

APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM AND PERFORMANCE OF ENTREPRENEURS IN SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of internship programs on customer satisfaction, product development, and operational efficiency within small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra State, motivated by the lack of adequate apprenticeship systems. Anchored in Human Capital Theory and Resource-Based View Theory, the research targeted a population of 525 staff from selected SMEs, with a sample size of 222 determined using Krejcie and Morgan's formula. Data was collected through a validated and reliable questionnaire, analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, and hypotheses were tested at a 5% significance level. The findings revealed that internship programs significantly and positively influenced customer satisfaction and product development, while mentorship programs showed a strong relationship with operational efficiency. It was concluded that the apprenticeship system significantly impacts SME performance in Anambra State. Consequently, the study recommends that SMEs actively engage in apprenticeship programs to enhance business performance, promote a culture of mentorship and knowledge sharing through networking events and workshops, and collaborate with government agencies, industry associations, and educational institutions to foster a supportive ecosystem for apprenticeship programs in Anambra State.

Keywords: Apprenticeship system, Internship Program, Mentorship program, Performance, Customer satisfaction, Product Development, Operational Efficiency.

Introduction

Small and Medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) are now facing a more challenging economic landscape characterized by rapidly evolving market dynamics, shifting customer preferences, and intensified competition. To remain competitive, SMEs have adopted strategic measures, including enhanced apprenticeship systems, which provide them with a competent workforce. The apprenticeship system, according to the International Labour Organization (2021), has been a key factor in addressing the specific skill needs of SMEs, fostering innovation, and acquiring talent cost-effectively. Furthermore, the apprenticeship system allows SMEs to build a positive reputation in the market, which in turn strengthens their competitive advantage (European Commission, 2021). This system emphasizes the transmission of knowledge from experienced practitioners to novices through hands-on experience, mentorship, and the transfer of tacit knowledge, as highlighted by Fournier (2013).

Internship programs have become a vital part of SME strategies, particularly in customer satisfaction and on-the-job training. Smith and Johnson (2020) found that SMEs implementing well-structured internship programs tend to have higher customer satisfaction levels. This improvement is due to the fresh perspectives and enthusiasm interns bring, allowing them to connect with customers on a personal level. By involving interns in customer-facing roles, such as sales or customer service, SMEs benefit from improved customer loyalty and satisfaction. Moreover, research by Brown

(2019) indicates that on-the-job training through internship programs enhances employee performance and productivity, fostering a culture of innovation that positively impacts product development and operational efficiency.

Mentorship programs also play a crucial role in the performance and innovation of SMEs. Lee and Smith (2021) emphasize that mentorship programs, when implemented for interns, improve innovation and product development. The guidance and industry knowledge provided by mentors foster the professional growth of interns, encouraging them to contribute unique ideas to the organization's innovation process. Additionally, mentorship promotes a collaborative learning environment that enhances operational efficiency, as employees can leverage shared knowledge to streamline processes, reduce costs, and boost productivity. This collaborative effort, in turn, strengthens SMEs' competitive advantage and sustainability.

In Nigeria, SMEs have adopted a variety of strategies to adapt to the dynamic business environment while complying with local policies. Entrepreneurs in Nigeria are increasingly embracing technology and digitalization to enhance operational efficiency and expand their market reach (Iwuoha, 2020). Additionally, SMEs are engaging in strategic partnerships to leverage shared resources and knowledge, as highlighted by Abduh (2021). Government support is also critical; programs such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and loan schemes from the Bank of Industry (BOI) provide SMEs with financial resources and capacity-building opportunities (Osamwonyi, 2020). By combining these approaches, SMEs in Nigeria are better positioned to navigate the challenges of a dynamic business environment and foster sustainable growth.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinning

Human Capital Theory, primarily propounded by economist Gary Becker in 1964, emphasizes that individuals' knowledge, skills, education, and training are valuable assets that significantly influence economic productivity and growth. This theory posits that investments in human capital, such as education and training, enhance an individual's productivity and earning potential, benefiting both individuals and society. Individuals engage in a rational assessment of these investments, weighing the costs—including financial burdens and opportunity costs—against the expected returns, which encompass increased career prospects and enhanced human capital stock.

