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Owner-Apprentice Bias, Service Quality and Outcomes Amongst Auto-Mechanic Firms in Abakaliki Nigeria

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Abstract: Service firms hold a central part in the flow of the Nigerian economy, either in providing jobs for teeming young people or enabling business start-ups with cheap labor in other to strive farther than it would have been without such easily sourced labor. The research was about how such cheap labor (apprentices) aid the level of service quality of auto-mechanic firms, considering the service quality dimensions of customers experience and service outcome. The results show a statistically significant but weak positive relationship between owner-apprentice bias and service quality experience and no statistically significant relationship between service quality outcome and owner-apprentice bias.

Key words: Nigerian economy, sourced labor, auto-mechanic, dimensions, statistically, relationship

INTRODUCATION

Apprenticeship practice; Then and now: The discourse on apprenticeship orientation and how it affects businesses is not a very new issue. From the very early days of antiquity, Biblical records hold that there was apprenticeship in its multifaceted form in the days of Jacob and Laban (Genesis 29:15, The Living Bible). It so happened that, Jacob (the apprentice) served (apprenticed for) Laban (the firm owner) in a particular cattle business, there was an oral agreement (informal). Mostly, this agreement was either changed or completely ignored by Laban, even though there was a specific term of settlement agreed upon. Jacob's servitude to Laban made Laban's enterprise to prosper; this encapsulates the role Jacob (the apprentice) had on Laban's business. This early form of apprenticeship had the three basic forms of apprenticeship training namely; traditional-Having to engage ones family member (Jacob was Laban's Nephew) in the skills transfer and training, informal-unregulated apprenticeship and usually without pay (ILO., 2011) and formal o r regulated apprenticeship where the apprentice almost serves as an employee and is being paid (Onakala and Banwo, 2015). After the Biblical days, people have not stopped transferring skills from one generation to another in some form of apprenticeship training.

Apprenticeship practice in Nigeria became a source of livelihood, means of being employed and a way to actively engage in economically worthwhile ventures (ILO., 2011). There are different enterprises that engage in apprenticeship practices which include; wielding, mechanics, auto-mechanics, auto-electricians, tailoring, generator repairing, mobile phone repairing, carpentry, furniture making, catering, manicure/pedicure and plumbing. These trades of the apprenticeship practice are recognized as a means of absorbing and training unemployed youths through manpower development and economic empowerment (Ariyo, 2001). As a result parents and guardians in Nigeria have seen apprenticeship as a system of keeping their wards meaningfully engaged in a worthwhile venture.

At some point to engage these youths in apprenticeship, parents/guardians handed over their wards who they could not train beyond the elementary education level to master a trade, sometimes without a formal agreement, although, the period of agreement for apprenticeship ranges from 3-5 years (ILO., 2011), if they learn the trade/craft successfully they could become masters of their own (second-tier entrepreneurs) if they are financially buoyant to start on their own, or work with the master as a journeyman (ILO., 2011). In Abakaliki Nigeria, many apprentices are involved in building the businesses of their masters. Although, some of the apprentices also are treated badly by their masters and some sent away without their masters fulfilling the agreed terms after a long period, some tricky or unscrupulous masters would subject these apprentices to regimented training and work with due compensation, all because the terms of work is not usually discussed, description of

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what the apprentice should do is not properly spelt out, prosecution of masters is not a norm and it is an unregulated system of apprenticeship. Ariyo (2001), states that the informal economy is regarded as the power house of developing economies of the world of which Nigeria is a part of. The importance of the informal economy wherein mechanic workshops fit is based on the fact that it accounts for more than 80% of jobs through agriculture, auto-repairs, mobile telecommunications services, transportation and trading and also has been the pedestal for 95% of new jobs in these developing countries (ILO., 2011; Ariyo, 2001) including a vast number of unemployed youths and young people that enter the labour market annually being unaccounted for. As a form of education and training, apprenticeship in the informal sector contributes significantly to youth employment and empowerment, thereby, reducing youth restiveness while ensuring productivity and better employment opportunities in these informal sectors.

