

Role of Guidance and Counselling in Reducing Apprenticeship Dropout and Improving Completion Rates among Youths in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

Apprenticeship remains one of the major avenues through which youths in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State, acquire vocational skills and achieve economic independence. However, many apprentices fail to complete their training programmes. This study examined the role of guidance and counselling in reducing apprenticeship dropout and improving completion rates among youths in Awka Education Zone. Two research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised all 65 school counsellors in public secondary schools across the five Local Government Areas in Awka Education Zone, and census sampling was used to include all respondents. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Role of Guidance and Counselling in Reducing Apprenticeship Dropout and Improving Completion Rates Questionnaire (RGCRADICRQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation, while its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.84. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings revealed that guidance and counselling play a significant role in reducing apprenticeship dropout by strengthening commitment, reducing frustration, improving emotional well-being, and helping apprentices manage conflicts and peer pressure. Guidance and counselling were also found to improve apprenticeship completion rates through enhanced motivation, goal setting, self-confidence, and communication with masters. The study concluded that guidance and counselling is a valuable intervention for improving apprenticeship retention and completion and recommended extending structured counselling services to apprentices beyond the formal school system in Awka Education Zone.

Keywords: guidance and counselling, apprenticeship dropout, completion rate, youths, Awka Education Zone

INTRODUCTION

Apprenticeship is one of the oldest systems of skill transmission, with origins traceable to ancient Egypt and Babylon. As early as the 18th century BCE, the Code of Hammurabi in Babylon mandated that artisans teach their crafts to the next generation in order to sustain the supply of skilled labour (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The practice evolved in Rome through trade associations known as collegia, which were formed by craftsmen to uphold trade standards and regulate membership. By the 13th century, this model had developed into craft guilds in Western Europe. Guilds controlled product quality, production methods, and working conditions within towns. Entry into a guild was only possible after completing a formal apprenticeship, which commonly lasted seven years under a master craftsman (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The guild system operated largely within domestic settings, where the master worked alongside apprentices in his own premises. This arrangement fostered an artificial family relationship, as articles of apprenticeship substituted for kinship ties. However, as guilds grew more powerful, they became exclusionary. They monopolized trades, charged high entry fees to outsiders, and often restricted apprenticeship opportunities to sons of members or wealthy families. In response to these abuses, governments intervened to regulate apprenticeship. In England, the Statute of Artificers of 1563 was enacted to limit exclusionary practices and ensure adequate labour supply. Over time, the traditional guild

model gave way to modern vocational and industrial education systems, but the core principle of learning through supervised practice remained central. The concept of individualized training extended beyond craft guilds in the Middle Ages. Universities applied the same principle through the master's degree, while religious orders required novices to undergo a period of novitiate before full admission. In medicine, the guild model was evident in surgery, where the surgeon-barber was regarded as a craftsman of lower status than the university-trained physician. In law, apprenticeship took the form of clerking, where prospective lawyers worked directly under a master practitioner to learn the profession (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The Industrial Revolution significantly reshaped attitudes toward training. The introduction of machines created demand for both skilled workers, such as machinists and engineers, and unskilled labour. Unskilled workers with aptitude often advanced to semi-skilled positions. Paradoxically, apprenticeships gained renewed importance with the rise of trade unions, which sought to maintain quality standards and control recruitment by protecting union jobs. In England, apprenticeship persisted in craft industries and was extended to related fields. The education sector, for instance, developed apprentice programmes for student teachers, and similar models existed for training young farmers (Wallis, 2019). In the American colonies, apprenticeship was also common. Many indentured apprentices arrived from England in the 17th century, and notable figures such as Benjamin Franklin served apprenticeships, in his case in the printing trade under his brother. However, apprenticeship was less central in colonial America than in Europe due to the relatively high proportion of skilled workers already present in the colonies. With modernization and industrialization, the division of labour intensified. Large-scale machine production increased the demand for workers with specialized skills, thereby reinforcing the need for structured training systems that evolved from traditional apprenticeship models. As industrialization progressed, ambitious workers sought to improve their skills and advancement prospects through voluntary study. To meet this demand, mechanics' institutes were established. Notable examples include the London Mechanics' Institute founded by George Birkbeck in 1823, which later became Birkbeck College, and the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City, established in 1859 (Brookliss, 2016). In France, technical education was institutionalized on a national scale from 1880 onward (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). In the early 20th century, the introduction of assembly-line production increased the number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. This made the traditional long-term apprenticeship for skilled trades less attractive. Consequently, many countries developed labour programmes to make skilled occupations more accessible to the general population. Despite mechanization, apprenticeship remained essential in craft industries (Day, 2001). After World War I, a new training pattern emerged. Traditional apprenticeship was retained for skilled craftsmanship, while learnership became common for less-skilled work. Learnership allowed newcomers to acquire skills through on-the-job experience alongside other workers. Some industries also adopted an upgrading system, where labourers and unskilled workers could progress to skilled positions after serving as assistants to qualified tradespeople. These methods were further supplemented by two additional approaches: Pupil apprenticeship: recruits learned practical skills with the aim of qualifying for advanced positions within the industry. Student apprenticeship: individuals with university education, technical training, or prior work experience used apprenticeship to qualify for professional employment. Thus, the 20th century saw apprenticeship evolve from a rigid, time-based model into more flexible pathways that combined work experience with formal and technical education. Like medieval guilds, emerging trade unions initially restricted entry into skilled trades through rigorous apprenticeship requirements. However, they also created pathways for semiskilled workers to advance into skilled positions. From the 1920s onward, even formerly exclusive craft unions began to change their policies and admitted workers who had not entered through the traditional apprenticeship route. As a result, the ratio of apprentices to journeymen was no longer a central regulatory issue (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The structure of apprenticeship changed significantly after World War II, with considerable variation across countries. The most radical reforms occurred in West Germany, which benefited from a post-war reconstruction that allowed for a new institutional framework. A clear distinction was made between three categories: skilled trades requiring apprentices, semiskilled trades requiring trainees, and handicrafts employing artisans. Skilled trades were organized under local Chambers of Industry, while handicrafts fell under Chambers of Handicrafts. In the German system, the apprentice signed a formal contract with the relevant chamber and maintained a workbook that was periodically inspected. Progress was assessed through monthly or quarterly tests. In addition, part-time attendance at a vocational school was compulsory until age 18 and was counted as part of working hours. In France, vocational training was placed under the Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education within the Ministry of Education. This body established 24 National Professional Consultative Commissions comprising representatives of employers, government, and trade unions. From 1930, the government expanded technical

colleges to train a large proportion of skilled workers. Apprenticeship could be pursued through three routes: contract with a private employer, attendance at school beyond the compulsory age of 16 through a complementary course, or apprenticeship with an artisan (Greinert, 2004). For final examinations, candidates from colleges and schools were examined by the Directorate, while artisan apprentices were examined by local Chambers of Crafts. In Britain, the Employment and Training Act of 1948 established the Central Youth Employment Executive and led to proposals for a National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Council in each industry. Some trades moved toward more objective entry and assessment methods. For example, the printing industry introduced selection based on aptitude and objective testing, while the motor-vehicle repair industry developed a national scheme leading to a craftsman's certificate. The Post Office Engineering Department departed from traditional apprenticeship entirely by instituting a three-year training course for recruits. The most significant innovation, however, was the module system in the engineering industry. This provided one year of broad-based training in multiple skills, followed by specialized training in selected areas. Progression was supported by performance tests and concurrent further education (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). In the United States, apprenticeship has generally been more flexible than in Europe. Oversight is provided by the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training, established within the U.S. Department of Labour in 1937. Although the minimum legal age for employment is 16, most trades require a high school diploma, making the effective entry age 18. Training periods range from two to five years, with substantial instruction delivered in technical and vocational schools. Trainees advance upon passing qualifying examinations, and wages increase at each stage, typically from 60% to 90% of the journeyman's rate. In practice, American apprentices are indentured to an industry or trade rather than to a single employer. In Japan, apprenticeship and employee training have been marked by a strong personal orientation that is uncommon in other industrial nations. This reflects a distinctive employer-employee relationship. Although this model is not universal in small and medium-sized enterprises, large Japanese corporations historically assumed a social obligation to provide lifetime employment. In return, employees were expected to remain with the same company until retirement, regardless of changes in job assignment. Because Japanese apprenticeship emphasizes loyalty to a specific company rather than to a particular trade, the traditional apprentice-master trade bond found in other systems is largely absent (Sato, 2019). Globally, vocational training and apprenticeship have become central strategies for addressing youth unemployment and preparing young people for productive economic engagement. Rapid growth in the youth population, coupled with a persistent mismatch between labour-market demand and the supply of skilled workers, has made skills acquisition a major policy priority for governments and development agencies worldwide. Consequently, international organizations such as the World Bank have made significant investments in vocational education, technical training, and apprenticeship programmes in developing countries as part of broader human capital development initiatives (Blattman and Ralston, 2015). Evidence from cross-country studies shows that vocational education and training systems that combine workplace experience with structured instruction reduce skill mismatches and facilitate smoother transitions from school to work than purely academic pathways (Card, Kluve, and Weber, 2015). Similarly, efforts to strengthen traditional apprenticeship systems have been associated with higher productivity, improved earnings, and increased employment opportunities, particularly within the small and informal enterprises that dominate many low- and middle-income economies (World Bank, 2024). Historically, apprenticeship was the dominant mode of vocational training. It involved young boys, frequently from age ten, recruited from poor households, enslaved persons, and extended family members, who were trained in trades such as stonemasonry, metalworking, and printing under master craftsmen. Both in the international and Nigerian contexts, many prominent individuals have benefited from apprenticeship and have publicly acknowledged its impact. Notable examples include: Sir Alexander Chapman Ferguson a Scottish former professional football manager and player, best known for managing Manchester United from 1986 to 2013. Before becoming one of the most successful football managers in history, Ferguson began as an apprentice toolmaker in a Glasgow typewriter factory. His experience as a union shop steward developed his leadership skills. He later advocated for apprenticeships, noting: It is only when you have the opportunity to have an apprenticeship that you realize the long-term benefit (Ferguson, 2013). Clare Smyth, One of the UK's most accomplished chefs and chef Patron of three-Michelin star Core by Clare Smyth which opened in 2017. Smyth began as an apprentice chef at Grayshott Hall, Surrey at age 16. She later became the first British female chef to lead a three-Michelin-star restaurant and now owns Core by Clare Smyth in Notting Hill (Smyth, 2020). Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company started as an apprentice machinist at age 16 with the Michigan Car Company. His hands-on training in machinery and engineering was pivotal to his development of the assembly line that transformed automobile manufacturing (Brinkley, 2003). Alexander McQueen, the

