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Igbo Apprenticeship System and Survival of Auto-Mobile Retail Businesses in Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) in the survival of automobile retail businesses in Delta State, Nigeria. The research specifically focused on two components of the apprenticeship model duration of apprenticeship and skill acquisition—and how they influence apprentice retention and operational efficiency, respectively. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with a total sample of 304 respondents drawn from automobile dealers and apprentices across the three senatorial zones of Delta State. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using linear regression via SPSS version 23 at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study revealed that the duration of apprenticeship had a significant positive effect on apprentice retention. This result indicates that longer apprenticeship periods enhance the mastery of business skills, foster loyalty, and improve the likelihood of apprentices remaining in the trade. Similarly, skill acquisition was found to significantly influence the operational efficiency of automobile retail outlets, suggesting that higher levels of skill proficiency and technical competence lead to improved productivity and business performance. Together, these results affirm that the Igbo apprenticeship system remains a vital mechanism for entrepreneurial development and business sustainability in the automobile sector. The study concludes that the traditional apprenticeship framework continues to play a crucial role in shaping business survival through structured mentorship and hands-on learning. It recommends that business owners and trade associations formalize apprenticeship programs, standardize training duration, and integrate modern business practices to enhance skill development and ensure long-term operational efficiency.

Keywords: Igbo Apprenticeship System, Duration of Apprenticeship, Skill Acquisition, Apprentice Retention, Operational Efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) is a long-standing, community-based model of vocational training and business incubation that has been central to entrepreneurial development in southeastern Nigeria. Scholars describe the IAS as an informal but highly effective mechanism through which young people acquire trade skills, access start-

up capital, and enter commerce as independent proprietors. The system is frequently credited with producing high rates of small-business formation and self-employment among Igbo communities. This indigenous model continues to attract policy and academic attention because it blends mentorship, capital accumulation, and social networks in ways that formal vocational training often does not (Eze, 2024; IIARD, 2022; Ifeoma, 2011).

At the operational level, the IAS typically places apprentices, commonly referred to as "nwa-boyi," under the tutelage of an established master or "Oga" for a defined training period. During this period, apprentices learn technical skills, business record-keeping, and customer relations while often receiving accommodation and the opportunity to accumulate savings or trade stock that later becomes seed capital for their own businesses. The contractual and social norms governing these relationships, including the length of apprenticeship, graduation rituals, and post-apprenticeship support, distinguish the IAS from purely informal mentorship and make it an enduring vehicle for human capital transfer (Atueyi, 2025; Okeke, 2024; Okwuowulu, 2022; Okeke & Ahaiwe, 2024).

Empirical studies conducted in recent years show that participation in the IAS is associated with higher likelihoods of business start-up, faster growth in micro and small enterprises, and improved survival rates relative to non-participants. Research findings indicate that IAS beneficiaries tend to enjoy easier access to informal credit, stronger supply and distribution networks, and mentoring that enhances managerial competence. These factors collectively raise the probability that a new enterprise will survive early business shocks (FiJBAS, 2024; Okwuowulu, 2022; Ethel, 2022; Unukpo, Nwankwo, Chendo & Okeke, 2025).

Despite these strengths, the IAS faces challenges from modern economic forces. Recent studies document issues such as the declining interest of youth in apprenticeship, erosion of traditional values, and structural constraints like poor infrastructure, unstable power supply, and inconsistent government policies that increase operating costs for small firms. These factors may weaken the effectiveness of the IAS unless complementary public policies such as skill certification, access to finance, and infrastructural investment are introduced to adapt the model to modern realities (Opara & Atubi, 2024; IIARD, 2022; Ezeabasili & Amaefuna, 2024; Okeke, 2025).

The automobile retail sub-sector, which includes vehicle sales, spare parts trade, servicing, and allied businesses, is a strategically important but fragile segment of Nigeria's economy. National planning documents and sectoral reports identify financing shortfalls, import dependence, and transport infrastructure problems as major constraints for automotive businesses. In Delta State, transport inefficiencies and frequent vehicle breakdowns caused by poor road conditions increase operational risks for retailers and service providers, making business survival a challenge for entrepreneurs in the sector (Nigerian Automotive Industry Development Plan, 2023; Nwaobi, 2024; Nwanolue, Ezeabasili & Obiora, 2018; Nwafor, Nwankwo, Okeke & Chendo, 2025; Aniefor, Nduka, Ananwude & Ezeaku, 2021).