All the benefits of apprenticeship therefore to a family and the economy at large have been adequately looked at and there is a consensus that apprenticeship aid unemployment reduction and also aid families to get a productive enterprise worthwhile for their wards. Apprenticeship is said to account for about 85% of skills training and transfer in most parts of the country which goes to enhance the start up of micro, small, medium entreprises (National Directorate of Employment Annual Report, 2009 in Agomo, 2011). In recognition of this, a lot of work has been undertaken to promote self-employment, from apprenticeship to financing to mentoring and counseling. Many training programs aim to promote self-employment and apprenticeship by fostering relevant skills and attitudes and relieving main constraints to entrepreneurship by government. Based on the evidence that some entrepreneurial traits and skills through apprenticeship are strongly related to business set up and success as supported by Adams (2013) and since these skills can be taught, many interventions (School on Wheels, National Open Apprenticeship System, Waste to Wealth Program and Graduate Internship Scheme) have focused on training at the expense of performance of these businesses that offer the actual training. Not to debase what the Nigerian government and others have done for apprenticeship, the fact remains that have the policies and plan of sending apprentices to businesses taken into cognizance the impact the apprentice would have on the business? Also, what feeling do customers have about service quality in a shop filled by apprentices?

The researchers adopt the measures that would be much more relevant to this study-service quality experience, service quality outcome; these strands of service quality have been factored into this study. Service quality is being seen as a construct to measure the actual performance of these mechanic firms as it relates to customers. "Customer is King" maxim simply implies that a business that neglects the feelings and wellbeing of her customers is actually not been competitive. The Service Quality, ServQual or ServiQual of a mechanic firm simply implies that the quality of services rendered by a mechanic firm could be picturesque of the extent the firm performs and the verdict as to whether service quality is high or low rests squarely on the customers or users of the service. When customers opine that the services rendered by apprentices are of high quality, they actually mean one of two things. The first could be that they (customers) had a nice experience which could either mean that the apprentice was courteous or helpful; even outside the job or the second could be that the apprentice's efforts have a positive outcome which could imply that the actual problem a customer brought to the shop was solved. If it was the repair of top gasket, it was done. If it was a bad type, it was fixed. Also, the experiential and outcome dimensions could be mutually exclusive, that is, high experience and low outcome or vice-versa or it could also be combined, that is, high experience and high outcome at the same time. Firm growth as a measure of performance implies the increase in the number of vehicles to be repaired whether at the workshop or outside while sustainability focuses on the long-term benefits of having an apprentice to the training mechanic firm.

Theoretical synthesis

Psychological contract theory: The concept of psychological contract was first introduced by Argyris in 1960 where he stated that "Since, the foremen realize the apprentice in this system will tend to produce optimally under passive leadership and since, the apprentices agree, a relationship may be hypothesized to evolve between the employees and the foremen which might be called the 'psychological work contract". The major assumption of the theory is that the worker will maintain high production and low grievances, if the foremen (masters) guarantee and respect the norms of the informal work culture. Psychological contract theory is a concept developed in contemporary research by Coyle. It emphasizes the mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between a master and an apprentice. It sets the dynamics for the relationship and defines the details and the kind of practical work to be done. It is distinguishable from the formal written contract of employment which for the most part, only identifies mutual duties and responsibilities in

a generalized form. It should also be noted that Rousseau's 1989 Article as highlighted by Coyle "was very influential in guiding contemporary research on apprenticeship".

Eugene on examining the relationship between employees/apprentices human capital on their performance in small scale businesses in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, Ghana inquired about the association between employee's human capital on their performance in small scale businesses in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the competencies of apprentices, examine the connection of these competencies on employee's performance and to determine the problems associated with the development of apprentice's competencies in small scale businesses in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. The study used descriptive survey involving 153 employees. Interview schedule and interview guide were the main instruments used for data collection. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Chi-square test was used to find out the associations between variables. The findings revealed that education and training are significantly associated with increased productivity and enhanced the effectiveness and efficiencies of employees. In addition, the study showed that employee's knowledge and skills were significantly associated with all the performance dimensions (improved quality, increased productivity and enhanced efficiency and effectiveness). Finally, the study discovered that the key challenges inhibiting the development of employee competencies were inadequate funds for training programmes and lack of time for training activities.

A very recent work, it should be noted that "employees" and "apprentices" are a world apart. Whereas an apprentice could be tagged "an employee", a full time employee cannot be said to be an apprentice. This implies that the topic is flawed in some sort. Also, the determinant of sample size was not befitting of a scientific research work in the management science; just random sampling technique is no sampling technique at all. More, the findings of the study were no way in congruence with the objectives of the study, whereas the objectives focuses on performance, the findings were focused on challenges. What would make the bogus findings worse is that no validity and reliability was reported, this should have been of priority owning to the high spuriousity that goes with the collation of primary data from respondents.

