question was effectively answered, showing the various challenges that may confront the transfer of the IEM to other ethnic groups in an ethnically-charged country like Nigeria.

In summary, the research aimed to broaden knowledge on using Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) for democratising Igbo Entrepreneurship Model (IEM) training in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos State, where the study revealed that the Igbo entrepreneurs utilise both Igbo and NPE to conduct business and train apprentices. This qualitative study showed that NPE could enhance the

adoption of the IEM system in different ways, considering that most respondents frequently speak and understand NPE. However, the research found that NPE is the preferred language for communication with customers and, in some cases, Yoruba. The research also found that several roadblocks hinder the IEM skill transfer, such as age, gender, trust, and honesty. The study further shows that most of the current vocational training are tilted towards fashion designing, craft, masonry etc. Finally, the data collected were tested to find the significance of the observations. The findings revealed a significant relationship between education and the level of speaking NPE. Still, no significant relationship was found between education and the level of understanding.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that NPE be developed beyond an oral language and become a central language in Nigeria due to its inclusivity across different socio-economic classes and ability to borrow words and mannerisms from various local Nigerian languages. It also suggests that NPE should be adopted as a formal/informal communication tool to pass information and opportunities to disenfranchised members of society. The government, policymakers, and language planners should show a keen interest in formalising NPE and changing people's attitudes towards it. In addition, policymaking institutions, academia, and private sector technology firms should invest in standardising, teaching, and testing NPE.

The research also explores the viability of the IEM, and it is a sustainable mode for skill acquisition and intergenerational socioeconomic sustainability. However, for this proven business model to percolate across Nigerian society, it is recommended that academia in business schools and policymakers must encourage IEM on a national level and provide more accessible ways of doing business via business hubs in geo-political zones. However, the study identified trust, gender, and structure as major hindrances to transferring IEM skills to other ethnic groups. Finally, the research recommends further quantitative surveys to evaluate the willingness of a larger population to adopt NPE as a language for vocational/technical skills transfer.

IEM's success rate has shown that vocational and technical trainers should positively engage in adding IEM to the curriculum and using NPE to engender easy information transfer and feedback. The practice and admission into the informal IEM programs are biased against females. Therefore, sensitisation and more engagement are necessary with IEM practitioners to address the bias towards accepting female apprentices. Finally, as digital tools and mobile technology continues to expand, NPE and other Nigeria gauges should be made available digitally to facilitate unity, localised communication and inclusive education.

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