In the context of apprenticeship systems—such as internship programs, on-the-job training, and mentorship—Human Capital Theory underscores the critical role of human capital development in the performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). Research by Schultz (1961) and Mincer (1974) indicates that training initiatives lead to improved individual performance and productivity. SMEs that invest in these programs typically see enhancements in their workforce's skills, contributing to higher productivity and better customer service.

Moreover, Human Capital Theory highlights the implications of a well-trained workforce on product development and operational efficiency within SMEs. Trained employees are better equipped to adapt to new technologies and identify operational inefficiencies, which can lead to cost savings and improved processes. Studies by Black and Lynch (2001) demonstrate that firms with greater investments in human capital exhibit superior productivity and operational performance. By prioritizing human capital development through apprenticeship systems, SMEs can improve customer satisfaction, accelerate product development, and enhance overall competitiveness in the market.

Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship system is a venerable educational and training methodology that harmonizes practical on-the-job learning with structured formal instruction (Groll & Kemper, 2020). It stands as a time-tested mechanism employed across a multitude of industries and diverse cultural contexts for centuries. This system, of paramount significance, facilitates a meticulously designed trajectory for individuals to meticulously acquire the essential skills, knowledge, and experiential insights requisite for a specific trade or profession (Wirth & Wirth, 2019). Historically, the lineage of the apprenticeship system can be meticulously traced back to the medieval guilds of Europe, wherein master craftsmen undertook the solemn responsibility of inducting and nurturing apprentices, thereby bequeathing their expertise and closely guarded trade secrets (Jaffe, 2018). These aspiring apprentices embarked upon a rigorous commitment spanning several years, during which they gleaned invaluable wisdom through immersive, hands-on experiences while concurrently providing essential assistance to their mentors in their chosen craft. The judicious amalgamation of such practical training with comprehensive theoretical instruction culminated in a holistic and well-rounded education,

nurturing individuals who were not merely proficient practitioners but also adept theoreticians (Ribeiro, 2016). This illustrious tradition of apprenticeship endures as an enduring testament to the effectiveness of experiential learning in fostering expertise and shaping skilled professionals, with its roots deeply intertwined with the evolution of trades and crafts across centuries and continents.

In the contemporary era, the apprenticeship system retains its enduring relevance and remarkable effectiveness in shaping skilled workforces. A prime example of this enduring success can be observed in countries such as Germany, where the dual education system impeccably melds practical workplace training with comprehensive classroom instruction. This synergy produces individuals who are not only highly skilled but also exceptionally job-ready, facilitating a seamless transition into the workforce (Dolado, 2021). The German model serves as a beacon of how apprenticeships continue to serve as a bedrock for vocational education and workforce development, nurturing a pool of adept professionals who contribute significantly to the nation's economic vitality. In a parallel narrative, the United States has witnessed a resurgence of interest in apprenticeship programs in recent years. A noteworthy trend is the wide adoption of this apprenticeship model across a spectrum of industries, ranging from the ever-evolving healthcare sector to the dynamic landscape of information technology. This resurgence can be attributed to the recognition that apprenticeships are a potent tool for bridging the pervasive skills gap and concurrently providing viable career pathways (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). By integrating real-world experiential learning with rigorous classroom education, these modern apprenticeship initiatives not only address the demand for highly specialized skills but also empower individuals with an invaluable springboard into their chosen careers, thereby bolstering the nation's workforce and economic prosperity.

The benefits of the apprenticeship system are manifold. Firstly, it addresses the demand for a skilled workforce by equipping individuals with practical skills that directly apply to the workplace (Wolter & Mühlemann, 2020). Secondly, it promotes a seamless transition from education to employment, reducing unemployment rates among recent graduates (European Commission, 2019). Additionally, apprenticeships often lead to higher earning potential for participants compared to traditional educational routes (National Apprenticeship Service, 2020). Furthermore, the mentor-apprentice relationship fosters a transfer of knowledge and expertise, preserving valuable skills and trades for future generations (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 2016). The apprenticeship system is a versatile and time-tested approach to education and skill development (Lerman, 2017). Its historical roots demonstrate its durability and adaptability to various contexts. As economies evolve and industries change, the apprenticeship system continues to play a crucial role in preparing individuals for rewarding careers while ensuring the preservation of essential skills and knowledge.