Peter and Judith (2014) investigated the effect of education and training to performance of entrepreneurs in micro and small entreprises within nakuru town in Kenya. The paper addresses how the skills of apprentices affect the performance of businesses. MSEs operators with different levels of education and training in the line of operations are assessed and their performance in terms of growth in capital recorded. Descriptive sample survey research design was adopted. Questionnaires were used to collect data and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings were that formal education and training offers skills of improving the quality and quantity of the goods and services produced through effective financial and labour management which in turn improves the performance. Recommendations were that ways of improving the level of skills in the sector should be identified to enhance higher productivity.

Although, the study was well thought out, the researchers factored the apprentices as neither an employee nor even an intrapreneur but as an entrepreneur. Of course, the entrepreneur bears the risk which apprentices do not. The work also used very elementary analytical technique of just mean, the work looking clumsy by a collage of charts whose information has been shown on tables. The positive aspect is that the work also shows that apprentices could have an effect on the performance of businesses, especially, those in the micro, small and medium enterprise if properly factored in.

Naylor *et al*. (2009) carried out a theoretical work on constructing apprenticeships; transforming through sharing. The study started by stating that due to the result of a general dissatisfaction among construction industry employers with the current apprenticeship training in the UK, a local training group in collaboration with a further education provider and the Sector Skills Council for construction developed an innovative training scheme. The authors showed that the claim of the Shared Apprenticeship scheme was to transform the learning experiences of construction apprentices by accentuating their craft skills development, broadening their vocational knowledge and sharing their on-site experiences through a consortium of employers. The project was said to be noteworthy not least because it involves significant public funds and numbers of apprentices but it also attracts global attention from decision makers delivering similar programmes. The study explored the reasons for the Shared Apprenticeship project and considers similar schemes through literature review and interviews with stakeholders.

The write up was a very interesting one. Although, not empirical, it could be used as a suggestive model for a national system of apprenticeship in Nigeria, building upon the three strands of National Directorate of Employment (NDE) of Waste to Wealth Programme,

National Open Apprenticeship Scheme and School on Wheels Scheme, so as to give Nigeria its own kind of models as the researchers showed that the United Kingdom already had its own model of apprenticeship.

Oforegbunam and Okorafor (2010) on effects of human capital development on the performance of small and medium scaled enterprises in the southeastern region of Nigeria accentuate that human capital is the most critical agent of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) performance. To this extent, a survey approach was adopted in investigating the effect of human capital development on the performance of SMEs. The 50 entrepreneurs operating around the Aba SME cluster, located in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria were interviewed as it relates to their quantity of output, quality of output, revenue generated and profits as indices of performance while formal education from educational institutions, on-the-job training and participation in seminars and trade fairs by SME apprentice were used as indices of human capacity development. The Likert 5-point scale was used in the quantification of responses. The multiple regression tool was used in analyzing the effect of human capacity development indices on the performance index. The result of the analysis shows that increased human capital development by sampled SMEs leads to significant improvements in their performances. However, on-the-job training was identified as the most significant option for developing the human capital of SMEs for enhanced performance.

Ofergbunam and Okafor (2010) failed to analyze the work around the specific objectives which had apprentices in the cluster SMEs at its crux. The fundamental problem with the work was that the researchers employed the multiple regression tool for a work with non-parametric data without a test of linearity that would have qualified the data for such a test. Without a time series or historical data, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and independence should have been met to have required the use of the multiple regression tests, even the data spread for analysis is very doubtful as they seem to be a level of repetitiveness. Another problem with the work was the use of the word "the" in describing the area of study, the use of "an Aba SME cluster" would have served better than "the Aba SME cluster" which makes it feel like there is only one definite Aba SME cluster whereas there is a multiplicity of SME clusters in Aba.

Literature review: The gaps filled by this research are geographical, theoretical and methodological. Geographical, being that the researchers have seen no empirical work done in the entire South Eastern part of Nigeria that bothers on apprenticeship, the closest being the work by Ofergbunam and Okafor (2010) which was done in Aba but wasn't squarely on apprentice but on another form of firm training. Theoretical, because, no other work has been done with the use of all the well crafted and selected variables under study, that is owner-apprentice bias, service quality experience and service quality outcome. Lastly, the study filled a methodological gap as amongst the empirical works reviewed, none showed the preliminary diagnostics of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy, Bartlett's test of sphericity, the principal component analysis for factor reduction and Cronbach's alpha for reliability.