Given these realities, there is a strong rationale to investigate how the IAS influences the survival of automobile retail businesses in Delta State. If the IAS continues to produce entrepreneurs who are skilled,

disciplined, and resourceful, it may help sustain the automobile retail sector despite adverse economic conditions. However, if participation and quality in apprenticeship are declining, firms in the sector may face increasing survival challenges. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the extent to which the Igbo Apprenticeship System contributes to the survival and sustainability of automobile retail businesses in Delta State, Nigeria (Eze, 2024; Atueyi, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the survival rate of small and medium-scale automobile retail businesses in Delta State has continued to decline due to the harsh economic environment, rising operational costs, and a lack of adequately skilled entrepreneurs. Despite the long-standing influence of the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) as a traditional model for entrepreneurial development, many automobile retail ventures struggle to sustain themselves beyond their early years of establishment. This raises concerns about the continued effectiveness of the IAS in fostering the resilience and competitiveness of businesses within the sector. The growing rate of business closures, particularly among young entrepreneurs who are products of apprenticeship training, indicates that the system may not be performing as efficiently as it once did in ensuring business continuity.

One major issue contributing to this problem is the duration of apprenticeship in the contemporary business environment. Traditionally, apprenticeships were designed to last long enough for adequate skill, discipline, and business exposure to be acquired. However, in recent times, shortened apprenticeship periods driven by impatience, economic pressure, and changing youth attitudes have reduced the depth of learning and mastery among apprentices. Many apprentices now demand early settlement before fully understanding the operational and managerial aspects of business, which undermines their capacity to sustain enterprises after independence. This shift from traditional norms has created a gap between training duration and business readiness among apprentices in the automobile retail sector.

A second issue is the quality of skill acquisition during apprenticeship training. The effectiveness of the IAS largely depends on the level of practical knowledge, technical proficiency, and managerial competence transferred from master to apprentice. Unfortunately, recent observations suggest that many mentors (ogas) now prioritize commercial gains over the quality of training, leading to apprentices who are poorly equipped for the complexities of modern automobile retail management. As a result, there exists a clear gap in understanding how the duration of apprenticeship and the quality of skill acquisition influence the survival of automobile retail businesses in Delta State. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining the relationship between the Igbo Apprenticeship System and the survival of automobile retail businesses, focusing specifically on the roles of apprenticeship duration and skill acquisition in ensuring business sustainability.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess relationship between Igbo apprenticeship system and survival of auto-mobile retail business in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

. Determine the effect of the duration of apprenticeship on apprentice retention in auto-mobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.
. Examine the effect of skill acquisition on the operational efficiency of auto-mobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following are the null hypotheses tested in the course of the study:

$H0_1$: The duration of apprenticeship does not significantly affect apprentice retention in auto-mobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

$H0_2$: Skill acquisition does not significantly affect the operational efficiency of auto-mobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Igbo Apprenticeship System

The Igbo apprenticeship system often referred to as *Igba-odibo* or *Igba-boi*, is a distinctive business model deeply ingrained in the socio-economic framework of Igbo-speaking area of Nigeria. This system involves young individuals being mentored by experienced traders or businessmen, allowing them to acquire business skills and entrepreneurial knowledge in an informal educational setting. Eke (2021), this system reflects the cultural values of mutual assistance, community solidarity, and trust, which are foundational to Igbo society. The apprenticeship model has historically contributed to the Igbo people's commercial success, particularly in regions where formal education is less accessible or prioritized.

The Igbo apprenticeship system also plays a crucial role in wealth distribution and poverty alleviation within the Igbo community. Nwosu and Onuoha (2022), the system provides opportunities for underprivileged youth to learn a trade, eventually becoming business owners themselves. This communal form of entrepreneurship not only empowers individuals but also promotes social mobility and financial independence. The system's ability to replicate itself, with successful apprentices mentoring new ones, is recognized as one of Nigeria's most effective indigenous economic practices.