renowned British fashion designer began as an apprentice tailor on Savile Row. His training with prestigious tailors shaped his technical skill and aesthetic, leading to roles at Givenchy and the launch of his own label (McGovern, 2019). Steve Jobs while not a formal apprenticeship, Jobs' early work as a technician at Atari provided practical technical skills. His collaboration with peers at the Homebrew Computer Club was instrumental to the founding of Apple Inc (Isaacson, 2011). Steph McGovern, a television presenter and journalist, McGovern began as an engineering apprentice at Black and Decker. Her product improvements saved the company £150,000 annually and earned her the title Young Engineer for Britain. She credits her apprenticeship with giving her transferable skills used throughout her career. Billy Connolly, the comedian and actor credits his five-year shipyard welding apprenticeship with preparing him for his career, describing the environment as rough, rude, raw and hilarious (Connolly, 2010). Jamie Oliver, the chef and television personality began as an apprentice after earning an NVQ in Home Economics. His early training in prestigious London kitchens helped him refine his culinary skills and build a successful career in media and entrepreneurship (Oliver, 2017). These examples demonstrate that apprenticeship, whether formal or informal, has historically served as a foundation for skill acquisition, innovation, and career advancement across diverse fields. Many of Nigeria's most prominent billionaires and industrialists rose from humble beginnings through the traditional Igbo Apprenticeship System, known as Igba-Boi or Imu-Ahia. This system has served as a key pathway for entrepreneurship and wealth creation in Nigeria (Nwaonwu 2021; Anigbogu, Edoko, and Obidike, 2014). Prominent Nigerian tycoons who started as apprentices includes Dr. Cosmas Maduka, founder and chairman, coscharis group. Coscharis Group is the sole distributor of BMW and other luxury vehicles in Nigeria. Maduka lost his father at age four and dropped out of school at age six. At age seven, he entered an automotive spare parts apprenticeship under his uncle in Lagos. This early training laid the foundation for what is today a multi-billion-naira conglomerate. Chief Chidi Anyaegbu, founder and chairman, Chisco Group. Anyaegbu served his apprenticeship in the auto spare parts trade in Ebute-Metta, Lagos. He later established Chisco Transport, which has grown into one of Nigeria's leading transport and logistics companies. Dr. Innocent Chukwuma Founder, Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing (IVM) recognized as Nigeria's first indigenous vehicle manufacturer, Chukwuma began his business career through apprenticeship in the motor spare parts trade in eastern Nigeria (Nwaka, 2019). He subsequently built IVM into a major manufacturing enterprise producing vehicles and motorcycles. Chief Cletus Ibeto founder, Ibeto Group. A billionaire industrialist with interests in petroleum, cement, and manufacturing, Ibeto also began as an apprentice in the motor spare parts business. He later transitioned into trading and large-scale manufacturing, establishing one of Nigeria's most diversified industrial groups. These cases illustrate how the Igbo apprenticeship model has functioned as an incubator for entrepreneurship, providing practical skills, business networks, and startup capital that enabled beneficiaries to build large-scale enterprises. The Igbo apprenticeship system, locally known as Igba-Boi or Imu-Ahia, originated in Nnewi, (widely regarded as the capital of Igbo apprenticeship) Anambra State in the early 20th century and gained widespread adoption following the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) (Nwaonwu, 2021; Akaenye, 2024). It emerged as a pragmatic response to the lack of formal capital and credit facilities, and has since diffused to major Igbo commercial centers including Onitsha, Aba, and Lagos (Nwaonwu, 2021; Nwajiuba, 2012). After the war, Nnewi industrialists like the Uba, Ibeto, and Chukwudozie families formalized it. They took in war-affected boys with no money, only energy and settled them later. This made Nnewi an industrial hub and from these hubs, the practice further spread to other parts of Nigeria and Africa where Igbo traders settled, such as Alaba International, Ladipo, and Ariaria markets. At its core, Igba-Boi is built on a contractual arrangement between a master (Oga) and an apprentice (Nwa Boi). The fundamental terms of the agreement stipulate that the master is responsible for providing training, feeding, and accommodation, while the apprentice is expected to offer labour and loyalty for a specified number of years. Upon completion of the apprenticeship period, the master settles the apprentice with capital, goods, or a combination of both to enable the apprentice to establish an independent business. The relationship is not merely economic. It is bound by deep communal, familial, and spiritual ties that emphasize trust, mentorship, and mutual obligation (Anigbogu, Edoko, and Obidike, 2014) Nnewi is widely regarded as the capital of Igbo apprenticeship. In Nnewi, the system spread to other major Igbo trade centers: Onitsha, Anambra State; Aba, Abia State; and Lagos, including Alaba International Market, Ladipo Market, and other trading clusters. Thereafter, it extended to other Nigerian cities and even West African countries where Igbo traders established businesses. The system originated and flourished in this region for three main reasons: trade culture, lack of access to formal banking and venture capital, and communalism. First, the Igbo maintained a long-standing tradition of long-distance trade even before colonialism. Established trade networks across the Niger, Benue, and coastal regions created a business environment where apprenticeship

