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Migrant Communities and the Economic Development of Gombe State: A Study of Igbo and Yoruba Communities

Author(s)

Odoh John Nathaniel (PhD); Agbo Mathew Oga (PhD)

Affiliation:

Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State

Email: odohjohntl@gmail.com; agbooga@gmail.com

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Abstract

Migrant communities play a significant role in the economic development of their host communities. The Igbo and Yoruba communities are among the most conspicuous migrant communities in Gombe State. Their migration to the Gombe area became prominent in the colonial era as a result of economic and transport connectivity presented by the colonial economy. The article argues that the rapid growth Gombe State has witnessed over the years was as a result of the immense economic contributions of migrant communities, especially the Igbo and Yoruba communities. Their influx into Gombe added economic value to the state. They came with skills and business acumen which contributed positively to the economy. Using oral interviews, archival documents, and secondary sources, the article highlights the contributions of the Igbo and Yoruba communities to the development of Gombe State. Findings from the research revealed that during the colonial period, economic activities like sales of spare parts, building materials, pharmaceuticals, textile materials, and skills like mechanics, furniture, masonry, plumbing and electrical work were dominated by the Igbo and Yoruba migrant groups. Further findings show that the host communities benefited from the presence of the Igbo and Yoruba communities through the various apprenticeship skills made available by business owners and the job opportunities the businesses they established provided in the value chain. The study therefore concludes that the Igbo and Yoruba communities played distinctive roles in boosting the economy of Gombe State.

Keywords: ***Keywords:*** *Apprenticeship; Economic Development, Igbo; Yoruba; migrant, Gombe State.*

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Introduction

The economic prosperity of a society is closely connected to the movement of people, the circulation of skills and capital, and the capacity of host communities to accommodate migrant groups. Migrant communities around the world have contributed to the economic, social, and cultural transformation of their host societies through entrepreneurship, labour, trade, professional services, and the transfer of skills and knowledge. Migration should therefore not be understood simply as the movement of people from one geographical location to another, but also as a process through which economic resources, skills, ideas, and social networks are transferred across communities. The experience of Nigeria is particularly relevant to understanding this relationship between migration and economic development. Long before colonial rule, different parts of present-day Nigeria were connected through networks of trade and human mobility. Cities and political centres such as Oyo, Ife, Benin, Arochukwu, Kano, Katsina, and Borno developed as important centres of political and economic activity and attracted people from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. Trade, fishing, blacksmithing, agriculture, salt production, carving, and other economic activities encouraged population movements and created relationships between communities. The development of these centres, therefore, cannot be understood exclusively through the activities of indigenous populations; migrants, traders, artisans, religious specialists, and other mobile groups also participated in the economic processes that sustained them.[1]

Migration became even more pronounced during the colonial period. The incorporation of diverse territories into a single colonial administrative and economic system expanded existing patterns of migration and created new opportunities for interregional mobility. Colonial economic policies, administrative expansion, transportation networks, missionary activities, and the growth of urban markets encouraged movement between southern and northern parts of Nigeria. The development of Sabon Gari settlements in northern Nigerian towns provided an important institutional and spatial setting for migrants from different parts of the country. The movement of southern Nigerians to northern urban centres was consequently connected not only to individual economic ambitions but also to the changing economic and administrative structures introduced during colonial rule.[2] Existing scholarship has established the importance of migrant communities in the economic history of northern Nigeria, particularly in major commercial centres such as Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Katsina, and Jos. Scholars have examined the participation of migrants in commerce, transportation, skilled trades, public employment, education, and other areas of urban life. Coleman, for example, highlights the importance of migration and urbanisation in the development of Nigerian nationalism and interregional relationships.[3] Similarly, Falola and Heaton demonstrate that population movement, trade, and interaction between different communities were central to the making of modern Nigeria.[4] Studies of Igbo migration have also drawn attention to the movement of Igbo traders and entrepreneurs into northern and western Nigerian towns and their participation in commercial and occupational activities.