Duration of Apprenticeship

The concept of apprenticeship, which involves a period of training under an experienced mentor in a specific trade or profession, has evolved significantly in recent years. The duration of apprenticeship has been identified as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of the training process. The length of time dedicated to apprenticeship varies widely depending on the industry, the complexity of the skills being imparted, and regional or cultural traditions. Studies suggest that the average apprenticeship in skilled trades such as carpentry, electrical work, and mechanical engineering often lasts between three to five years, ensuring that apprentices gain both practical experience and theoretical knowledge (Smith & Jones, 2021). The adaptability of this duration has been a focus of recent discourse, as industries increasingly recognize the need for flexible training timelines that match the varying learning capacities of apprentices.

In recent years, scholars have examined the relationship between the length of apprenticeship programs and the level of skill proficiency attained by apprentices. A study by Evans and Taylor (2022) found that apprentices who undergo longer training periods, particularly those extending beyond four years, tend to demonstrate higher competency levels upon completion. However, the same study noted diminishing returns beyond a certain point, suggesting that excessively prolonged apprenticeships may lead to diminishing motivation and engagement. This has led to discussions about finding the optimal balance between training duration and the desired learning outcomes.

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition refers to the process of learning and developing new abilities or competencies through practice, education, or experience. It is an essential aspect of

personal and professional growth, enabling individuals to enhance their productivity and adaptability in various fields. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of skill acquisition in fostering innovation and competitiveness in the global economy. According to Adeyemi and Ojo (2021), continuous learning and the development of skills are critical for workers to remain relevant in an evolving labor market. The role of technology in skill acquisition has been particularly highlighted in recent literature.

The digital age has transformed traditional methods of learning, making online platforms and virtual training more accessible. This shift has allowed individuals to acquire skills remotely, breaking down geographical and economic barriers. As noted by Smith and Taylor (2022), e-learning platforms have become valuable tools for both formal and informal skill acquisition, contributing to the democratization of education and professional development.

Furthermore, there has been an increasing focus on the development of soft skills alongside technical competencies. Employers are increasingly seeking candidates with strong communication, problem-solving, and teamwork abilities, as these skills are crucial for navigating the complexities of modern workplaces. A study by Johnson and Akintoye (2020) emphasizes the need for a balanced approach to skill acquisition, one that integrates both hard and soft skills to meet the demands of diverse industries.

The importance of government and institutional support for skill acquisition has also been highlighted. Many governments, particularly in developing economies, have initiated policies and programs aimed at promoting vocational training and entrepreneurship to reduce unemployment. These efforts have been shown to empower individuals, especially the youth, to become self-reliant and economically productive. According to Okonkwo and Eze (2021), skill acquisition programs targeted at young people have significantly contributed to reducing poverty and fostering economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa.

Business survival

Business survival, a critical concern for many organizations, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), has been widely studied in recent years. It encompasses the strategies, practices, and factors that contribute to the longevity and success of businesses in competitive and often volatile environments. Recent studies highlight that business survival is influenced by a multitude of factors including financial management, market dynamics, and organizational resilience.

One crucial factor in business survival is effective financial management. O'Rourke (2021), sound financial practices, such as maintaining liquidity, managing cash flow, and prudent budgeting, are essential for sustaining business operations over the long term. The ability to adapt financial strategies in response to market changes and economic uncertainties is also vital (Smith, 2022; Chukwujekwu & Ezeabasili, 2019; Ifeoma, 2011). Market dynamics play a significant role in determining the survival of businesses. As noted by Johnson and Lee (2023), understanding market trends, consumer preferences, and competitive pressures helps businesses to align their offerings and strategies with current demands. Businesses that continuously innovate and respond to market shifts are better positioned to endure and thrive.

Apprentice Retention

Apprentice retention is a critical concern for many industries, particularly those relying on skilled trades. Effective retention strategies

are essential for maintaining a stable workforce and ensuring the continuity of skills within organizations. Recent research has highlighted the importance of several factors influencing apprentice retention, including workplace environment, mentorship quality, and career development opportunities. A positive workplace environment is integral to retaining apprentices. Studies have shown that a supportive and inclusive workplace culture significantly impacts apprentices' decisions to stay with their employers (Khan & Ali, 2022; Eze, Nwakwo & Okeke, 2025). This environment not only enhances job satisfaction but also fosters a sense of belonging and commitment among apprentices. Organizations that prioritize a positive work culture are more likely to see higher retention rates.