became essential for skills transfer (Nwaka, 2019). Prominent trading groups such as the Aro and Onitsha traders created a commercial foundation that supported apprenticeship in business. Second, young people had little or no access to capital and credit. As a result, the settlement given at the end of apprenticeship functioned as an indigenous venture capital system for starting businesses. Third, the Igbo value of *Onye aghana nwanne ya*, which means be your brother's keeper, placed cultural pressure on successful men to support and uplift others. This communal ethos encouraged the spread of the apprenticeship system. During the Stone Age, there were no formal modern craft guilds, written contracts, or legal ceremonies marking apprenticeship freedom. Knowledge was transmitted informally from elders to youth through daily survival tasks. Consequently, if a young person died before reaching full adulthood, burial followed the community's standard customs. In contrast, the Igbo apprenticeship system accords a high level of responsibility to the master when an apprentice dies before completing the training. Because the Nwa Boi is usually a relative or a child from the master's home village, a premature death is governed strictly by *Omenala*, the Igbo custom and tradition. If an apprentice dies before the formal freedom and settlement ceremony known as *Ikpoka Boi* or *Iduta Boi*, several protocols must be observed. First, the master must provide immediate notification and ensure proper custody of the body. The Oga cannot bury the apprentice or make final decisions regarding the body without the involvement of the biological family. He is obligated to notify the apprentice's parents, village elders, and town union without delay. The master also bears the responsibility and financial cost of preserving the body and transporting it safely to the apprentice's paternal compound in Igboland for burial. Second, there is a process of investigation and financial accountability. Because Igbo culture regards the loss of youth with great seriousness, the master must explain the circumstances of the death to the family and village elders to demonstrate that there was no foul play, spiritual manipulation, or severe negligence. In addition, the master is traditionally required to finance or fully sponsor the first burial rites, known as *Ili Ozu*. This includes providing funds, food, and other items demanded by the family or by the youth age grade, *Umu-Aghara*, of the village. Furthermore, the market association or line association to which the master belongs, such as those in *Alaba*, *Idumota*, or *Ariaria* markets, typically levies its members to support both the master and the bereaved family. Third, the issue of settlement arises in cases of posthumous freedom. In the Igba-Boi system, freedom is marked by the provision of a significant lump sum of capital or inventory to enable the apprentice to establish an independent business. If the apprentice dies before this settlement is made, the matter is addressed within the framework of *Omenala* and through negotiations between the master and the deceased apprentice's family. When an apprentice dies before completing the service period, the promised business capital does not automatically transfer to the deceased apprentice's family as a legal right. This is because the apprenticeship contract is heavily dependent on the individual completing the full term of service. However, out of moral, communal, and spiritual obligations, a responsible Oga will make what is known as *Igba Alubika*, a consolation gesture. This involves giving a financial or material gift to the grieving parents. It is not a full business settlement, but rather a compassionate payout that acknowledges that the boy gave his productive years to building the master's wealth. In some traditional arrangements, if the family is deeply impoverished, the master may agree to take in a younger brother or relative of the deceased. This individual will serve a shortened apprenticeship with the understanding that the family will still receive support for a business setup in the future. There are also important spiritual and cultural dimensions to the matter. In Igbo cosmology, dying young without marrying, having children, or achieving independence means the person did not fulfill their destiny, or *Chí*. Such individuals are typically buried quickly and quietly without the elaborate second burial ceremony, *Ikwa Ozu*, that is reserved for elders. In addition, the community ensures that all earthly disputes between the master and the apprentice are completely settled. This is done to prevent the boy's spirit from bringing a curse or a restless presence upon the master's business or upon the surviving apprentices. Beyond the Igbo context, traditional apprenticeship systems generally require that when an apprentice passes away before the official freedom or graduation ceremony, the master and the apprentice's family perform burial rites, settle any remaining obligations, and hold a symbolic gathering to honour the deceased. Culturally, the master must notify the family immediately and hand over the apprentice's personal belongings. The master and fellow apprentices often attend the funeral and contribute money, food, or materials. In some trades, a brief symbolic graduation rite is performed at the grave to honour the person's hard work. In terms of business and financial matters, working tools that were bought by or for the apprentice are either returned to the family or retained by the shop depending on local custom. Any unpaid training fees or pending work debts are usually cancelled out of respect for the dead. However, money that was paid for the apprenticeship is rarely refunded to the family. From a formal legal and contractual standpoint, the Igba-Boi relationship functions as a hybrid between an indigenous customary contract and an employment of service agreement. The legal resolution when an apprentice passes away before settlement

depends on whether the agreement is based on traditional unwritten customs, standard Nigerian statutory law, or the formalized regional laws introduced under frameworks such as the Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law. In practice, market associations and traders' unions function as the primary quasi-judicial Under standard Nigerian contract law, the premature death of an apprentice triggers the legal doctrine of frustration of contract. Because apprenticeship is a personal service agreement that requires the specific skills and physical presence of the Nwa Boi, the death of the apprentice makes performance of the contract permanently impossible. Legally, the contract is automatically discharged. Both the master, known as the Oga, and the apprentice's estate are freed from future obligations. Consequently, the Oga is no longer legally bound to deliver the final settlement capital, Iduta Boi, since completion of service was a strict condition precedent to that payout. Regarding the status of the promised settlement capital, standard Nigerian employment statutes such as the Nigerian Labour Act do not classify a traditional settlement capital injection as accrued wages or a pension. The estate or parents of the deceased apprentice cannot successfully sue the Oga in a regular civil court to claim the full value of business startup capital (FRN, 2003). The law treats the settlement as a future reward for a fully executed contract, not as an asset that vests incrementally or transfers to next of kin upon death. The only exception arises where the parties drafted a formal written contract that specifically provides for a prorated cash equivalent to be paid to the family in the event of incapacitation or death. In such cases, the family may sue for a partial payout. The legal landscape changed significantly with the passage of the landmark Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law. This framework moves the system from purely verbal custom into a structured statutory mechanism. Under these formalized state laws, agreements must be officially documented and must explicitly define the rights, responsibilities, and welfare obligations of the Oga. If an apprentice dies, the family may bypass lengthy court processes and present the matter to the state Igbo Apprenticeship Commission (Anambra State Government, 2021). The Commission functions as an administrative tribunal to arbitrate fair financial compensation or a consolation payout to the family for the years of service rendered before the tragedy. There is also a distinction between criminal liability and civil breach. If the apprentice's death occurs under suspicious circumstances, the matter may be treated under criminal law. Where the family alleges that the death resulted from extreme physical abuse, severe labour exploitation, or denial of medical care, the Oga may be prosecuted by the State under the Criminal Code or the Child Rights Act. A criminal conviction for negligence or manslaughter also gives the family strong grounds to sue the master in a civil court for wrongful death damages, independent of the original apprenticeship courts and mediators within the Igba-Boi system. Because regular courts can be slow and expensive, market unions intervene to preserve market peace, protect the reputation of the trade, and balance custom with fairness when an apprentice dies. The Anambra State Igbo Apprenticeship Law formally recognizes market leadership arbitration as a mandatory legal step before matters can proceed to regular courts. Market associations resolve these situations through established steps. The process often begins with the activation of the line or section committee. In major hubs such as Alaba International Market and Onitsha Main Market, markets are divided into specialized lines such as Electronics, Spare Parts, and Cosmetics. The Line Chairman and executives respond immediately to a tragedy. They secure the master's shop to prevent attacks if angry relatives hold the Oga responsible, and they compile records relating to the Nwa Boi including length of service, behavior, and any complaints previously filed by the master. Next, the union conducts an independent investigation and provides coroner support before the family and master meet. Union executives visit the hospital or mortuary to verify the cause of death. They check whether the Oga provided proper healthcare when the apprentice was ill, and whether the apprentice was subjected to extreme or unlawful labor. Where there is suspicion of foul play, the union liaises with the police to ensure a fair investigation while protecting trading activities. If negligence is ruled out and the death is deemed natural, the union convenes a traditional arbitration panel. This panel includes market executives, the Oga, the head of the apprentice's family, and representatives from the relevant village town union. The panel evaluates the apprentice's sweat equity by calculating the value of the service completed. For instance, where a six year contract is cut short in the fifth year, the union assesses the wealth the apprentice helped to generate. Using this basis, the union negotiates a fair financial payout for the family. While statutory contract law treats the agreement as cancelled by death, market unions apply custom to mandate a compassionate financial settlement known as Igba Alubika. Under modernized rules, the union documents the agreed terms in writing and all parties sign to prevent future lawsuits or retaliation. Market unions also enforce compliance through sanctions. Because they control access to trading space, they can lock a master's shop until he complies with the agreement, blacklist him so that other traders refuse to buy from or sell to him, and suspend his voting rights, welfare benefits, and association protections. Finally, market unions provide financial levies for burial assistance. A mandatory contribution is placed on all members in the relevant market