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Despite these contributions, the literature has concentrated largely on major northern urban centres, leaving smaller or emerging centres comparatively understudied. Gombe represents an important gap in this scholarship. Although Gombe occupied an important position within the historical and commercial networks of northeastern Nigeria, relatively little attention has been given to the economic roles played by migrant communities in its development. Existing studies on the peopling and migration of Gombe indicate that Yoruba and Igbo migrants were present in the area before the colonial period. Their movement was associated with commerce, missionary activities, administrative expansion, education, and other economic opportunities.[5] The central problem addressed by this study is therefore the relative neglect of Gombe in the historiography of internal migration and migrant economic contributions in Nigeria. While existing scholarship has demonstrated how migrant communities contributed to the development of cities such as Kano, Kaduna, and Zaria, comparatively little is known about the economic activities and contributions of Igbo and Yoruba migrants in Gombe. This gap raises important questions concerning the factors that encouraged their migration, the occupations they pursued, and the extent to which their activities contributed to the economic transformation of Gombe.

This article argues that the economic development of Gombe cannot be adequately understood without recognising the contributions of migrant communities. It specifically contends that Igbo and Yoruba migrants were active economic agents whose participation in commerce, skilled occupations, transportation, education, public service, and entrepreneurship contributed to the expansion and diversification of Gombe's economy. Their activities did not necessarily replace indigenous economic practices; rather, they interacted with and complemented existing economic structures. Through trade networks, employment, skills, capital, and social connections, migrant communities helped to create new economic opportunities and strengthen Gombe's connections with other parts of Nigeria. The study consequently shifts attention from viewing migrants simply as beneficiaries of economic opportunities to understanding them as agents of economic transformation. This perspective is important because migration studies often focus on why people leave their places of origin while giving less attention to what migrants contribute after settlement. The Gombe case demonstrates that migrants participated actively in shaping the economic environment of their host community. The study contributes to the historiography of migration in Nigeria by expanding the geographical focus beyond the country's major commercial centres. While Kano and other large cities remain important to the understanding of migration and economic change, the Gombe experience demonstrates that the relationship between migration and economic development also operated in smaller and emerging urban centres. It therefore broadens our understanding of how migration contributed to economic transformation across northern Nigeria.

The article is divided into four parts. The first is the introduction. The second examines the history of Yoruba and Igbo migration and settlement in Gombe State. The third discusses the major economic activities of the Igbo and Yoruba communities and their contributions to the economic development of Gombe State. The final section is the conclusion, which draws

together the findings and considers their broader implications for understanding migration, economic development, and intergroup relations in northern Nigeria. Ultimately, the article seeks to demonstrate that the history of Gombe's economic development is also a history of mobility, enterprise, and interaction between indigenous and migrant communities.

History of Igbo and Yoruba Migrant Groups in Gombe Area

The history of Igbo and Yoruba migration into the Gombe area needs to be situated within the wider history of mobility, commerce, colonial administration, and urban development in Northern Nigeria. Although the movement of people from southern to northern Nigeria became more visible during the colonial period, contacts between the two regions predated British rule. Trade routes connected the forest and savannah zones through networks that moved agricultural products, manufactured goods, and people across considerable distances. J. F. A. Ajayi and E. J. Alagoa have shown that economic interaction between different parts of the Nigerian area existed long before the creation of the colonial state. Southern commodities, including palm produce and kola nuts, moved northward through riverine and overland routes, while northern products circulated in the opposite direction.[6] These networks created an early economic basis for interregional mobility.

The significance of Gombe in this history, however, requires closer attention. Recent research on the peopling and demographic development of Gombe demonstrates that the area was historically characterised by considerable ethnic diversity and repeated migration. Adamu Babayo Usman observes that Yoruba and Igbo communities were already identifiable in the Gombe area by 1960 and that their arrival became particularly significant during the early decades of the twentieth century.[7] Their migration was associated with commerce, colonial employment, railway services, Christian missionary activities, Native Authority administration, and artisanal work.[8] This evidence challenges an interpretation of southern migration to Northern Nigeria that concentrates almost exclusively on Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Jos, and other major colonial centres. Gombe was not simply a peripheral recipient of migration; it became an important node within the expanding economic and administrative networks of colonial Northern Nigeria.