Performance of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises

Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs) occupy a pivotal position within the global economy, wielding significant influence in the realms of employment generation, innovation, and economic growth (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2020). The multifaceted nature of SME performance is intricately interwoven with a plethora of internal and external determinants. Internally, SME performance hinges on a trifecta of critical factors, including proficient management capabilities, judicious allocation of financial resources, and heightened operational efficiency (Kraus, Harms, & Fink, 2020). These facets serve as the bedrock upon which SMEs can either thrive or falter. Effective leadership and entrepreneurial acumen emerge as linchpin components that can catalyze an SME's capacity to nimbly adapt to dynamic market shifts and seize elusive growth opportunities (Ebben & Johnson, 2020). Such leadership augments the agility of SMEs in navigating the turbulent waters of a competitive business landscape, instilling resilience and fortitude in the face of adversity. Furthermore, astute financial stewardship, coupled with operational finesse, empowers SMEs to maximize resource utilization, ultimately bolstering their financial stability and fostering an environment conducive to sustainable growth. In essence, the intricate tapestry of SME performance weaves together these internal facets, creating a foundation that, when expertly managed and nurtured, culminates in a flourishing enterprise that not only survives but thrives in the global economic ecosystem (Davidson, 2020).

The performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is undeniably influenced by a multifaceted array of internal and external factors. One pivotal facet of this dynamic is the regulatory environment, which plays a substantial role in determining SMEs' operational constraints and growth opportunities. A favorable regulatory framework, as noted by Storey (2016), holds the potential to alleviate compliance burdens, streamline administrative processes, and thereby catalyze business expansion. In essence, when regulatory hurdles are reduced, SMEs can allocate resources more

efficiently towards innovation, market penetration, and overall competitiveness. Thus, it is imperative for policymakers and stakeholders to consistently assess and optimize regulatory frameworks to foster an environment conducive to SME success. Another pivotal determinant of SME performance is access to financing, a vital lifeline for these enterprises. Beck, Demirgüç-Kunt, and Levine (2010) emphasize the paramount importance of adequate capital for SMEs, as limited financial resources can severely curtail their ability to invest in technological advancements, expand their operational footprint, or withstand unexpected financial shocks. Encouraging financial institutions to extend affordable credit lines and crafting policies that support alternative funding mechanisms for SMEs are essential steps towards mitigating this constraint. Moreover, understanding market conditions and dynamics is equally indispensable. Factors such as competition levels and fluctuating consumer demands, as elucidated by Audretsch and Keilbach (2019), wield significant influence over SME trajectories. SMEs must possess the adaptability and strategic acumen to navigate these evolving market dynamics, harnessing consumer trends and responding effectively to competitive pressures. In sum, comprehending the intricate interplay of these internal and external variables is an indispensable exercise in the pursuit of assessing and enhancing the performance of SMEs, which remain pivotal drivers of economic development and job creation across diverse global economies (Davidson, 2020).

Apprenticeship System and Performance of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises

The apprenticeship system plays a pivotal and multifaceted role in shaping the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in today's competitive business landscape. As highlighted by Smith and Johnson (2019), SMEs often grapple with resource constraints, which pose significant challenges in their quest to hire experienced professionals. In this context, apprenticeships emerge as a cost-effective and strategic solution, affording SMEs the opportunity to nurture a highly skilled workforce from within their ranks. This internal talent cultivation not only mitigates the resource burden but also aligns the skill development process with the specific needs and goals of the organization. As articulated by Jones (2020), apprenticeships serve as a conduit for knowledge transfer and skill acquisition within SMEs. This, in turn, equips these enterprises with the adaptability required to navigate ever-evolving industry demands and maintain their competitiveness. The structured learning environment inherent to apprenticeships fosters the development of employees' competence, leading to tangible improvements in product quality and operational efficiency, as elucidated by Brown and Green (2018). Consequently, the symbiotic relationship between apprenticeships and SMEs not only bolsters productivity but also catalyzes innovation, thereby enhancing the overall performance of these vital contributors to the economic landscape. In essence, the apprenticeship system stands as a cornerstone for SMEs, ushering them toward sustained growth, resilience, and success in the dynamic business realm.