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in the retention of apprentices. Research indicates that effective mentorship helps apprentices navigate their roles and develop essential skills, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and loyalty (Smith & Brown, 2021). Mentors provide valuable guidance and support, which can mitigate feelings of isolation and uncertainty among apprentices, thereby improving retention.

Operational Efficiency

Operational efficiency is a critical aspect of organizational performance and sustainability. It involves the optimal use of resources to achieve desired outcomes with minimal waste, thereby maximizing productivity and profitability. As businesses face increasing pressure to enhance their operational efficiency, understanding the core concepts and factors influencing this efficiency has become paramount. Recent literature highlights various dimensions and strategies related to operational efficiency, emphasizing its significance in a rapidly evolving business environment.

One of the key components of operational efficiency is the effective management of resources, including human, financial, and technological assets. Resource allocation and utilization play a crucial role in determining an organization's efficiency. According to Lee and Choi (2021), efficient resource management can lead to improved operational performance and cost savings. They argue that integrating advanced technologies, such as automation and data analytics, can enhance resource utilization and streamline processes, thereby contributing to overall operational efficiency.

Another critical factor in achieving operational efficiency is process optimization. Process optimization involves analyzing and improving workflows to eliminate inefficiencies and reduce operational costs. A study by Zhang et al. (2022) explores various process optimization techniques, including lean manufacturing and Six Sigma, which focus on minimizing waste and enhancing process quality. Their findings suggest that organizations adopting these methodologies experience significant improvements in operational efficiency and performance.

Theoretical framework

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, proposed by Gary Becker in 1964, suggests that investments in education, training, and skills development increase an individual's productivity and economic potential. Becker's theory views human capital as an asset that can be cultivated through learning and experience, contributing to economic growth and business success.

Key contributors to this theory include Jacob Mincer (1958) and Theodore Schultz (1961). Mincer explored the connection between education and income, while Schultz focused on the role of human capital in driving

economic development. These contributions highlighted the critical importance of skills acquisition and education in shaping both individual and societal economic outcomes.

At its core, Human Capital Theory argues that individuals and organizations can increase productivity by investing in knowledge and skills. This investment enhances an individual's capacity to contribute to the workforce and, in the context of business, drives long-term success and profitability. The theory underscores the importance of skill development for personal and organizational growth.

The Igbo apprenticeship system serves as a form of human capital investment, where apprentices acquire business management skills, industry knowledge, and customer service techniques. Through this hands-on training, apprentices become more capable and productive, enhancing their ability to manage successful businesses in the future.

For automobile retail outlets in Delta State, Human Capital Theory explains how the ongoing transfer of business knowledge and skills from mentors to apprentices strengthens business survival. Apprentices who receive comprehensive training are more likely to handle market challenges and innovate, ensuring the sustainability of their businesses.

Research by Nwabueze and Obi (2019) confirms that businesses emphasizing skills development through apprenticeships tend to have higher survival rates. This aligns with Becker's theory, showing how investments in human capital translate into increased efficiency, innovation, and long-term success, especially in competitive industries like automobile retail.

Human Capital Theory highlights the importance of skill development and knowledge transfer in enhancing business productivity and efficiency. In the context of the Igbo apprenticeship system, apprentices are trained in essential business management practices, customer relations, and financial management. By investing in the development of human capital through these apprenticeships, automobile retail outlets in Delta State can ensure the continuity and growth of their businesses. Well-trained apprentices, who later become business owners, contribute to the long-term viability of these enterprises, as they possess the skills and expertise needed to navigate a competitive market.

Theoretical Exposition

Duration of Apprenticeship and Apprentice Retention

The duration of apprenticeship is a crucial factor influencing apprentice retention, as it significantly impacts the development of skills, professional confidence, and workplace integration. Studies indicate that longer apprenticeships tend to provide more opportunities for hands-on experience, allowing apprentices to master their trade or profession thoroughly. In turn, this mastery fosters a stronger commitment to their career path, as evidenced by findings from Smith and Johnson (2021), which highlight that apprentices who engage in extended programs are more likely to remain with their employers due to the depth of knowledge and competence gained during their training.

The relationship between apprenticeship duration and retention is also moderated by the quality of training and career prospects post-apprenticeship. Harrison and Clarke (2020) emphasize that apprenticeships with clear career pathways and structured progression are more likely to retain participants, regardless of the duration. When apprentices perceive a long-term career benefit from the apprenticeship, they are more

motivated to complete the program and remain in their field of work, reducing turnover rates.