The colonial transformation of Gombe provides an important explanation for this development. The consolidation of British rule brought new administrative institutions, roads, markets, taxation systems, railway connections, and commercial opportunities. These changes altered the geographical pattern of economic activity and encouraged the movement of people towards emerging urban centres. The development of Gombe town itself was closely connected with colonial administrative reorganisation. By the early twentieth century, the relocation of the administrative centre to Gombe and the development of transportation and commercial facilities contributed to the town's growing importance.[9] The changing administrative geography therefore created new spaces for migrants whose

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occupational skills and commercial networks enabled them to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

The Native Authority system was particularly important in this process. Colonial rule did not operate solely through European officials; it depended substantially on existing emirate institutions and Native Administration structures. Annual colonial reports show that Gombe was incorporated into a system in which Native Authorities exercised administrative responsibilities, including policing, taxation, local administration, and the maintenance of public order.[10] Such institutions created employment opportunities for clerks, messengers, artisans, teachers, policemen, interpreters, and other workers. The growth of these administrative institutions consequently helped to transform Gombe from a predominantly regional settlement into an increasingly complex urban centre. The available archival evidence further suggests that migration should not be explained simply as the result of economic hardship in southern Nigeria. It was also a response to the opportunities created by colonial development in the North. Charles Elegalam's study of Igbo migration identifies both "push" and "pull" factors. Land pressure, taxation, limited employment opportunities, and population growth encouraged movement from the South, while employment, commercial opportunities, access to land, and the expanding colonial economy attracted migrants to Northern Nigeria.[11] These factors were particularly important for Igbo migrants, whose movement into Northern cities became closely associated with occupational mobility and entrepreneurship.

Colonial records provide unusually important evidence for understanding this process. A 1939 document concerning population pressure in the Eastern Provinces explicitly discussed the migration of Igbo people to Northern Nigeria. The report linked land scarcity in parts of the East to the movement of people towards areas where agricultural opportunities were more readily available.[12] Such evidence is significant because it demonstrates that southern migration was not merely an informal or spontaneous process. Colonial officials themselves recognised population pressure and land scarcity as factors contributing to the movement of southern Nigerians to the North.

Taxation also shaped patterns of mobility. Colonial taxation imposed new financial obligations on communities and individuals, particularly in the southern provinces. For young men who had limited access to land or wage employment, migration offered an alternative means of earning income. At the same time, colonial development in the North generated demand for labour. The result was an interaction between conditions of pressure in the South and opportunities in the North. Migration was therefore neither exclusively voluntary nor entirely forced; it existed along a continuum shaped by economic necessity, individual ambition, family expectations, colonial policies, and access to employment. The railway represented perhaps the most important physical infrastructure facilitating this movement. The expansion of railway and road networks connected southern Nigeria with the northern interior and reduced the costs and difficulties of long-distance movement. By the middle of the twentieth century, the railway network had connected important towns in the eastern

and northern parts of Nigeria, including Enugu, Makurdi, Jos, Bauchi, Gombe, and eventually Maiduguri.[13] The railway was not simply a transportation system. It became an institution around which settlements, markets, employment opportunities, and migrant communities developed.

The importance of the railway to Gombe is particularly clear from the development of the settlement around the railway station. Available evidence indicates that southern migrants, especially Igbo and Yoruba, became concentrated around areas associated with the railway and the emerging commercial settlement commonly known as "Sabon Line."^9 Unlike Kano and Zaria, where colonial authorities formally developed Sabon Gari settlements for non-indigenous populations, Gombe's migrant settlement developed in a more integrated manner. Migrants lived and worked alongside indigenous residents, although commercial activities around the railway created a particularly important concentration of southern migrants. The railway therefore produced what may be described as an economic corridor of migration. Workers could move to Gombe more easily; traders could transport goods more cheaply; colonial officials could be posted to the area; and commercial companies could establish branches and depots. The railway station became a meeting point between different occupational and ethnic groups. This is consistent with broader research showing that colonial transportation infrastructure connected previously separated regions of Nigeria and encouraged both internal migration and the expansion of markets.[14]