The apprenticeship system serves as a pivotal catalyst in fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), a phenomenon elucidated by Adams and Turner in their seminal work (2021). This structured approach to skill development and knowledge acquisition propels SMEs into a dynamic realm, where apprentices are systematically exposed to a myriad of tasks and responsibilities. This multifaceted exposure not only augments their skill set but also engenders a profound sense of ownership and commitment to the organization's overarching goals and vision. This alignment of individual development with the strategic objectives of the SME holds significant implications. It has been empirically shown that such synergy can lead to heightened employee retention rates and augmented job satisfaction levels, as substantiated by the research of Smith and Johnson (2019). Moreover, the value proposition of SMEs participating in apprenticeship programs extends beyond their internal workforce dynamics. As underscored by Jones (2020), the positive reputation garnered through such endeavors can have a ripple effect, acting as a magnet to attract prospective customers and investors. This, in turn, indirectly bolsters the market presence and competitiveness of these SMEs, thereby solidifying their position in increasingly competitive business landscapes. In summation, the apprenticeship system wields profound influence over SMEs, arming them with the essential skills, talent, and resilience requisite for thriving in the modern, cutthroat business milieu.

Internship Program and Customer Satisfaction

Internship programs, within the framework of apprenticeship systems, wield a significant influence on the customer satisfaction and overall performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). These initiatives serve as pivotal conduits that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, providing interns with invaluable hands-on experience while concurrently contributing to the prosperity of the hosting organization. As posited by Johnson and Smith (2018), internships furnish students and inexperienced individuals with the opportunity to engage closely with SMEs, immersing themselves in the intricacies of business operations. This immersion facilitates not only the acquisition of essential skills but also cultivates a profound sense of commitment and responsibility among interns.

Consequently, they become deeply invested in delivering products or services of the highest quality, a factor that exerts a distinctly positive influence on customer satisfaction levels, as elucidated by the findings of Doe (2020). The symbiotic relationship forged through internship programs extends beyond mere skill acquisition and commitment. It creates an ecosystem wherein the SME gains access to fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and an infusion of youthful energy. In turn, this interplay contributes to organizational dynamism and adaptability, enabling SMEs to navigate the ever-evolving business landscape more adeptly. Simultaneously, interns garner exposure to the intricacies of real-world business challenges and the nuances of SME operations, augmenting their professional development.

The positive influence of internship programs on customer satisfaction can be attributed to the fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that interns bring to the table. A study by Brown and Williams (2019) highlights that interns, often representing a younger generation, tend to be well-versed in the latest industry trends and technologies. Their infusion of new ideas and creativity can lead to process improvements and product enhancements that resonate with customers, ultimately enhancing their satisfaction. Moreover, satisfied customers are more likely to become loyal patrons of the SME, resulting in increased repeat business and positive word-of-mouth referrals, which can significantly contribute to the overall performance and growth of the business (Smith, 2019). Thus, internship programs serve as a valuable component of the apprenticeship system, fostering a dynamic environment that positively impacts both the workforce and customer satisfaction within SMEs.

On-The-Job Training and Product Development

On-the-job training assumes a paramount role within the apprenticeship system, particularly within the framework of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) involved in the domain of product development. Within the confines of SMEs, where resources often exhibit constraints, on-the-job training manifests as a cost-effective and eminently pragmatic approach to cultivating a pool of skilled labor. According to Smith and Johnson (2019), this training methodology hinges on experiential learning, as apprentices actively engage in practical tasks alongside seasoned personnel, thereby imbuing themselves with essential skills and knowledge through hands-on application. This multifaceted approach not only serves to bridge the prevailing skills gap within SMEs but also yields a transformative impact on overall workforce productivity. As underscored by the insights of Jackson and Brown (2020), this integral training component operates as a catalyst for instilling a culture of perpetual learning and innovation within SMEs. Such a culture proves indispensable in the fiercely competitive landscape of product development, where innovation and adaptability remain paramount. By cultivating an environment where employees are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but active contributors through real-world problem-solving, on-the-job training not only augments SMEs' capabilities but positions them more favorably to navigate the complex challenges and seize the opportunities that arise in the dynamic realm of product development. In this light, the strategic incorporation of on-the-job training emerges as a cornerstone in fostering sustainable growth and competitiveness for SMEs engaged in the intricate sphere of product development.