Hypotheses development: Background literature of this work has succinctly shown the importance and role of apprenticeship in families and the economy at large. There is a clear consensus as to the importance of apprenticeship in the provision of jobs and the development of unskilled labour as ILO (2011) opines that providing jobs is arguably the most pressing policy objective around the developing world and since apprenticeship aids government, supporting apprenticeship is critical in an environment where self-employment is a major source of jobs. Indeed, over 80 percent of the private informal workforce is engaged in self-employment having developed their skills through apprenticeship and now working in micro, small and medium scale businesses and household enterprises (Gindling, 2012). Given the very small proportion of wage and salary jobs and increasing number of youths in the workforce, a large majority of workers having developed their skills through apprenticeship may have to find jobs from self-employment for coming decades. This is particularly relevant for the low skilled and less experienced vulnerable youths who have but a little chance of finding jobs in wage employment. Therefore, promoting productive apprenticeship training among vulnerable individuals is an important intervention but how this intervention would enhance the performance of the training firm is still in doubt as there still seem to be incongruence as to the role or importance apprenticeship plays on the firm that provides the direct training services.

The question of whether the apprentice contributes to the quality of services as perceived by the customers is one thing that also is yet to be established. One school of thought has it that the apprentice render services that betimes betters the master's or business owner; although, an opposing view holds that some apprentices lack courtesy, make repetitive on-the-job mistakes or show slothfulness at work, these would lead to a dip in service

quality and consequently scare customers (Adekola, 2013). Especially as it has to do with mechanic handiwork, individual customers could be unconvinced as to the fact that a particular apprentice should be involved in working for them.

It is apt to also know that the service quality of a firm's performance has multi-dimensional expositions as regards what service quality really is. Kotler and Keller (2011) accentuates that "service quality, customer's satisfaction and company profitability are intricately connected. Higher levels of quality result in higher levels of customer's satisfaction". There is, therefore, little or no doubt as to the place of service quality as a measure of the performance of service firms. This point is supported by Berry *et al.* (2003) as they spelt out that higher performances could be perceived through looking at service quality aspects like keeping promises to customers, listening to customers, keeping customers informed and exceeding customers satisfaction by showing uncommon swiftness, courtesy, competence, commitment and understanding but the expositions did not end there as Berry *et al.* (2003), Phil and Maklan (2012), opine the four basic strands of service quality as against the weak strands of Kotler and Keller (2011) and Berry *et al.* (2003) which were on reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles but the four proposed by Phil and Maklan (2012) were on outcome focus on service quality, product/service experience of service quality, peace of mind dimension of service quality and moments of truth dimension of service quality. The researchers ignore other postulations on service quality and adopt the scales of service quality experience which bothers on the behavior expectations of apprentices towards the customer and the dimension of service quality outcome that centers on the actual goal/repairs expectation of the customer as performed by apprentices.

To understand the system of apprenticeship, Aysit and Keiichi (2008) accentuates that when a young person undertakes to work in an enterprise in other to learn or master a vocation, the person could be said to be an apprentice. They also opined that there are four stages of apprenticeship training namely candidate apprenticeship have a starters tag, apprenticeship having a student status, journeyman ship-being organized by vocational training centers and mastership have the "stamp" of a master and therefore being able to train other candidate apprentices.

On owner-apprentice bias, it is simply the measure of the master or mechanic shop owner's inclination towards the use and acceptance of apprentices. It centers on whether or to what extent a mechanic shop owner wants to accept apprentices, use apprentices and train them to become masters of their own. A shop owner may want to be involved in apprenticeship due to the need for more hands at the workshop, apprentices need for capacity building, transfer of knowledge and for want of extra hands for other informal ventures (Onakala and Banwo, 2015). Most of the apprenticeship practices in Nigeria is usually unregulated and untenured (Onakala and Banwo, 2015) and at the discretion of the training firm that provides the "agreement". In tenured and regulated apprenticeship, the agreement may not be static as it may be negotiated upon pre-existing norms, law and regulations of such climes but the unregulated and untenured apprenticeship, the agreement could at best be concocted and badly crafted or at worse be verbal or oral. In unregulated apprenticeship also, the cost of the apprenticeship is usually shared between the training firm and the apprentice. The apprentice may be expected to cater for his own upkeep even having paid for the training he is receiving- Imu-Oru aka. The use of apprentices in the informal sector is even more pronounced than that of the formal sector as it provided extra manpower for firms, reduces youth unemployment, reduces youth restiveness and may contribute to the level of service quality, firm growth and sustainability of firms that are inclined to the use of these apprentices. The informal sector consists of sectors that are not very well regulated and that also do not have very strong statistical information in term of documentary sources being kept overtime. They consist of carpentry, vulcanizers, auto-mechanics, cobblers, furniture makers, brick layers, welders, barbers; this work focuses on mechanics involved in repairs of car, motorcycles, tractors, tippers and tricycles. The relationship between the apprentice and the master is as presented in Fig. 1. Adopted from the policy brief by International Labor office (ILO., 2011).