The growth of commercial activity also strengthened the position of Igbo and Yoruba migrants. Gombe developed as a collection and distribution centre for agricultural products, particularly groundnuts, cotton, and food crops. The expansion of commercial agriculture created demand for traders, transport workers, clerks, mechanics, artisans, and shopkeepers. Recent research on Gombe's economic history confirms that the expansion of transportation networks, agricultural production, and markets contributed significantly to population growth and commercial development in the twentieth century.[15] Migrants were therefore attracted not simply to Gombe as a place of residence but to a developing economic environment. The occupational structure of the migrant communities illustrates this point. Igbo migrants became particularly visible in trading, tailoring, carpentry, mechanics, spare-parts dealing, clerical employment, and other forms of skilled and semi-skilled work. Yoruba migrants were also involved in railway employment, teaching, civil service, trading, artisanship, and other occupations. The difference between the two communities should not, however, be exaggerated. Both groups were internally diverse, and their occupational activities changed over time. Some migrants entered government employment, while others became traders or artisans. Some arrived as employees and later established independent businesses.

The evidence also suggests that migrant communities were not simply passive beneficiaries of colonial development. They actively contributed to the transformation of Gombe. Chimarck's account of Igbo artisans working on the Emir's palace, for example, illustrates the contribution of southern skilled workers to the introduction of new construction techniques.[16] Such examples are important because they shift the discussion from migration as a demographic

phenomenon to migration as a process of knowledge transfer and economic transformation. Migrants contributed skills, business practices, occupational networks, and commercial connections that became part of Gombe's developing urban economy.

The postcolonial period brought important changes to these patterns. Independence in 1960 did not end migration into Gombe. Instead, new opportunities in the civil service, education, commerce, transportation, and private business continued to attract migrants. The Nigerian Civil War, however, temporarily disrupted Igbo migration and led many Igbo residents in Northern Nigeria to return to the Southeast.[17] The experience of the war represents an important rupture in the history of the community, but it did not permanently terminate Igbo settlement in Gombe. After 1970, many Igbo migrants returned and reconstructed their commercial activities. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), established in 1973, created another channel through which young Nigerians from different parts of the country entered Gombe. The scheme reinforced national mobility by placing graduates outside their regions of origin. Some participants subsequently remained in their places of service because of employment, business opportunities, marriage, or other social connections. Although systematic records of corps members who permanently settled in Gombe are not available, oral interviews with ex-corps members attest to the fact that many corps members of Igbo and Yoruba origin stayed behind after the service year.[18]

The creation of Gombe State in 1996 introduced another phase in the history of migration. The appointment of an Igbo, Group Captain Joseph Orji, as the state's first military governor increased the visibility of southern Nigerians within the emerging state administration and created additional professional networks. Migrants were also attracted by opportunities associated with the expansion of the new state's civil service, commerce, construction, education, and services. Security developments in the wider Northeast have also influenced migration into Gombe in the twenty-first century.[19] The insurgency and insecurity affecting Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa have encouraged some people to relocate towards comparatively safer areas. Gombe's relative stability has consequently increased its attractiveness as a destination for migrants, traders, professionals, and displaced populations. This more recent phase demonstrates the continuing importance of security alongside economic opportunity in shaping migration.

Economic Activities of Igbo and Yoruba Communities and their Contributions to the Economic Development of Gombe State.

The economic history of Gombe cannot be adequately understood without considering the contribution of migrant communities, particularly the Igbo and Yoruba, whose commercial activities became increasingly embedded in the state's urban and rural economies. Their presence was not simply an outcome of migration in search of economic opportunities; rather, migration and commerce developed in a mutually reinforcing relationship. The expansion of Gombe's markets created opportunities for migrants, while migrant

entrepreneurs simultaneously expanded the range of goods, services, skills, credit arrangements, and commercial networks available to the wider population. The evidence therefore suggests that Igbo and Yoruba economic activities constituted an important component of the historical processes through which Gombe became integrated into wider Nigerian circuits of production, distribution, and consumption.