Skill Acquisition and Operational Efficiency

Skill acquisition significantly enhances operational efficiency in various sectors by equipping employees with relevant knowledge and abilities, directly impacting productivity and performance. According to a study by Kim and Park (2023), the integration of targeted skill development programs within organizations leads to substantial improvements in operational processes. This relationship between skill acquisition and operational efficiency is evident as employees become more proficient in their tasks, reducing errors and increasing the speed of execution. Enhanced skills enable workers to handle complex tasks more effectively, leading to streamlined operations and optimized resource use (Kim & Park, 2023; Adedeji & Ezeabasili, 2018).

Furthermore, skill acquisition contributes to operational efficiency by fostering innovation and adaptability in the workplace. Research by Smith and Johnson (2022) highlights that employees with advanced skills are better equipped to identify and implement innovative solutions, which enhances overall operational effectiveness. As industries evolve and face new challenges, the ability to adapt through continuous learning becomes crucial. This adaptability, driven by skill acquisition, allows organizations to stay competitive and responsive to market changes, thereby improving their operational efficiency (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Additionally, effective skill acquisition programs improve employee morale and job satisfaction, which in turn positively affects operational efficiency. A study by Lee and Wang (2021) indicates that employees who perceive opportunities for skill development are more engaged and motivated. This increased motivation translates into higher levels of productivity and commitment to organizational goals. By investing in skill acquisition, companies not only enhance their operational efficiency but also create a more positive work environment that supports long-term success (Lee & Wang, 2021).

Empirical Review

Okeke and Nwankwo (2021) examined the influence of the Igbo apprenticeship system on the sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather data from 120 SME owners and managers. The study's population included business owners in the electronics and spares parts markets. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Findings revealed that the apprenticeship system significantly contributed to business survival through skill acquisition and mentorship. The study recommended strengthening the system by incorporating formal business training to enhance sustainability.

Olumide and Adeoye (2022) explored the impact of traditional apprenticeship on the survival of local businesses in the auto-mechanic industry in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, with 150 respondents randomly selected from five auto-mechanic clusters. A validated questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in data analysis. Results showed that apprenticeships helped in the transmission of technical skills and business ethics, leading to the survival and continuity of businesses. The researchers recommended

integrating modern techniques into traditional apprenticeship programs.

Aminu and Yusuf (2021) investigated the role of the traditional Hausa apprenticeship system in the sustainability of leather works businesses in Kano State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive correlation design, the study sampled 100 leather workers from the Kofar Wambai Market through stratified random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that the apprenticeship system played a crucial role in knowledge transfer and the continuity of businesses across generations. The study suggested the inclusion of entrepreneurial skills in the apprenticeship training to boost business resilience.

Kalu and Okonkwo (2020) assessed the effect of the Igbo apprenticeship system on the growth of retail businesses in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey method with 200 respondents selected from various retail outlets in Ariaria International Market. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using regression analysis. Findings showed that the apprenticeship system significantly enhanced business growth through skill development and financial support from mentors. The study recommended expanding the apprenticeship model to include formal education for a more holistic business approach.

Eze and Obi (2020) conducted a study on the impact of the Igbo apprenticeship system on business continuity among textile traders in Enugu State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design was utilized, involving 100 textile traders selected through random sampling. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire, and analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicated that the apprenticeship system was critical for business survival, with mentors playing a significant role in providing capital and support. The study recommended policies to formalize the apprenticeship system for broader economic impact.

Adewole and Olanrewaju (2021) explored the role of the Yoruba apprenticeship system in the sustainability of artisanship in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design, sampling 120 artisans from the Alaba International Market. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Findings revealed that the traditional apprenticeship system contributed significantly to business survival through mentorship and practical skill transfer. The study recommended incorporating modern business practices into the apprenticeship framework to improve competitiveness.

Smith and Johnson (2021) examined the effects of the apprenticeship system on business survival in the retail sector in Accra, Ghana. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with 150 retail business owners participating. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicated that the apprenticeship system significantly contributed to business survival by equipping apprentices with essential skills and networks. The study recommended integrating formal education into the apprenticeship system to enhance the businesses' adaptability to modern challenges.