Statement of hypotheses:

- H_{a1}: owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) has a significant relationship with the level of service quality experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in abakaliki mechanic worksite

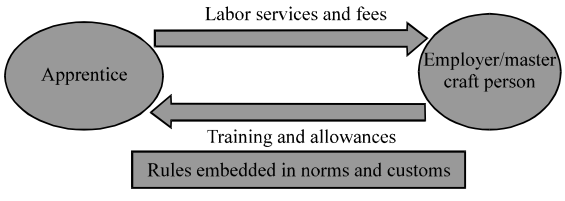

Fig. 1: Owner apprentice agreement

- H_{01}: owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) does not have a significant relationship with the level of service quality experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite
- H_{a2}: there exists a significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accepts and uses apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite
- H_{02}: there exists no significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rates at which business owners accept and use apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design adopted in this study is the correlational research design which established the relationship between the variables under study. These relationships are between Owner-Apprentice Bias (OAB) and Service Quality Experience (SQE), Service Quality Outcome (SQO) of the mechanic workshops under study, respectively. The area of this study is the Mechanic WorkSite at Onuebonyi in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Sample frame: The population of this study was dual in nature. That is, it included the customers of these mechanic workshops as respondents so as to measure service quality as rendered by apprentices. These customers are of an infinite population. The second part of the population included all the owners of shops who have apprentice therein. This is of an finite population. A visit to the mechanic worksite shows that they are shop owners who share a space with others and cannot be said to own the shop, even when the both shops occupants have apprentices.

As stated due to partly of the infinite population, the researchers used a system of convenience sampling, this can either be deliberate or judgmental (Kothari, 2008). Deliberate sampling is also known as purposive or non-probability sampling. This sampling method involves purposive or deliberate selection of particular units of the universe for constituting a sample which represents the universe. When population elements are "selected for inclusion in the sample based on the ease of access and statistical simplicity, it can be called convenience sampling" (Kothari, 2008). On this basis, the researchers studied 274 respondents, 137 shop owners and 137 customers.

Shop owners instrument: The instrument was divided in 2 parts, the first being for social variables like age, marital status, number of years in the line of business, location of the business and the number of apprentices under the tutelage of the shop owner. The second had 9 question items that had two question items that measured Owner-Apprentice Bias (OAB).

Customers instrument: This instrument was also developed in 2 parts, also like the one for shop owners, it had 2 sections. The first was also on social variables like age, gender, highest educational qualification, marital status and location of main mechanic. The other section had 6 question items, 2 question items measuring Service Quality Experience (SQE) while the other 4 measured Service Quality Outcome (SQO).

Data check: Data were generated to measure Owner-Apprentice Bias (OAB) and Service Quality Experience (SQE). Question items were developed through synthesis on existing literatures as presented in the literature review. On the OAB scale development, preliminary diagnostics were as shown in Table 1carried out on the instrument showing a high degree of sampling adequacy.

Kaiser-Meyer Olkin test = 0.607, Bartllet test of sphericity: p = 0.000; 32.866; 3 in congruence with Hair in Ernest and Ogba who stated that the KMO must be above 0.5 and the p-value for the Bartlett's must be below 0.05.

Still on the OAB scale, 5 items loaded poorly while the only three that loaded as a single factor had loading values as 0.657, 0.775 and 0.744, respectively far above the accepted 0.4 value (www.statisticssloution.com) (Table 2).