This interpretation also challenges approaches that treat migrant entrepreneurs primarily as beneficiaries of host economies. Recent scholarship on African entrepreneurship emphasises that migrant businesses are frequently embedded in networks of family, ethnicity, apprenticeship, informal credit, and transregional trade. Thomas Antwi Bosiakoh and Bernard Acquah Obeng, for example, demonstrate that Nigerian entrepreneurs operating outside their immediate places of origin draw upon socio-cultural networks, informal institutions, apprenticeship arrangements, and transnational commercial connections.[20] Such an approach is particularly useful for understanding the Igbo and Yoruba experience in Gombe, where commercial success depended not only upon individual initiative but also upon connections extending beyond the state.

The Igbo were particularly prominent in automobile spare parts, building materials, electrical and electronic goods, groceries, and related forms of commerce, while Yoruba entrepreneurs were conspicuous in household goods, textiles, transportation, printing, garment production, welding, and other services.[21] These occupational concentrations should not, however, be interpreted as rigid ethnic divisions of labour. The evidence indicates considerable overlap between the two communities and between migrant and indigenous entrepreneurs. Their importance lay less in exclusive ethnic ownership of particular sectors than in the networks through which they introduced, distributed, financed, and reproduced economic activities. The automobile spare-parts trade provides a particularly important illustration. Igbo traders became strongly associated with the sector in Gombe, although Yoruba and indigenous traders also participated. The trade was sustained by extensive supply networks connecting Gombe with Lagos and Anambra State. Large-scale dealers with sufficient capital purchased goods in bulk and distributed them to smaller retailers, creating a hierarchical but highly functional distribution system.[22] The concentration of spare-parts businesses in areas such as Tasha Bauchi, Rainbow Roundabout, Tasha Dukku, BCJ, Michka House, Sabo Line, and the New Market transformed these locations into recognisable commercial nodes. The importance of this trade extended beyond the traders themselves because motorcycles, tricycles, automobiles, and agricultural machinery depended upon reliable access to replacement parts. The availability of such goods reduced the distance between consumers and suppliers and supported transportation and agricultural activities across the state.

The significance of the spare-parts trade also lay in its capacity to reproduce entrepreneurial knowledge. Established traders trained younger people who subsequently entered the same business, thereby extending the commercial network beyond its original practitioners. The evidence from Gombe indicates that apprentices trained by Igbo traders eventually

established businesses of their own, including among indigenous populations. This is consistent with recent research demonstrating that the Igbo apprenticeship system functions not simply as vocational training but as an institutional mechanism for transmitting business knowledge, managerial practices, customer relations, and entrepreneurial dispositions. Bridget Irene and her colleagues describe the system as an experiential form of entrepreneurial learning in which skills are acquired through sustained participation in everyday commercial activities.[23] Chukwunonso Ekesiobi and Stephen Kelechi Dimnwobi similarly find that participation in the Igbo entrepreneurship model is associated with higher business survival, business growth, and access to informal trade credit.[24] The Gombe evidence consequently suggests that apprenticeship operated as a mechanism of local economic reproduction: migrants did not merely establish businesses; they generated new entrepreneurs capable of continuing and diversifying commercial activity.

Building materials constituted another important area of Igbo and Yoruba economic activity. The rapid expansion of Gombe generated increasing demand for cement, roofing sheets, timber, tiles, paints, electrical fittings, plumbing materials, doors, and windows.[25] Igbo merchants participated prominently in the wholesale and retail distribution of these commodities. Large merchants imported or purchased materials in bulk, stored them in warehouses, and supplied retailers and consumers. The practice of extending credit to trusted customers is particularly significant because it demonstrates that commercial exchange depended upon social relationships and accumulated trust rather than solely upon immediate cash transactions.[26] Credit arrangements made housing more accessible to lower-income residents. Some traders accepted instalment payments for building materials, enabling customers to accumulate materials over time while undertaking construction. Although disputes occasionally arose when inflation altered the value of goods between the initial agreement and final payment, the evidence suggests that such conflicts were exceptional rather than representative of the entire system. Importantly, the available testimony indicates that personalities and individual business practices, rather than ethnicity alone, better explain such breakdowns in trust. This qualification is analytically important because it prevents the study from reproducing ethnic stereotypes and instead emphasises the complex social foundations of commercial relationships.