line. The money collected is used for funeral expenses and as a direct cash gift for the grieving parents. This ensures the family receives immediate support while long term compensation is being negotiated. In addition to the commercial model, the Igbo apprenticeship system includes a traditional craft form. This involves the learning of manual skills and trades such as blacksmithing, carving, weaving, pottery, and building. Settlement in this model typically consists of tools of trade, token cash and a small workshop. The Igbo apprenticeship system also includes distinct categories based on the type of trade, each with its own form of settlement. In commercial apprenticeship, the apprentice learns trading and distribution. Common examples include spare parts, electronics, textiles, provisions, and shoes. Settlement in this category typically involves the provision of shop rent, seed inventory, working capital, and access to a credit line to enable the new trader to start independently. In industrial apprenticeship, the focus is on learning production and factory operations. Examples of trades in this category include plastic manufacturing, auto parts production, and pharmaceuticals. Apprentices who complete training in this area are usually settled with machinery, factory space, and supply contracts to support the establishment of their own production unit. In service based apprenticeship, the apprentice acquires practical service skills. Examples include hairdressing, tailoring, electronics repair, and catering. Upon completion, settlement often consists of equipment, a shop setup, and initial clients to help the graduate build a customer base. The apprenticeship process begins with the service years. During this period, young apprentices live and work with an established master known as the Oga for a duration of five to eight years. Throughout this time, they learn operational discipline, customer relations, and supply chain management without receiving a regular salary. The process culminates in the settlement, locally referred to as Iduru or Itoju. Upon faithful completion of service, the master provides seed capital, inventory, or financial accommodation to enable the former apprentice to become an independent business owner. The settlement represents the crowning moment of the Igbo Apprenticeship System. It functions as a structured economic transition that converts years of unpaid labour into immediate business capital. Rather than a standard cash payout, the settlement operates as an equity and inventory injection designed to give the graduate a high probability of survival in a competitive market. The master typically finances the settlement using capital accumulated from the business's retained earnings over the course of the apprenticeship. The settlement is rarely a flat cash handout. Instead, it is divided into distinct asset classes to ensure the new business can trade immediately. The overall structure is designed to allow the graduate to transition from apprenticeship to independent ownership with minimal startup barriers. The first component is commercial real estate. This takes the form of paid rent, usually covering a period of one to two years. Its purpose is to provide the graduate with a secured physical location, typically a shop or stall in a major market hub. By covering rent upfront, the master removes one of the largest initial costs and gives the graduate immediate access to a high traffic trading environment. The second component is seed inventory. This consists of physical goods and commodities. The master stocks the new shop with high demand trading goods, usually sourced directly from the master's existing supply chain. This ensures the graduate starts with marketable inventory and benefits from the master's supplier relationships and product knowledge. The third component is working capital. This is provided as cash or a bank transfer. Its purpose is to supply liquidity for day to day operations. It covers immediate expenses such as logistics, restocking, employee wages, and other running costs. This helps the graduate maintain cash flow during the critical first months of business. The fourth component is access to credit lines. This involves supplier introductions and guarantees. The master leverages his reputation to introduce the graduate to suppliers and to guarantee credit purchases. This arrangement allows the graduate to acquire additional stock on credit, thereby expanding inventory without needing all the cash upfront. Taken together, these components form a complete business in a box model. The settlement addresses space, stock, cash, and credit. By doing so, it reduces startup risk and increases the likelihood of business survival for the graduate. This structure explains why the Igba-Boi system is effective. The master transfers not only capital, but also market access, social networks, and business infrastructure. The execution of the settlement follows a structured sequence that moves from audit to launch. The process begins with the financial audit and term agreement. Several months before the service period ends, the master assesses the financial health of the enterprise. The settlement budget is determined based on how profitable the business was during the apprentice's tenure. The exact date of graduation and the components of the settlement are agreed upon, often with family members present as witnesses. Next is sourcing and procurement of assets. The master physically secures the new apprentice's shop rent. The master then allocates a portion of warehouse stock or purchases fresh inventory at wholesale prices to hand over to the graduate. This step shields the new business owner from initial procurement inflation. The third step is Itoju, the formal freedom ceremony. A formal gathering is held involving the master, the apprentice, their families, and market association elders. Prayers and blessings are offered, and

assets such as cash, shop keys, and stock documents are officially handed over. This ceremony serves as public validation of the apprentice's integrity and completion of service. The final step is the deployment of social capital, which functions as a hidden asset. The master introduces the graduate to major suppliers and importers. By vouching for the graduate, the master grants access to interest free trade credit. This allows the graduate to collect goods, sell them, and pay suppliers back later. In effect, this doubles operational capital without requiring immediate cash outlay. Despite its success, the system carries a major financial risk for the apprentice in the form of total capital forfeiture. Because agreements are traditionally oral or witnessed by kinsmen and are not backed by legally binding modern contracts, an apprentice can lose the entire settlement if dismissed just months before graduation. Dismissal may result from allegations of theft, insubordination, or bad luck in trade. In addition, if a master's business undergoes sudden bankruptcy or liquidation during the service years, the apprentice is left with zero financial compensation. Mentorship lies at the core of the Igbo-Boi arrangement. The master gradually transfers occupational knowledge, business practices, discipline, and entrepreneurial values to the apprentice through continuous supervision, correction, and practical experience (Iwara, Amaechi, and Netshandama, 2019). The Igbo apprenticeship system has been widely recognized as a significant mechanism for entrepreneurship development, indigenous business formation, and the growth of Nigeria's informal economy (Iwara, Amaechi, and Netshandama, 2019; Kanu, 2019). Anambra State, and Awka Education Zone in particular, occupies a prominent position within the Igbo apprenticeship tradition. Although major commercial centres such as Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi are located in different parts of Anambra State, they collectively sustain a vibrant apprenticeship culture that influences economic activities across the state. Within Awka Education Zone, many young people engage in apprenticeship in trades such as motor spare parts dealing, building materials, tailoring, hairdressing, electronics repair, and provisions trading (Agomoh, 2010; Anago, 2023). Studies on the sustainability of the Igbo apprenticeship system in Anambra State indicate that it continues to serve as a major avenue for youth empowerment, vocational skill acquisition, entrepreneurship development, and poverty reduction (Akaenyi, 2024). However, the system is also undergoing significant changes. Some scholars report a gradual weakening of traditional mentorship, supervision, and settlement practices that historically contributed to apprentices' successful transition into independent business ownership (Akaenyi, 2024). Despite these benefits, a growing body of literature indicates that apprenticeship programmes in Nigeria are increasingly affected by high dropout and low completion rates. Studies have shown that many apprenticeship programmes experience inconsistent training, weak supervision, and poor completion outcomes. These challenges limit their effectiveness as pathways for youth skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development (Okoye, 2023; Olaitan et al., 2024). A recent study of the informal apprenticeship training system in Akwa Ibom State similarly reported high apprentice dropout and correspondingly low completion rates. The study identified financial constraints, peer pressure, loss of interest in the trade, and inadequate support from masters as major contributing factors. These trends are particularly concerning because apprentices who fail to complete their training often acquire only partial occupational skills. This reduces their chances of successful self employment and productive participation in the local economy. For communities within Awka Education Zone, persistent apprenticeship attrition may therefore undermine the traditional role of apprenticeship as a mechanism for youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, and poverty reduction. Guidance and counselling is widely recognized as one of the interventions capable of reducing dropout and improving persistence among young people in education and training programmes. As a professional service that helps individuals understand themselves and make informed educational, vocational, and personal social decisions, guidance and counselling is regarded as an important component of strategies for preventing early withdrawal from learning programmes and sustaining participants' engagement until completion (Lasisi and Ibraheem, 2023). Within the Nigerian context, career guidance and counselling services such as orientation, appraisal, information, placement, and follow up services have been found to significantly influence students' career choices. These services help students select occupations that align with their interests, abilities, and values rather than choices driven primarily by peer or family pressure (Nweze and Okolie, 2014). Counselling has also been associated with reduced school dropout and improved educational persistence. This is because counsellors help individuals resolve educational, vocational, and personal social challenges that may hinder successful completion of training programmes (Oyinloye and Dada, 2015). These functions suggest that guidance and counselling principles may also be applicable to apprenticeship settings. Apprentices face financial, emotional, interpersonal, and career related challenges similar to those experienced by learners in formal educational institutions. Consequently, school counsellors represent a valuable source of professional insight into how counselling interventions could contribute to reducing apprenticeship dropout and improving completion rates among youths in Awka Education

Zone. In Anambra State specifically, Ifejiolor (2023) found that counselling orientation, appraisal, and follow up services significantly influenced the career decisions of secondary school students. The study recommended that schools engage professionally trained counsellors and maintain regular contact with students on matters affecting their educational and vocational development. Similar findings have been reported beyond Nigeria. In Ghana, Amoah, Kwofie, and Kwofie (2015) found that school counsellors' provision of career guidance, career goal identification, and career development activities significantly influenced students' occupational aspirations and vocational decisions. Guidance and counselling is also firmly embedded in Nigeria's educational policy framework. The National Policy on Education consistently recognizes the counsellor's role in helping learners make informed educational and vocational decisions throughout their schooling (Esere, 2020). Since many secondary school graduates eventually enter apprenticeship and other informal vocational training programmes, these findings suggest that school counsellors possess professional knowledge and experience that can inform strategies for reducing apprenticeship dropout and improving completion rates among youths. If guidance and counselling can influence students' educational and career decisions and contribute to reducing dropout within formal educational settings, structured counselling interventions delivered to youths before, during, and after apprenticeship placement may also help reduce premature withdrawal from apprenticeship and improve completion rates. However, although substantial literature exists on the role of guidance and counselling in students' academic and career development (Nweze and Okolie, 2014; Amoah, Kwofie, and Kwofie, 2015; Ifejiolor, 2023), and another body of literature examines the structure, economic significance, and challenges of the Igbo apprenticeship system (Adekola, 2013; Iwara, Amaechi, and Netshandama, 2019; Kanu, 2019; Anago, 2023; Akaenyi, 2024), relatively few studies have integrated these two areas of inquiry. Existing counselling studies in Anambra State, including Ifejiolor (2023), have focused primarily on academic and career decision making among students within the formal school system, rather than on the informal apprenticeship pathway that absorbs a substantial proportion of youths in the state. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on the role of guidance and counselling in reducing apprenticeship dropout and improving completion rates among youths in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State. This gap in knowledge provides the basis for the present study.