To ensure the internal consistency or reliability of the variables, the Cronbach's alpha of 0.732 was got after one of the item was expunged, leaving the researchers with the

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's test for OAB

Variables	Values
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.607
Approx. Chi-square	32.866
Bartlett's test of sphericity	
df	3.000
Sig.	0.000

Table 2: Component matrix for OAB

Variables	Component 1
I regularly accept to train apprentices	0.657
Apprentices are permitted to learn through observation	0.775
Apprentices are encouraged to ask questions regarding my work	0.744

Extraction method: principal component analysis

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test for SQE

Variables	Values
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.650
Approx. Chi-square	152.214
Bartlett's test of sphericity	
df	21.000
Sig.	0.000

Extraction method: test of sphericity

Table 4: Combined rotated component matrixa

	Component	
Variables	1	2
At the absence of the shop owner, no apprentice is allowed to "touch" my car	0.822	
I do not feel fine with my mechanic apprentices working on my car	0.728	
Apprentices from this workshop are usually fast at work	0.619	
Apprentices at this (my) mechanic workshop contribute to prompt repairs	0.615	
I mostly receive prompt answers from my mechanic's apprentices		0.715
Apprentices at this (my) mechanic workshop are usually rude		0.714
Some of the apprentices here (at my mechanic's orkshop) could make me come back here again and again		0.690

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalizationa. Rotation converged in 3 iterations

two strongest measures of owner-apprentice bias (apprentices being permitted to learn through observation and being encouraged to ask questions regarding my work. On the service quality experience scale, Table 3 has been presented to show that the same procedure as stated for the OAB factor was also subscribed to having a good measure of sampling adequacy (KMO: 0.650), (Bartlett's: p = 0.000, 152.214; 21).

Although, the loadings for service quality were done once, it rotated as two factors, making emphatic the choice of Service Quality Experience (SQE) and Service Quality Outcome. The loadings were also in line with subsisting literature (Phil and Maklan, 2012). Three question items loaded as a single factor (SQE) having 0.715, 0.714 and 0.690, respectively as depicted in Table 4 while on the factor was the SQO loadings having 0.615, 0.728, 0.619 and 0.822, respectively. The SQE reliability test of Cronbach alpha generated a 0.769 having removed one item. While the SQO reliability test of Cronbach alpha generated a 0.742 without expunging any of the items.

Test of hypotheses: The hypotheses were tested using the following procedures:

- Step 1: statement of the research question.
- Step 2: statement of the hypothesis:
- H_0: = 0
- H_A: ≠0
- Step 3; decision rule: at system generated significance levels of 0.05 or 0.01, accept H_o if the computed p-value exceeds significance levels
- Step 4: decision
- Step 5: interpretation

Test of hypothesis 1

Step 1; Statement of the research question: To what extent does owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accepts and use apprentices) relate to the level of Service Quality Experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki Mechanic WorkSite?

Step 2: Statement of the hypothesis:

- Ha_1: owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) has a significant relationship with the level of service quality experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite
- H_{01}: owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) does not have a significant relate with the level of service quality experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite

Step 3; Decision rule: $p<0.05$; $r = 0.2$.

Step 4; Decision: Null hypothesis (owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) does not have a significant relationship with the level of service quality experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki Mechanic WorkSite.) is rejected, alternate hypothesis (owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) has a significant relationship with the level of service quality experience rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki Mechanic WorkSite) is accepted.

Step 5; Interpretation: The relationship between owner-apprentice bias and the level of service quality experience is positive implying that an increase in the shop owners inclination towards apprentices also leads to a corresponding increase in the level of service quality experienced by customers of the mechanic shop owners.

Test of hypothesis 2:

Step 1; Statement of the research question: What is the relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accept and use apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki Mechanic WorkSite?

Step 2; Statement of the hypothesis:

- Ha_2: there exists a significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rates at which business owners accept and use apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite
- H_{02}: there exists no significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rates at which business owners accept and use apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite

Step 3: Decision rule: $p>0.05$; $r = 0.04$.

Step 4; Decision: Alternate hypothesis (there exist a significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accepts and uses apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in Abakaliki mechanic worksite) Is rejected while the null hypothesis (There exists no significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias (the rate at which business owners accepts and uses apprentices) and the level of service quality outcome rendered by mechanic apprentices in abakaliki mechanic worksite) Is accepted.