Yoruba entrepreneurs were similarly active in the building-material sector, particularly in the production of doors, windows, glass fittings, and related construction services. Their participation demonstrates the complementarity between commercial distribution and artisanal production. Locally produced doors and windows offered less expensive alternatives to imported products, thereby enabling lower-income residents to participate in the expanding housing market. In this sense, migrant entrepreneurship contributed not only to commerce but also to the democratisation of access to certain consumer goods and construction services.

The participation of Hausa traders and indigenous residents further demonstrates that these commercial sectors became spaces of economic interaction rather than isolated ethnic

enclaves. Hausa men initially worked as salespersons, delivery workers, and assistants for Igbo and Yoruba traders and subsequently acquired sufficient knowledge and capital to establish independent businesses.[27] This process is significant because it reveals the multiplier effects of migrant entrepreneurship. Skills and commercial knowledge moved across ethnic boundaries, transforming migrant-controlled businesses into training grounds for other members of the host population. Economic interaction therefore produced forms of economic integration that were not necessarily dependent upon cultural assimilation.

The activities of Igbo and Yoruba traders in markets similarly broadened the economic geography of Gombe. They participated in the distribution of foodstuffs, textiles, household utensils, palm oil, garri, provisions, and other consumer goods. Yoruba women were particularly visible in the sale of household utensils, taking their merchandise beyond major urban markets into rural centres such as Lariski, Kashere, and Kumo.[28] Igbo traders, meanwhile, developed important distribution networks for palm oil, transporting supplies from southern Nigeria to Gombe. The testimony that consumers maintained relationships with particular suppliers because of the perceived quality of their palm oil demonstrates how reputation and trust functioned as economic assets.[29]

Women were therefore not peripheral actors in this process. Their participation in food retailing, restaurants, household-goods trading, and other commercial activities indicates that migrant economic integration was gendered but not exclusively male. Restaurants operated by Igbo and Yoruba women provided food services in urban areas and transport centres, while women traders also connected urban markets to rural consumers. Their activities contributed to household incomes, consumer welfare, and the expansion of service-sector employment. A fuller history of migrant economic contribution in Gombe must therefore move beyond male-dominated narratives of entrepreneurship and acknowledge women's role in sustaining everyday commercial exchange.

Perhaps even more consequential was the role of Igbo and Yoruba traders in the movement of agricultural commodities between Gombe and southern Nigeria. Gombe's position within the grain-producing economy of northeastern Nigeria made it an important point of aggregation for grains, cattle, goats, and sheep. Traders purchased agricultural products from rural producers, stored them in markets such as Tudun Hatsi, and transported them toward southern markets.[30] This process connected rural producers to geographically distant consumers and demonstrates how migrant traders served as intermediaries within interregional commodity chains.

The significance of this trade lies in its capacity to integrate different regional economies. Farmers in Gombe gained access to markets beyond their immediate locality, while consumers in southern Nigeria obtained agricultural commodities produced in the northeast. Igbo and Yoruba traders worked alongside Hausa traders at several stages of this process, including purchasing, storage, loading, transportation, and distribution. The resulting commercial relationships demonstrate that ethnic difference did not necessarily obstruct

economic cooperation. On the contrary, economic interdependence created practical forms of collaboration across ethnic boundaries.[31]This pattern is particularly consistent with recent scholarship on Yoruba commercial migration. Olaniyi's recent study of Yoruba migration and commercial activity in northern Nigeria demonstrates that Yoruba mobility historically connected migrants to northern commercial economies through trading networks and occupational diversification.[32] The Gombe evidence is therefore situated within a broader history in which Yoruba migration was not simply a movement of people but a process of commercial integration across ecological, cultural, and political boundaries.