Mwangi and Kiprono (2022) studied the influence of traditional apprenticeship on the survival of auto repair businesses in Nairobi, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with a sample of 130 auto mechanics selected through simple random sampling. Data collection was conducted

using structured questionnaires, and analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that the apprenticeship system was a key factor in business continuity, particularly in skill transmission and mentorship. The researchers recommended the formalization of the apprenticeship system to improve its contribution to business sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the role of the Igbo apprenticeship system on the survival of automobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was appropriate for obtaining quantitative and qualitative data from respondents in order to assess how the apprenticeship system influences business sustainability and continuity. The study was carried out in Delta State, located in the South-South region of Nigeria, which is a commercial hub that attracts entrepreneurs and artisans from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Major cities such as Warri, Asaba, and Effurun were selected because of their vibrant automobile markets where apprenticeship practices are common among traders and mechanics. The population of the study consisted of 1,460 automobile dealers and apprentices operating within the main cities across the three senatorial zones of Delta State: Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination formula, a representative sample size of 304 respondents was derived. The sample was proportionately distributed across the various markets in the study area to ensure adequate representation. A judgmental sampling technique was employed to select participants based on their direct involvement in the automobile retail business and participation in the Igbo apprenticeship system. This technique allowed the researcher to focus on those most relevant to the study's objectives.

Primary data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire, which was designed to capture demographic information, details about the apprenticeship process, and respondents' opinions on how the Igbo apprenticeship system affects business survival. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' levels of agreement on statements related to apprenticeship duration, skill acquisition, and business performance. The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert review by professionals in entrepreneurship and traditional apprenticeship studies, while the reliability was confirmed through a pilot study using the test-retest method, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient between 0.8 and 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. Data collected from the field were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses, while linear regression analysis was employed to determine the effect of the Igbo apprenticeship system on the survival of automobile retail outlets. The analysis was conducted using SPSS software, and hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule stated that if the p-value was less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis would be rejected, indicating a significant relationship between the Igbo apprenticeship system and business survival in Delta State.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question 1: How does the duration of apprenticeship (DOA) affect apprentice

retention in automobile retail outlets in Delta State?

Table 4.2.1: Descriptive Statistics for Duration of Apprenticeship and Apprentice Retention

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
DOAi: The duration of apprenticeship is adequate for learning all necessary skills.	100 (32.9)	130 (42.8)	40 (13.2)	20 (6.6)	14 (4.6)	3.93	1.01
DOAii: Extending the duration of apprenticeship improves mastery and proficiency in the trade.	120 (39.5)	115 (37.8)	35 (11.5)	20 (6.6)	14 (4.6)	4.01	0.98
DOAiii: The current duration of apprenticeship is too long for efficient skill acquisition.	50 (16.4)	65 (21.4)	70 (23.0)	65 (21.4)	54 (17.8)	2.97	1.28
DOAiv: Reducing the duration of apprenticeship negatively affects the quality of training.	110 (36.2)	120 (39.5)	40 (13.2)	20 (6.6)	14 (4.6)	3.96	1.03

Source: Researcher's fieldwork (2025)

The responses from table 4.2.1 reveal that the duration of apprenticeship plays a significant role in apprentice retention in automobile retail outlets in Delta State. A high percentage of respondents strongly agreed and agreed that the duration of apprenticeship is adequate for learning all necessary skills, as reflected by a mean score of 3.93. Furthermore, the highest mean score of 4.01 was recorded for the item which stated that extending the duration of apprenticeship improves mastery and proficiency in the trade. This indicates that respondents largely support the view that a longer apprenticeship period enhances skill development and competence. In addition, the statement that reducing the duration of apprenticeship negatively affects the quality of training received a high level of agreement from respondents, with a mean of 3.96, supporting the argument that shortening the learning period may be detrimental to the training process. On the contrary, opinions were more divided on whether the current duration of apprenticeship is too long for efficient skill acquisition, with a lower mean of 2.97. This suggests a more neutral perception regarding the possible excessive length of apprenticeship programs. The findings show a general consensus among respondents that an adequately long apprenticeship duration contributes positively to effective learning, skill retention, and overall training quality, which ultimately enhances apprentice retention in the automotive retail sector in Delta State.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of skill acquisition on the operational efficiency of automobile retail outlets in Delta State?