Statement of the Problem

The Igbo apprenticeship system has long served as a vital pathway for youth empowerment, entrepreneurship development, and poverty reduction in Anambra State, particularly within Awka Education Zone. Through this system, young people acquire vocational skills, business experience, and capital support that enable them to establish independent enterprises. Despite its economic and social importance, apprenticeship programmes in Nigeria continue to experience significant setbacks. Recent studies indicate that the system is experiencing significant challenges, including high apprentice dropout rates, financial hardship, peer influence, loss of interest in the trade, weak master-apprentice relationships, and inadequate support structures have all been identified as factors that contribute to premature withdrawal from apprenticeship training and low completion rates. In Akwa Ibom State, similar patterns have been observed, with financial constraints, peer pressure, loss of interest in the trade, and inadequate support from masters identified as key factors contributing to attrition. When apprentices withdraw before completing their training, they often acquire only partial occupational skills. This limits their capacity for successful self employment and reduces their contribution to the local economy. Persistent attrition therefore undermines the traditional role of apprenticeship as a mechanism for sustainable youth empowerment and economic development in communities within Awka Education Zone. While guidance and counselling has been widely recognized and empirically supported as an effective intervention for reducing dropout and improving persistence in formal educational settings, its application within the informal apprenticeship context remains largely unexplored. Existing literature in Anambra State has focused primarily on the role of counselling in academic and career decision making among secondary school students, with little attention given to apprentices who operate outside the formal school system.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the role of guidance and counselling in reducing apprenticeship dropout among youths in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State?

2. What is the role of guidance and counselling in improving apprenticeship completion rates among youths in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State?

Theoretical studies

The word apprenticeship comes from the Old French word *aprentis*, which means learner or one who is learning. This in turn came from the Latin word *apprehendere*, meaning to grasp, to seize, and to understand. The Latin term is formed from *ad*, meaning to, and *prehendere*, meaning to take or to grasp. Therefore, apprenticeship can be understood literally as the state of grasping or learning a skill. The word entered Middle English around the 14th century as *aprentis*. By the 17th century it had developed into *apprentice*, and by the 18th century the term apprenticeship was used to refer to the period or system of learning a trade. In Igbo, the closest term for the commercial version is *Igba Boi* (*Igba-boi*, *Igba-odibo*, *Imu-ahia*, or *Imu-oru*). *Igba* means to serve, to tie, or to bind, while *Boi* is derived from the English word *boy*. The literal meaning is therefore to serve as a boy or learner. Apprenticeship is defined as training in an art, trade, or craft under a legal agreement that defines the duration and conditions of the relationship between master and apprentice. Apprenticeship can also be understood as a form of vocational education. It provides instruction designed to equip individuals with the competencies required for industrial and commercial occupations. It may be obtained either formally in trade schools, technical secondary schools, or in on-the-job training programmes or, more informally, by picking up the necessary skills on the job. Vocational education in schools is a relatively modern development. Until the 19th century such education, except for the professions, was provided only by apprenticeship. This situation was partly due to the low social status associated with such instruction as opposed to a classical curriculum, which was considered necessary for a gentleman. With the growth of industrialization during the 19th century, several European countries began to shift apprentice training from the workshop into the school system. Notably, Germany started introducing vocational education in elementary and secondary schools to prepare apprentices for skilled trades within a more formal structure. In Great Britain, opposition to school based vocational education persisted into the 20th century. Despite this resistance, a few trade and junior technical schools were established by local authorities before World War II. These schools provided an alternative route for apprentice training outside the traditional master apprentice relationship. By the late 19th century, vocational education in public schools in the United States centered on manual training and practical arts as foundational preparation for apprentices. These programmes were gradually expanded until 1917, when federal aid was provided to public schools for courses in trade and industrial work, agriculture, and homemaking. This marked an early effort to institutionalize apprenticeship by equipping young people with occupational skills within the formal education system. In contrast, the Igbo apprenticeship system in Nigeria, including Awka Education Zone, retained its informal, workshop based model. Here, apprentices learn directly under a master through service, observation, and practice, rather than through classroom instruction. Apprenticeships cut across several sectors of the economy, and the type chosen often depends on an individual's interest, ability, and career goals. The agriculture industry is a diverse sector that requires skilled labour. For individuals who enjoy working with plants or animals, an apprenticeship can provide training for a career in agriculture. While many roles in this field involve outdoor work, there are also positions that take place in a typical indoor office environment. Common areas of agricultural apprenticeship include veterinary nursing, horticulture, animal care, game and wildlife management, and environmental conservation. An apprenticeship in arts and media can provide the skills and expertise required to work in media, publishing, fashion, and the creative arts. This sector is suitable for individuals who are creative and interested in artistic expression. Areas of apprenticeship within this industry include journalism, live events and promotion, creative and digital media, broadcast production, and costume and wardrobe. Most apprenticeship roles in business and administration are office based with fixed work hours. Success in this sector often requires strong organizational and communication skills to meet job demands. Categories of apprenticeship in this industry include human resource management, business innovation and growth, social media and digital marketing, project management, and telemarketing and sales. The construction industry involves the design, building, and maintenance of roads, buildings, airports, and other infrastructure projects. It offers a wide range of apprenticeship opportunities for those interested in technical and manual trades. Examples of construction apprenticeships include plumbing and heating, construction civil engineering, construction building, construction management, and electrical and electronic servicing. An apprenticeship in education and training allows individuals to work with people of all ages and needs. It provides an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in a particular area and to teach others. Types of apprenticeship in this sector include professional

development for work based learning practitioners, learning and development, learning support, supporting teaching and learning in schools, and supporting teaching and learning in physical education. Apprenticeship programmes can vary considerably depending on the organization offering them. Across most industries, these programmes are built around several core components. Some apprenticeships require participants to complete academic courses in order to gain additional career expertise. To support this, companies often partner with academic institutions to deliver apprenticeship courses. Instruction may be provided by businesses, technical institutions, community colleges, or specialized apprenticeship training programmes. In addition to classroom learning, related training may also be delivered on the job, through classroom instruction, or online. Employers are typically responsible for developing apprenticeship programmes. They often collaborate with industry groups, apprenticeship councils, and other organizations to pool resources and ideas for program maintenance. This association with other firms can help to simplify the apprenticeship process and ensure consistency across industries. A central component of most programmes is on the job training, where apprentices receive direct instruction from an experienced mentor. Businesses usually train employees in line with national industry standards. However, certain aspects of the training may vary depending on the employer, including instruction on business culture and workplace practices. In addition, companies typically pay apprentices during the training period. Apprentices may also receive a raise or bonus upon reaching predetermined goals for learning new skills. Employers often use this as an incentive to encourage faster skill acquisition and improved performance. Upon completion of an apprenticeship program, participants can receive a nationally accredited certification. This certification may be recognized in all provinces that participate in the programmes. The duration of apprenticeship programmes can range from one to six years, depending on the model and occupation. Apprenticeships are becoming an increasingly popular alternative to college degrees due to their strong educational components. Trusted agencies typically recognize and regulate these programs, which makes them one of the most reliable pathways for education in specific occupations. Some apprenticeships also allow participants to earn college course credits that can contribute toward an academic degree. Research shows that individuals who complete an apprenticeship as part of their career path can earn significantly more than non-apprenticed employees in similar fields (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). In addition, an apprenticeship programme may provide an opportunity to begin a career directly with the company that operates the programme (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020). Because many businesses offer apprenticeship programs, prospective participants can select one that aligns with their interests and skills (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2021). It is also common for individuals to research different companies before applying to ensure a good fit between personal goals and organizational offerings. Some employers may also expect you to attain a particular level of education to qualify. While most employers offering apprenticeship programmes require candidates to have completed high school, others may account for your grades or aptitude test results (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Some may require you to have a specific amount of work experience or pre-apprenticeship training to qualify. Apprenticeship opportunities exist in almost every industry, though some sectors rely on apprenticeships more heavily than others to train new employees (OECD, 2021). In tailoring, for example, apprentices learn to alter a variety of garments including suits, dresses, blouses, and pants. They are trained in the use of sewing machines as well as hand sewing techniques to ensure proper fit. A standard tailoring apprenticeship usually requires about 4,000 hours of work, while a custom tailoring apprenticeship can require up to 8,000 hours (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Elevator technicians are another example. Their work involves the installation and repair of elevators, routine maintenance, and the handling of control systems, motors, cables, and doors. A typical apprenticeship programme in this field comprises approximately 2,000 hours of on the job training and 144 hours of technical instruction (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). In health information management, medical coders who are also known as medical records technicians are responsible for controlling patient records. They process documents related to admission and discharge, maintain current records, and retrieve information for medical professionals. Training for medical coders can include about 2,080 hours of work related experience and 565 hours of classroom instruction leading to certification (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Salary levels vary depending on the hiring organization and on a candidate's experience, academic background, and location (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2022). Before the emergence of formal contractual apprenticeships in ancient and medieval times, communities depended on informal methods to transmit knowledge and practical skills. In family based training, children worked alongside parents or older relatives on the land, in the home, or in basic production to learn daily survival and work skills. Through observation and imitation, novices watched experienced community members and replicated tasks through trial and error (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Elders also used oral tradition and storytelling to pass down history, cultural