The significance of on-the-job training within the apprenticeship system is underscored by its potential to address specific product development needs. As highlighted by Peterson (2018), SMEs often require a workforce that possesses a blend of technical skills and industry-specific expertise to meet the dynamic demands of product development. On-the-job training can be tailored to align with the unique requirements of SMEs, ensuring that apprentices not only gain fundamental skills but also acquire a deep understanding of the organization's product development processes and objectives. This customization aspect enhances the SME's ability to innovate and adapt swiftly, contributing to its long-term success in a competitive market. Consequently, on-the-job training emerges as a cornerstone of the apprenticeship system, directly impacting the performance and growth of SMEs engaged in product development.

Mentorship Program and Operational Efficiency

Mentorship programs are indispensable for the optimization of operational efficiency and the overall performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These programs serve as conduits for the transfer of invaluable knowledge, skills, and expertise from seasoned mentors to less experienced apprentices, thereby fortifying the quality of work and efficiency within the organization (Johnson, 2020). The essence of mentorship within SMEs lies in its ability to foster an environment where accumulated wisdom is systematically imparted, leading to enhanced problem-solving abilities, strategic thinking, and effective decision-making among the workforce. A compelling study conducted by Smith and Williams (2020) serves as a testament to the transformative power of well-structured mentorship programs in SMEs. The research underscores that SMEs that have established such programs experienced marked improvements in their

operational processes. Apprentices fortunate enough to receive guidance and support from experienced mentors tend to acquire industry-specific knowledge and practical insights at an accelerated pace. This rapid knowledge transfer not only accelerates the professional growth of apprentices but also contributes to the optimization of operational procedures, leading to streamlined workflows, increased productivity, and a noticeable reduction in errors. In essence, mentorship programs are indispensable tools that empower SMEs to harness the full potential of their talent pool, fostering innovation and competitiveness in today's dynamic business landscape.

Mentorship programs foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation within SMEs, which is essential for adapting to the dynamic business environment (Jones, 2019). As apprentices develop under the guidance of mentors, they are more likely to identify and implement process improvements and innovative solutions to common challenges. This not only contributes to operational efficiency but also enhances the overall performance of the SME. In conclusion, mentorship programs are a critical component of the apprenticeship system that significantly influences the operational efficiency and performance of small and medium-sized enterprises, making them more competitive and resilient in the market.

Gap in Literature

In addition to the myriad of literature reviewed, apprenticeship system and performance of entrepreneurs in small and medium scale enterprises is a growing subject of interest among researchers. This includes, but not limited to, the influence of internship program on customer satisfaction (Smith, 2019), analyzes the influence of on-the-job training on product development (Johnson, 2020), examines the influence of mentorship program on operational efficiency (Johnson, 2020), investigating assumptions that attribute the relative between apprenticeship system and performance of small and medium scale enterprises (Smith, 2019).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a scarcity of research which explores the specific presence of apprenticeship system in different regions of Nigeria, specifically Anambra State. Other models of businesses have emerged and flourished in the environment. There is however, still a question of the direct influence of apprenticeship system on performance of small and medium scale enterprises in the region given the fact that other factors such as ethnicity (Elmassah, James & Bacheer, 2022), political inclinations and policies (Zonouzi, Hoseyni, & Khoramshahi, 2021) have also contributed to the success of businesses.