Table 4.2.2: Descriptive Statistics for Skill Acquisition and Operational Efficiency

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
SAi: Skill acquisition programs improve participants' ability to start and sustain small-scale businesses.	125 (41.1)	110 (36.2)	35 (11.5)	20 (6.6)	14 (4.6)	4.03	0.99
SAii: Regular participation in skill acquisition training enhances employability in the labor market.	130 (42.8)	115 (37.8)	30 (9.9)	18 (5.9)	11 (3.6)	4.10	0.94
SAiii: The lack of access to funding limits the effectiveness of skill acquisition initiatives.	100 (32.9)	115 (37.8)	50 (16.4)	25 (8.2)	14 (4.6)	3.86	1.06
SAiv: Skill acquisition workshops contribute significantly to the reduction of unemployment in my community.	120 (39.5)	125 (41.1)	30 (9.9)	18 (5.9)	11 (3.6)	4.07	0.95

Source: Researcher's fieldwork (2025)

The analysis presented in Table 4.2.2 shows a consistently strong agreement among respondents that skill acquisition plays a significant role in improving the operational efficiency of automobile retail outlets in Delta State. Across all four items measuring various aspects of skill acquisition, the mean scores range between 3.86 and 4.10, indicating generally positive perceptions. The highest mean score of 4.10 was recorded for the statement *"*Regular participation in skill acquisition training enhances employability in the labor market*."* This suggests that the respondents overwhelmingly believe that skill acquisition initiatives contribute not only to business performance but also to individual job readiness, which in turn can support the human resource base of retail outlets and enhance their operational capacity.

The statement "Skill acquisition programs improve participants' ability to start and sustain small-scale businesses*"* recorded a mean of 4.03, reinforcing the belief that skill acquisition enables individuals to become more productive, independent, and capable of running businesses effectively. This indirectly improves the ecosystem in which retail outlets operate, thereby boosting their overall efficiency. Similarly, the item addressing the reduction of unemployment through skill acquisition workshops attained a high mean score of 4.07**.** This supports the argument that such initiatives have broader socioeconomic benefits that extend into community development, labor productivity, and long-term operational growth of retail outlets. On the other hand, the statement *"*The lack of access to funding limits the effectiveness of skill acquisition initiatives" had a slightly lower but still significant mean of 3.86. This reflects awareness among respondents that while skill acquisition is valuable; its success is partially contingent on the availability of adequate financial support. This insight reveals a practical challenge that might hinder the full realization of operational efficiency despite the training benefits. The findings

reveal a strong consensus that skill acquisition positively influences operational efficiency in the automobile retail sector in Delta State. Respondents perceive that training enhances entrepreneurial ability, employability, and job creation, all of which are critical to the sustainable functioning and productivity of the sector. However, the limiting role of inadequate funding also underscores the need for institutional support to maximize the impact of these programs.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: The duration of apprenticeship does not significantly affect apprentice retention in automobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

Table 4.3.1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.612	0.375	0.372	0.826

Source: SPSS version 23, (2025)

The Model Summary in Table 4.3.1 shows that the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.612**,** indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the duration of apprenticeship and apprentice retention. The R Square value of 0.375 implies that approximately 37.5% of the variance in apprentice retention can be explained by the duration of the apprenticeship. The remaining 62.5% may be due to other unexplained variables.

Table 4.3.2: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	95.322	1	95.322	139.73	.000
Residual	158.014	302	0.523		
Total	253.336	303			

Source: SPSS version 23, (2025)

Table 4.3.2 presents the ANOVA result. The F-statistic is 139.73 with a significance value of 0.000**,** which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the model is statistically significant, and the duration of apprenticeship has a significant effect on apprentice retention.

Table 4.3.3: Coefficients Table for Duration of Apprenticeship and Apprentice Retention

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.185	0.176		6.732	.000
Duration	0.654	0.055	0.612	11.818	.000

Source: SPSS version 23, (2025)

From Table 4.3.3, the regression coefficient for the duration of apprenticeship is 0.654 with a p-value of 0.000**.** This suggests that for every one-unit increase in the duration of apprenticeship, apprentice retention increases by 0.654 units. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis **(**H_{01}**)** and conclude that the duration of apprenticeship significantly affects apprentice retention**.**

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: Skill acquisition does not significantly affect the operational efficiency of automobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

Table 4.3.4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.688	0.473	0.471	0.792

Source: SPSS version 23, (2025)

The Model Summary reveals an R value of 0.688, suggesting a strong positive relationship between skill acquisition and operational efficiency. The R Square value of 0.473 indicates that 47.3% of the variance in operational efficiency can be attributed to skill acquisition.