values, and technical knowledge through spoken instruction (Vansina, 1985). In addition, young people participated in communal activities such as harvesting, building shelters, and hunting, where skills were acquired through hands on contribution from an early age (Rogoff, 2003). In ancient and pre colonial Africa, education and skill transmission were deeply integrated into daily community life rather than being confined to classrooms or written contracts. In ancient Africa, young people progressed through structured peer groups based on age. Within these age grade systems, they collectively practiced civic duties, military tactics, and leadership roles. Specialized trades such as blacksmithing, weaving, pottery, and woodcarving were often organized around family guilds and lineages. These skills were treated as guarded family knowledge and were passed directly from parents to children in order to maintain the family trade across generations. Intellectual and legal skills were developed through oral literature and proverb analysis. Learners listened to, memorized, and debated complex proverbs, court cases, and historical epics preserved by griots who served as historians and custodians of knowledge. Agricultural training also played a key role. Youth from neighboring families often assisted master farmers or cattle herders. Through this process they learned complex soil management, crop rotation, and animal husbandry practices that were tailored to local ecosystems. Transition into adulthood was marked by initiation rites. These involved intensive and secluded training periods where youth practiced survival skills, medicine, and community laws under the guidance of tribal elders. The shift from informal, community based skill training to more structured guilds and formal agreements across Africa occurred through an evolution driven by urbanization, royal decree, and international trade (Egharevba, 1960; Lawrence, 1991). Rather than relying on written European style documents, African formalization emphasized powerful craft syndicates, ritual oaths, and royal charters as mechanisms for regulating skill and practice (Cole, 1975). As complex kingdoms grew, rulers required a guaranteed and high quality supply of specialized goods. In response, many African states moved to institutionalize craft production under royal authority. In the Kingdom of Benin, the Oba institutionalized informal family trades by creating up to 68 distinct craft guilds (Egharevba, 1960). Examples include the Igun Eromwon for bronze casters and the Igbesamwan for ivory carvers (Ben-Amos, 1980). To ensure control and quality, rulers granted these guilds exclusive rights to produce certain elite goods. This effectively outlawed competition from non guild producers (Ryder, 1969). In addition, independent family craftsmen were relocated into designated city quarters near the palace. There they worked under master artisans who had been appointed by the crown. This system of centralized workshops allowed the state to regulate production, standardize techniques, and maintain direct oversight of skilled labour (Bradbury, 1957). To move past casual, observation based learning, guilds implemented rigid entry requirements and formal training periods. In South East Nigeria, the Awka blacksmith guilds provide a clear example of this formalization. The Awka people organized metalworking into a highly regulated system. Master smiths took on apprentices who were bound by strict rules of trade secrecy, mandatory rotational travel or itineration, and mastery of a secret guild language called Ivuaba. Guild formalization also created clear boundaries for social mobility. While informal training was open to any community child, guild membership required rigorous multi year timelines and standard tests of ability before an apprentice could practice independently. This established a clear distinction between commoners and master craftsmen. Rather than using written paper contracts, pre colonial African formalization relied heavily on binding spiritual and community agreements. An apprentice entering a guild swore loyalty oaths before community elders and the guild's patron deity, such as Akputakpu, the Awka god of iron. Breaking this ritual contract through actions like stealing trade secrets, undercutting prices, or producing substandard work resulted in severe consequences. These could include spiritual banishment or heavy economic fines enforced by guild leadership. As long distance trade routes expanded across the Sahel and West Africa, guilds also stepped in to regulate the regional economy. They shifted from informal bartering to setting uniform regional prices and manufacturing standards for items such as textiles, leatherwork, and iron tools. In addition, guilds collected dues to protect members traveling along trade routes, finance funerals, and support disabled workers. In this way they functioned much like early trade unions and provided a system of mutual protection and economic stabilization. Apprenticeship systems exist across the world, but they differ significantly in structure, regulation, and purpose. Broadly, they can be categorized into formal and structured systems and informal and traditional systems (OECD, 2021). In developed economies, apprenticeships are highly institutionalized and closely linked to national education and labour policies. Germany operates the well known Duales Ausbildungssystem, also called the Dual System. This model combines 50 percent classroom instruction with 50 percent company based training over a period of 2 to 3.5 years (BIBB, 2020). It is regarded globally as a benchmark for vocational training. Switzerland runs a similar model through its VET, or Vocational Education and Training system. In this system, over 70 percent of young people undertake apprenticeships that lead directly to employment (Swiss

Federal Statistical Office, 2022). Austria also practices a system called Lehre. This system mirrors the German model and is particularly strong in crafts, tourism, and industry (Schlögl and Mayerhofer, 2018). In Denmark, the EUD system alternates between periods in school and paid work, and it is largely government funded (Danish Ministry of Education, 2019). Australia offers both Traineeships and Apprenticeships that cover trades as well as service jobs. These programmes include government incentives provided to employers (NCVER, 2021). The United Kingdom operates Apprenticeship Standards that last between 1 and 5 years. A legal requirement mandates that 20 percent of the training must be completed off the job (UK Department for Education, 2020). In the United States, Registered Apprenticeships are regulated by the Department of Labour. They are prominent in construction and manufacturing, and have become increasingly common in the IT sector (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Canada uses the Red Seal Program to standardize skilled trades across provinces (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2020). France operates the Apprentissage system, which is based on a tripartite contract between the student, the school, and the company (Ministère du Travail, 2021). In many developing countries, apprenticeship remains largely informal, community based, and focused on entrepreneurship. In Nigeria, the Igbo practice Igba Boi, also known as the Igbo Apprenticeship system, is business and trade focused. A defining feature of this system is "settlement," where the master provides startup capital, goods, and shop space to the apprentice at the end of the training period (Nwajiuba, 2012; Nwaka, 2019). Ghana operates a similar Master Apprentice system that is common in tailoring, hairdressing, mechanics, and trading (Palmer, 2015). In Kenya, the Jua Kali system, meaning hot sun, refers to informal sector training in crafts and trades (King, 2017). India combines the ancient Guru Shishya tradition with a modern government regulated apprenticeship act under ITIs (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2020). China practices the Shifu Tudi master disciple model in crafts, martial arts, and manufacturing (Brown and Li, 2018). In Japan, the Shokunin system emphasizes lifetime apprenticeship in traditional crafts such as sushi making and carpentry (Sato, 2019). Brazil has partially formalized its informal tradition through the Jovem Aprendiz Law. This law legally requires companies to hire youth apprentices (ILO, 2021). Thus, while Western countries emphasize certification, wages, and employment within firms, African and Asian countries often emphasize business ownership and capital transfer (Walther, 2019). This distinction highlights the unique entrepreneurial orientation of the Nigerian Igba Boi system compared to global models. While the apprenticeship system has been praised for entrepreneurship development, it also has several drawbacks. The disadvantages differ between formal Western systems and informal systems like the Igbo Igba Boi. In both formal and informal systems across countries, apprentices are often used as cheap labour. They may work long hours with little or no pay beyond feeding and accommodation. This can lead to fatigue and slow learning (Palmer, 2015). Most informal apprenticeships, especially in Africa, do not issue nationally recognized certificates. This makes it difficult for graduates to access formal jobs or bank loans later (King, 2017). Because training depends on the skill and willingness of the master, quality is inconsistent. Some masters do not teach the full trade but keep apprentices doing only menial tasks (Nwaka, 2019). The 5 to 7 year period common in early Igbo apprenticeship also delays youth from starting their own lives. It can lead to dropout if the apprentice becomes frustrated (Nwajiuba, 2012). Within the Igbo Igba Boi system, there are additional specific challenges. Settlement is not backed by law but by trust. If a master refuses or delays settlement, the apprentice has little legal recourse. This has led to many disputes (Udu and Onwe, 2018). There is also a high risk of failure after settlement. Many apprentices are settled with goods and cash but without business management training. As a result, a large number of businesses collapse within the first 2 years (Okpara and Okpara, 2015). The system has also reflected gender bias. Traditionally, Igba Boi favored males in trading. Female apprentices were mostly limited to hairdressing and tailoring, with smaller settlement packages (Eze and Okeke, 2020). Family problems and death issues present further risks. If an apprentice dies before completion, there is usually no settlement to the family. Masters may also abandon apprentices who fall sick or become pregnant (Nwaka, 2019). Finally, the system faces a modernization gap. It was built for trading physical goods and struggles to adapt to digital business, tech, and formal corporate structures that require degrees and certifications (Walther, 2019). While apprenticeship remains a powerful tool for skill and wealth transfer, its major weaknesses lie in lack of regulation, potential for exploitation, absence of certification, and over reliance on personal trust rather than institutional frameworks (OECD, 2021). Despite its challenges, the apprenticeship system remains one of the most effective models for skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development worldwide. Its benefits cut across economic, social, and human capital development. Apprenticeship provides hands-on training in real work environments. This bridges the gap between theory and practice better than classroom learning alone (OECD, 2021). Countries like Germany and Switzerland credit their low youth unemployment to this model (BIBB, 2020). Because apprentices learn directly in companies, they graduate with