The same can be said of Igbo commercial networks. Contemporary scholarship has increasingly rejected explanations of Igbo entrepreneurship that rely solely on cultural stereotypes about an inherent propensity for business. Instead, scholars emphasise institutions, family networks, apprenticeship, informal credit, social capital, and access to commercial knowledge.[33] The evidence from Gombe supports this institutional interpretation. The success of Igbo traders in spare parts, building materials, pharmaceuticals, groceries, and other sectors was facilitated by the ability to mobilise capital, establish supply chains, train apprentices, extend credit, and reproduce commercial knowledge.

The contribution of migrant entrepreneurs also extended into hospitality, medicine, craftsmanship, and technical services. Igbo entrepreneurs established hotels and relaxation centres as Gombe's population and commercial importance expanded. Although some early establishments acquired reputations associated with illicit or socially disapproved activities, the subsequent development of more formal hotels reflected changing patterns of urban consumption, business travel, and social events. Establishments such as Mac Cornels, Skyhub, La Bridges, Majesty, and Evolution reflected the emergence of a more diversified service economy.[34] Their importance consequently extended beyond accommodation to employment generation, entertainment, event hosting, and urban development.

Igbo entrepreneurs also established patent medicine stores in both Gombe metropolis and rural communities. Their presence in locations such as Kashere, Mamara, Tula, Gombe Abba, and Dukku expanded access to basic pharmaceutical products and household necessities in areas where commercial services were otherwise limited.[35] This rural distribution is especially important because it demonstrates that migrant entrepreneurship was not exclusively an urban phenomenon. By extending commercial services into less-developed settlements, these businesses contributed to the circulation of commodities and the integration of rural populations into the wider market economy.

Craftsmanship and technical skills constituted another important dimension. Igbo and Yoruba artisans worked as masons, carpenters, electricians, welders, and builders. Oral evidence indicates that some of the early migrant artisans introduced construction techniques and subsequently trained local workers.[36] Such knowledge transfer had effects that extended beyond individual businesses because apprentices could reproduce the acquired skills and train others. The economic impact was therefore cumulative: a migrant artisan trained local

workers; those workers eventually became independent practitioners; and the resulting expansion of skilled labour increased the supply of construction and technical services. This process also complicates conventional distinctions between migrant and indigenous economic activity. Over time, the boundaries became increasingly porous. Indigenous entrepreneurs entered sectors initially associated with migrants, while migrants became integrated into local markets and patronage networks. The result was not simply the transplantation of southern commercial practices into Gombe but the emergence of hybrid economic spaces in which knowledge, labour, capital, and commercial practices circulated across ethnic boundaries.

The cumulative contribution of these activities is visible in state revenue and employment. Businesses operated by Igbo and Yoruba entrepreneurs contributed through taxes, rents, fees, and other forms of internally generated revenue. According to the evidence presented in this study, Gombe State Internal Revenue Service records indicate that the state generated approximately ₦155.4 billion from businesses, taxes, and government agencies between 2011 and 2025.[17] Although this aggregate figure cannot be attributed exclusively to Igbo and Yoruba enterprises, it indicates the broader fiscal environment within which migrant businesses operated. Their contribution should therefore be understood as part of the wider entrepreneurial and commercial ecosystem that generated revenue for the state.

Conclusion

The contribution of the Igbo and Yoruba to the economic development of Gombe State cannot be overemphasised. The findings of the article reveal that they were among the earliest and conspicuous migrants group in the state. They played a veritable role in improving the economy of the state through the various businesses that they established in the state. They were actively involved in trading activities, spare parts businesses, building materials, grain business, agriculture, artisanship and craftsmanship. Based on these findings, it is clear that Migrant groups in the case of the Igbo and Yoruba stimulated the economic growth of their host communities. It also demonstrated how state policies can be a powerful tool in encouraging and boosting the businesses of migrants groups, thereby contributing to the overall economic development of the state.

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[30] Livinus Chijoke, Aged 51 years, Businessman, Interviewed at Sabo Line, 27 May, 2026, Funmilayo Mathew, Aged 48 years, Interviewed at Jekadafari, 30 May, 2026.
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