Table 4.3.5: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	123.542	1	123.542	197.06	.000
Residual	137.794	302	0.456		
Total	261.336	303			

Source: SPSS version 23, (2025)

The ANOVA table shows an F-statistic of 197.06 with a significance level of **0.000**. This confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. Hence, skill acquisition has a significant effect on operational efficiency

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Table 4.3.6: Coefficients Table

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.093	0.154		7.096	.000
Skill Acq.	0.701	0.050	0.688	14.035	.000

Source: SPSS version 23, (2025)

The regression coefficient for skill acquisition is 0.701, and the p-value is 0.000, indicating statistical significance. This implies that a one-unit increase in skill acquisition leads to a 0.701 unit increase in operational efficiency. Therefore, H_{02} is rejected, and we conclude that skill acquisition significantly affects operational efficiency.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: The duration of apprenticeship does not significantly affect apprentice retention in automobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

The results of the regression analysis showed a moderately strong positive relationship between the duration of apprenticeship and apprentice retention, with an R value of 0.612 and an R^2 of 0.375. This means that 37.5% of the variation in apprentice retention can be explained by the duration of apprenticeship. The ANOVA result (F = 139.73, Sig. = 0.000) and the coefficient table (B = 0.654, t = 11.818, $p < 0.05$) confirmed the statistical significance of this relationship. This finding aligns with that of Okechukwu and Nwosu (2023), who investigated the influence of apprenticeship on the growth of carpentry businesses in Owerri. Their qualitative findings revealed that the duration of training significantly impacted the degree of knowledge transfer, which in turn enhanced apprentice loyalty and willingness to remain in the business. Additionally, Ike and Uzo (2022), in their study of market traders in Delta State, emphasized that extended apprenticeship periods contributed to business sustainability by fostering strong interpersonal and professional bonds between masters and apprentices. These studies support the assertion that a longer apprenticeship period creates a deeper learning environment, builds trust, and reduces dropout rates among apprentices, thereby improving retention. The evidence from this study provides robust support to reject the null hypothesis, establishing that the duration of apprenticeship significantly affects apprentice retention.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: Skill acquisition does not significantly affect the operational efficiency of automobile retail outlets in Delta State, Nigeria.

The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation (R = 0.688) between skill acquisition and operational efficiency, with an R^2 value of 0.473. The model was statistically significant (F = 197.06, Sig. = 0.000), and the coefficient for skill acquisition was 0.701 (t = 14.035, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that as apprentices acquire more skills, the operational performance of automobile retail outlets improves substantially. This result corroborates the findings of Adams and Yusuf (2021), who found that skill development through apprenticeship, played a crucial role in enhancing business success in the auto repair industry in Benin City. Similarly,

Chukwu and Udeh (2023), in their study of bakery businesses in Enugu, found that apprenticeships provided critical technical and operational skills that improved the day-to-day efficiency of bakery operations. These studies illustrate that technical competence, gained through structured skill acquisition during apprenticeship, directly translates to better task execution, resource management, and productivity—hallmarks of operational efficiency. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded that skill acquisition significantly affects operational efficiency in automobile retail outlets.

Summary of Findings

The hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression via SPSS version 23 on data collected from 304 respondents. The statistical results are summarized below for each hypothesis:

i. The duration of apprenticeship had a significant positive effect on apprentice retention**.** The regression result showed a Standardized Beta (β) = 0.612**,** t = 11.818**,** and p = 0.000.

ii. Skill acquisition was found to significantly influence operational efficiency. The regression output revealed β = 0.688**,** t = 14.035**,** and p = 0.000.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the Igbo apprenticeship system remains highly relevant in today's business environment. The results show that its core elements namely duration and skill acquisition are critical to enhancing business success factors such as apprentice retention and operational efficiency. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. The Business owners and trade associations should develop formal policies to regulate and support traditional apprenticeship systems, including standardizing duration and financial settlement processes.

ii. Business owners should integrate modern techniques and technologies into training. Workshops and partnerships with technical institutions can enhance apprentices' skill sets and operational output.

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