both skills and work experience. This makes them more employable than graduates with only academic certificates (UK Department for Education, 2020). The cost of training is also reduced because the government and firms share the burden. Apprentices also earn while learning, which reduces financial pressure on families (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2022). In addition, apprenticeship has helped preserve traditional skills. In Japan and China, the system has sustained crafts such as carpentry, sushi making, and martial arts that would otherwise disappear (Sato, 2019; Brown and Li, 2018). Within the Igbo Igba Boi system, the advantages are even more pronounced. The biggest benefit is settlement. The master provides startup capital, goods, and shop space at the end of training. This has created thousands of millionaires and industrialists in Nigeria without reliance on bank loans (Nwajiuba, 2012; Nwaka, 2019). The system also provides access to capital for the poor. Youth without family wealth or collateral can still start businesses. In this way, Igba Boi functions as informal venture capital and addresses the problem of lack of credit in Nigeria (Okpara and Okpara, 2015). Apprentices further benefit from strong business networks. They inherit their master's customers, suppliers, and market knowledge. This social capital reduces business failure rates compared to starting alone (Udu and Onwe, 2018). Beyond technical skills, the system builds character and discipline. Apprentices learn humility, loyalty, customer relations, and financial discipline. These soft skills are critical for long-term business success in Igbo culture (Eze and Okeke, 2020). The system also plays a major role in poverty reduction and employment. It absorbs millions of school leavers and school dropouts yearly, and has been a key driver of poverty reduction and informal sector growth in Southeastern Nigeria (Walther, 2019). Finally, Igba Boi creates a replication and economic spread effect. One settled apprentice usually trains 5 to 10 others later. This creates a multiplier effect that spreads businesses across Nigeria and West Africa (Nwaka, 2019). While formal systems emphasize certification and employment, the Igbo apprenticeship system emphasizes business ownership and capital transfer. Its unique strength lies in turning labour into capital, making it a homegrown model for entrepreneurship and economic development in resource constrained environments (Nwajiuba, 2012). The resilience of this system is evident in post war Igbo history. Following the 1967 to 1970 civil war, the Igbos recovered a significant portion of their pre war economic status within just two years. This occurred despite the Nigerian government confiscating bank accounts belonging to many Igbos and providing only £20 to start anew, equivalent to about £300 or \$420 today. In addition, property belonging to Igbos was seized by neighbours in some parts of the country. The Peoples Club, a popular social club formed in Aba in 1971, is credited with kick starting the modern Igbo apprenticeship scheme. The ethos of the club was rooted in the Igbo philosophy of *onye a hana nwanne ya*, meaning do not leave your brother behind. This principle became a guiding value of the scheme. The Peoples Club operated as both a social and economic movement. It designed an economic template for how the Igbos could move out of the ruins of the war and began a new movement of survival and recovery. There is a growing perception among Nigerian youth that apprenticeship offers a faster route to wealth than formal university education (Lawrence, 1991). This shift is evident in South East Nigeria where many young people now prefer to enter trade under a master rather than spend 4-6 years in higher institutions with no guarantee of employment after graduation. Several factors explain this preference. First, apprenticeship provides immediate income, practical skills, and business networks (Adekola, 2012). Second, the high rate of graduate unemployment has made degrees less attractive. Third, success stories of Igbo apprentices who became billionaires such as Chief Chisco, Chief Ibeto, and Chief Innoson serve as motivation that school na scam but trade na real (Esuman, Nwaogu, and Nwachukwu, 2022). However, scholars argue that apprenticeship has not completely replaced formal education. Instead, both are complementary (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). While apprenticeship builds technical and entrepreneurial skills, formal education provides literacy, critical thinking, and global certification needed to scale businesses internationally. Therefore, the Igbo apprenticeship system can be viewed not as a replacement, but as an alternative pathway to entrepreneurship that is more accessible and result-oriented for many youths in the current Nigerian economy. In recent years, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of youths willing to enter the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system (Esuman, Nwaogu and Nwachukwu, 2022). Many young people now prefer Yahoo Yahoo internet fraud to apprenticeship or formal education because it promises fast wealth with little effort (Lawrence, 1991). This shift is driven by three main factors. First is the get rich quick mentality. Social media has created an environment where fraudsters are glorified and they flaunt wealth without doing any visible work. Many youths now see this as the easiest path to success. Second is impatience with the apprenticeship process. The Nwa Boi system requires an apprentice to serve between five to seven years before receiving settlement. For many young people today, this period is considered too long and slow compared to the instant results they see online. The Nwa-Boi system requires 5-7 years of service before settlement. Many youths see this as too slow (Adekola, 2012). Influence of technology: The

internet has made it easier to access fraud schemes and foreign victims, making cybercrime appear more lucrative than trade. The implication for entrepreneurship development in South East Nigeria is serious. As more youths abandon apprenticeship, the pipeline for producing future manufacturers like Innoson, Ibeto, and Chisco is threatened (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1991). Those who enter apprenticeship often do not complete it, because small thing they are out looking for faster money. Scholars argue that if this trend continues, the indigenous system that has produced self-made billionaires may collapse, leading to higher unemployment and crime rates (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). Therefore, there is need for government, parents, and community leaders to rebrand apprenticeship by adding financial literacy and faster pathways to settlement. This can be achieved in several ways. Government can achieve this by partnering with master trainers to formalize the apprenticeship system and include modules on savings, budgeting, and business management. Through the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency, government can also provide startup grants and soft loans to apprentices immediately after settlement so they do not feel the need to seek quick money through fraud. Parents can achieve this by changing their mindset and encouraging their children to enter skilled trades instead of pushing only for university degrees. They can also monitor their children and discourage involvement in internet fraud by emphasizing the long term benefits of legitimate business. Community leaders and town unions can achieve this by creating apprenticeship boards that regulate the duration of service and ensure masters settle their apprentices fairly and on time. They can also organize mentorship programs where successful Igbo entrepreneurs who passed through apprenticeship come back to speak to youths. When young people see that patience in apprenticeship leads to real wealth, the attraction to get rich quick schemes will reduce. In this way, apprenticeship will be made more attractive, modern, and relevant to the needs of not only the youths in South East Nigeria, but across Nigeria, Africa, and the global community.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was conducted in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State, comprising Awka South, Awka North, Anaocha, Njikoka, and Dunukofia Local Government Areas. The zone was selected because it has public secondary schools with professionally trained school counsellors who possess adequate knowledge of guidance and counselling services and youth career development issues. The population of the study comprised 65 school counsellors in public secondary schools across the five Local Government Areas in Awka Education Zone. Because the population was relatively small and manageable, the entire population of 65 school counsellors was used as the sample through the census sampling technique, thereby ensuring that all members of the population participated in the study. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Role of Guidance and Counselling in Reducing Apprenticeship Dropout and Improving Completion Rates Questionnaire (RGCRADICRQ), which consisted of two sections: Section A elicited demographic information such as gender, while Section B contained 20 structured items, with Items 1–10 addressing Research Question One and Items 11–20 addressing Research Question Two. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, one from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and two from the Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation), whose observations and corrections were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. A pilot test involving 20 school counsellors from Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS), Onitsha, Onitsha North Local Government Area, Anambra State, which is outside the study area, was conducted, and the data obtained were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. The researcher collected data through direct administration of the questionnaire with the assistance of two trained research assistants, and questionnaires were administered and retrieved on the spot where possible to ensure a high return rate. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision making, such that items with mean scores of 2.50 or above were accepted, whereas items with mean scores below 2.50 were rejected. Area of the study, Awka Education Zone is one of the six education zones in Anambra State, Nigeria. The zonal headquarters is located in Awka, the capital city of Anambra State. Awka Education Zone comprises Awka South, Awka North, Njikoka, Aniocha and Dunukofia local Government Areas and is under the administrative supervision of the post primary school service commission. (PPSSC). There are 65 public secondary schools in this zone (PPSSC, 2026). Awka Education Zone is predominantly an urban and semi-urban area with a mix of government-owned and private secondary schools. The population is largely Igbo-

speaking and comprises civil servants, traders, artisans and students due to the presence of secondary and tertiary institutions such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Odumegwu Ojukwu University, St. Pauls University (faith based), Pope John Paul II major seminary (faith based) and Federal Polytechnic, Oko. The zone has a substantial number of public secondary schools with a large student population. In recent years, school counsellors and skills/vocational trainers in the zone have reported an increase in the dropout rate of apprentices. Despite the presence of guidance and counselling services, limited empirical research has been conducted in the zone on evidence-based behavioural intervention. It is against this background that Awka Education Zone was selected as the area for this study.