Step 5; Interpretation: There is no relationship between owner-apprentice bias and the level of service quality outcome implying that directionality can be deduced from amongst these variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussion on hypothesis one: To establish the measure for owner-apprentice bias, question were collated and loaded as very strong factors for the measure of owner apprentice bias. The sum of these question items were correlated against the sum of the question measuring the scale for service quality experience. These two measures the relationship between performance of mechanic clusters (service quality experience) and apprenticeship orientation (owner-apprentice-bias). This test shows that there exist a positive and significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias and the level of service quality ($p<0.05$; $r = 0.2$). This result means that the null hypothesis is rejected since the acceptance criterion states that the null hypothesis would be accepted if the computed p-value exceeds the line of 0.05 and 0.01 at two-tail. Therefore, the positive hypothesis is going to be accepted which states "There is a positive significant relationship between owner-apprentice bias and the level of service quality experience of mechanic firms in Abakaliki mechanic cluster (site)". This finding is in congruence with the psychological contract theory where the apprentice expresses his inner nature to the customer based on the feeling that permeates the workplace. It shows that even though the apprentice is not very well experienced as to be involved in direct work for a customer, the apprentice could still contribute to the customer by being prompt to respond to other non-work related questions as posed by the customer or just tries to be courteous at the presence of customers. Literature and empirical works have supported this finding (Kotler and Keller, 2011; Berry *et al*., 2003; Phil and Maklan, 2012).

Discussion on hypothesis two: Like the first, this hypothesis was also derived from the objectives stated in the earlier part of this work. To establish the relationship, the measure for Owner-Apprentice Bias (OAB) and that of Service Quality Outcome (SQO) were collated; these questions loaded as very strong factors measuring Owner-Apprentice Bias (OAB) and Service Quality Outcome (SQO) as explained earlier. These two (OAB and SQO), measures the relationship between apprenticeship orientation and performance of these selected mechanic workshops, respectively. The pearson product moment correlation test shows that there is a positive but insignificant relationship between owner-apprentice bias and the level of service quality outcome as perceived by customers of those firms under study ($p>0.05$; $r = 0.043$). This result means that the null hypothesis is accepted in line with the acceptance criterion. Therefore, the null hypothesis.

H_{02} is accepted which states "there is no significant relationship between owner apprentice bias and the level of service quality outcome of mechanic firms in Abakaliki mechanic cluster (site)". This implies that there is no relationship between the rate of acceptance and usage of apprentices and the level of service quality outcome as perceived by customers of these mechanic workshop owners under study. This finding shows that an increase in the inclination towards apprentices would not automatically transform to the level of service outcome. This is very logical because to have more hands doesn't imply that a shop owner has more "good" hands. A lousy master may just keep accepting apprentices, even though he permits them to ask questions and learn, if the master himself isn't very well grounded in the knowledge of the craft, the apprentice would have no option but to give what they have this is in congruence with the self-assessment dictate of the cognitive apprenticeship theory where if an apprentice learns poorly, he works poorly. This simply put implies that there is more to service quality outcome than owners' inclination to apprenticeship, or service quality outcome has nothing to do with owner-apprentice bias.

CONCLUSION

Masters of firm owners should use the apprentices at his tutelage very effectively and also on a contingent basis. A young apprentice may be the one to go on errands that are not very technical, maybe to buy drinking water for a customer, help with purchase of a car wash detergent or other not so important errands while senior apprentices should make more contact with the customers as it may relate to work, so as to reduce complaints and dissatisfaction and also to improve the level of service quality outcome and experience at the same time.

Very importantly, apprentices shouldn't be taken for granted as they also could make or mar the business. A business is volatile under a badly treated apprentice. An apprentice could steal and pillage their masters, insult customers, involve in espionage or even do worse things and a good apprentice could serve as an asset to the business. It is clear that they are scenarios where some apprentices are more knowledgeable than their bosses and have the customers loyalty much more as compared to their bosses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that the practice of apprenticeship should be very well regulated and the regulations should be made binding as this would serve as a deterrent to either party (training firm or the apprentice). The non-regulated form of apprenticeship in Nigeria and by extension Ebonyi State is one that neither exhausts the vocational need of the country nor impacts effectively on the business as the apprentice also could choose what to do and what not to do, irrespective of the dictates from his master. With guiding laws, a business owner can deal with an "impending" havoc on the business while the apprentice can also deal with the excesses of a "wicked" master.

Another recommendation is that, there should be learning towards the kind of "traditional" apprenticeship practice a master thinks would be more effective to the kind of business being done. Literature (Onokala and Banwo, 2015) holds that there could be various types of apprenticeship training a firm can want to get involved in; the firm should choose on a contingent basis the type of apprenticeship that best suites the business. For instance, 'Imu Oru' aka may be best for handiworks, 'Igba Odibo' may suite trades.

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