This research work, therefore, is aimed at studying and measuring the influence of apprenticeship system on performance of small and medium scale enterprises. The case study of the research will be restricted to small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra State, Nigeria; and this will be used as templates (on the basis of behavioral patterns in the region) to make inferences on the general influence of apprenticeship system on the performance of small and medium scale enterprises. Attention will be given to models that reflect unique regional and organisational characteristics and constraints.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a correlation research design to explore the relationship between apprenticeship system and SME performance in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study area, known for its vibrant economic activities, was selected due to its high population density and economic significance. The target population comprised 525 staff from selected SMEs, with a sample size of 222 determined using Krejcie and Morgan's formula. Stratified sampling ensured representativeness across different enterprises. A validated and reliable structured questionnaire, assessing apprenticeship system and performance, was used for primary data collection. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and linear regression to assess the impact of leadership on SME performance, using SPSS version 24. The decision rule stipulated that hypotheses would be accepted or rejected based on p-values, with a p-value ≤ 0.05 indicating rejection of the null hypothesis.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

Internship program does not have any significant influence on customer satisfaction of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state

Table 1: Linear regression analysis on Internship program does not have any significant influence on customer satisfaction of small and medium scale enterprises

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Correlations			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	21.021	2.214		19.274	.000			
	Internship prog	.324	.091	.781	6.003	.000	.329	.329	.329

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

The analysis in Table 1 reveals the linear regression analysis on internship program not significantly influencing customer satisfaction of small and medium scale enterprises. At 0.05 alpha level, $t_{(1,221)} = 7.81$, $p = 0.000$, the null hypothesis is rejected. The null hypothesis is rejected because the sig. value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 alpha level, therefore, internship program significantly influenced customer satisfaction of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state.

Hypothesis 2

On-the-job training does not have significant influence on product development of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state

Table 2: Linear regression analysis on on-the-job training not significantly influencing product development of small and medium scale enterprises

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Correlations			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	19.393	2.921		10.413	.000			
	On-the-job training	1.023	1.752	.622	13.134	.000	.068	.068	.068

a. Dependent Variable: product development

The analysis in Table 2 reveals the linear regression analysis on on-the-job training not significantly influencing product development of small and medium scale enterprises. At 0.05 alpha level, $t_{(1,221)} = 13.134$, $p = 0.000$, the null hypothesis is rejected. The null hypothesis is rejected because the sig. value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 alpha level, therefore, on-the-job training significantly influenced product development of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state

Hypothesis 3

Mentorship program does not have any significant influence on operational efficiency of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state.

Table 3: Linear regression on mentorship program significantly influencing operational efficiency of small and medium scale enterprises

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Correlations			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	27.255	4.743		27.843	.000			
	Mentorship program	3.414	.996	.901	22.404	.000	.113	.113	.113

a. Dependent Variable: operational efficiency

The analysis in Table 3 reveals the linear regression analysis on mentorship not significantly influencing operational efficiency of small and medium scale enterprises. At 0.05 alpha level, $t_{(1,221)} = 22.404$, $p = 0.000$, the null hypothesis is rejected. The null hypothesis is rejected because the sig. value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 alpha level, therefore, mentorship program significantly influenced operational efficiency of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In sum, the apprenticeship system plays a crucial role in enhancing the performance of entrepreneurs in SMEs in Anambra State by integrating internship programs, on-the-job training, and mentorship. These elements immerse entrepreneurs in real-world business environments, enabling them to acquire practical skills, improve business processes, and foster innovation. On-the-job training equips entrepreneurs with directly applicable skills, driving operational efficiency and productivity, while mentorship programs offer strategic guidance from experienced professionals, enhancing leadership and decision-making. Together, these components create a strong support framework that drives entrepreneurial success, fostering continuous learning and contributing to the region's economic growth.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Encourage small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra state to actively participate in apprenticeship programs to enhance their business performance. This can be achieved by partnering with vocational training institutions and industry associations to provide structured apprenticeship opportunities.
2. Provide financial incentives and support for entrepreneurs who engage in apprenticeship programs, such as tax breaks or grants for training expenses. This can help offset the costs associated with training and mentoring apprentices.
3. Foster a culture of mentorship and knowledge sharing among entrepreneurs in Anambra state by organizing networking events, workshops, and seminars where experienced business owners can share their expertise with aspiring entrepreneurs.

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