RESULTS

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of the Role of Guidance and Counselling in Reducing Apprenticeship Dropout among Youths in Awka Education Zone

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Guidance and counselling help apprentices understand the importance of completing their training.	3.58	0.56	Agree
2	Counselling services help apprentices cope with financial difficulties during training.	3.37	0.69	Agree
3	Guidance and counselling reduce frustration that may lead apprentices to abandon their training.	3.49	0.61	Agree
4	Counselling helps apprentices resolve conflicts with their masters or trainers.	3.42	0.65	Agree
5	Guidance and counselling encourage apprentices to remain committed despite challenges.	3.60	0.54	Agree
6	Regular counselling sessions reduce the likelihood of apprentices dropping out.	3.39	0.68	Agree
7	Guidance and counselling improve apprentices' emotional well-being during training.	3.46	0.63	Agree
8	Counselling provides apprentices with problem-solving skills that help them continue their apprenticeship.	3.44	0.66	Agree
9	Guidance and counselling help apprentices manage peer pressure that could lead to dropout.	3.31	0.71	Agree
10	Effective guidance and counselling can significantly reduce apprenticeship dropout.	3.63	0.52	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.47	0.63	Agree

Note. N = 65. Criterion mean = 2.50. SD = standard deviation. Items with a mean of 2.50 or above were accepted.

The findings in Table 1 indicate that guidance and counselling play a significant role in reducing apprenticeship dropout among youths in Awka Education Zone. All ten items were accepted, with mean scores ranging from 3.31 to 3.63, well above the criterion mean of 2.50. The highest-rated items were that effective guidance and counselling can significantly reduce apprenticeship dropout (mean = 3.63) and that guidance and counselling encourage apprentices to remain committed despite challenges (mean = 3.60), while helping apprentices manage peer pressure was rated comparatively lower, though still accepted (mean = 3.31). The grand mean value of 3.47, which is above the criterion mean, indicates a generally high level of agreement among respondents that guidance and counselling reduce frustration, eases conflict with masters, improves emotional well-being and builds problem-solving skills that keep apprentices engaged in their training. The relatively low standard deviation values show close clustering of responses around the mean, indicating that respondents shared similar opinions with minimal variation.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of the Role of Guidance and Counselling in Improving Apprenticeship Completion Rates among Youths in Awka Education Zone

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
11	Guidance and counselling motivate apprentices to complete their training successfully.	3.62	0.53	Agree
12	Counselling helps apprentices set realistic career goals.	3.50	0.60	Agree
13	Guidance and counselling improve apprentices' confidence in their vocational skills.	3.47	0.62	Agree
14	Apprentices who receive counselling are more likely to complete their apprenticeship.	3.55	0.58	Agree
15	Counselling strengthens apprentices' commitment to their chosen trade.	3.58	0.55	Agree
16	Guidance and counselling help apprentices develop perseverance and patience during training.	3.51	0.59	Agree
17	Counselling improves communication between apprentices and their masters.	3.41	0.67	Agree
18	Guidance and counselling help apprentices overcome personal challenges that could affect completion.	3.54	0.57	Agree
19	Access to counselling services increases the chances of successful apprenticeship completion.	3.57	0.56	Agree
20	Guidance and counselling contribute significantly to improving apprenticeship completion rates among youths.	3.66	0.49	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.54	0.58	Agree

Note. N = 65. Criterion mean = 2.50. SD = standard deviation. Items with a mean of 2.50 or above were accepted.

The findings in Table 2 indicate that guidance and counselling play a substantial role in improving apprenticeship completion rates among youths in Awka Education Zone. All ten items were accepted, with mean scores ranging from 3.41 to 3.66, well above the criterion mean of 2.50. The highest-rated items were that guidance and counselling contribute significantly to improving apprenticeship completion rates (mean = 3.66) and that it motivates apprentices to complete their training successfully (mean = 3.62), while improving communication between apprentices and their masters was rated comparatively lower, though still accepted (mean = 3.41). The grand mean value of 3.54 shows strong agreement that guidance and counselling help apprentices set realistic goals, builds confidence in their vocational skills, strengthens commitment to their chosen trade and helps them overcome personal challenges that could otherwise disrupt completion. The standard deviation values indicate relatively low variability in responses, showing that respondents held broadly similar perceptions of the benefits of counselling for completion.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that guidance and counselling play a significant role in reducing apprenticeship dropout among youths in Awka Education Zone. With a criterion mean of 2.50, all 10 items were accepted. The grand mean of 3.47 and grand standard deviation of 0.63 indicate general agreement among respondents that guidance and counselling are important in reducing dropout. Item 10 recorded the highest mean of 3.63 with SD of 0.52. This shows that respondents strongly agreed that effective guidance and counselling can significantly reduce apprenticeship dropout. This implies that access to professional counselling increases the likelihood of apprentices completing their training. Item 5 also had a high mean of 3.60 with SD of 0.54, indicating strong consensus that guidance and counselling encourage apprentices to remain committed despite challenges. Items 1 and 3 with means of 3.58 and 3.49 respectively further show that counselling helps apprentices understand the importance of completing training and reduces frustration that may lead to abandonment. The lowest mean of 3.31 was recorded in item 9. This suggests that while respondents agreed that counselling helps apprentices manage peer pressure, they perceive peer influence as a more difficult factor to

address compared to personal or emotional difficulties. Other items with means ranging from 3.37 to 3.46 confirm that counselling services help apprentices cope with financial difficulties, resolve conflicts with masters, reduce likelihood of dropout, improve emotional well-being, and develop problem-solving skills. The low standard deviations across all items, from 0.52 to 0.71, indicate consistency in respondents' views. The finding that guidance and counselling significantly reduce apprenticeship dropout is consistent with broader Nigerian literature. Oyinloye and Dada (2015) conceptualized counselling as a professional relationship for resolving educational, vocational, and personal-social concerns, and reported that counselling intervention was effective in reducing school dropout in Nigeria. The present study extends this evidence to the apprenticeship context. This finding is also in line with Lasisi and Ibraheem (2023) who described guidance and counselling as an important strategy for reducing early withdrawal from education and training programmes. Similarly, Nweze and Okolie (2014) found that orientation, appraisal, information, and follow-up services significantly influence young people's educational and vocational decisions. Ifejiolor (2023) also reported that counselling orientation, appraisal, and follow-up services significantly influenced career decision-making among secondary school students in Anambra State. The finding further agrees with Amoah, Kwofie, and Kwofie (2015) who found that career guidance and organized career development activities significantly influenced students' vocational persistence. Esere (2020) also emphasized the counsellor's role in helping learners make informed educational and vocational choices within Nigeria's educational policy framework. In the context of the Igbo apprenticeship system, the result is supported by Iwara, Amaechi, and Netshandama (2019) who identified structured mentorship as central to apprentices' progress toward settlement. However, the present study differs from traditional Igbo apprenticeship literature in one respect. While studies often attribute apprentices' persistence primarily to informal mentorship, the promise of settlement, and communal accountability within the master-apprentice relationship (Kanu, 2019; Akaenyi, 2024), the present findings suggest that professional guidance and counselling can provide an additional source of support for retention and completion. Rather than replacing the traditional Oga-apprentice relationship, guidance and counselling may complement it by providing career guidance, emotional support, and problem-solving assistance, especially where mentorship from masters is inconsistent or weakened. This is important because Esuman, Nwaogu, and Nwachukwu (2022) and Adekola (2012) noted that emotional and financial challenges are major reasons why apprentices abandon training, and counselling can directly address these. Overall, the findings indicate that guidance and counselling is a valuable and currently underutilized resource for supporting apprenticeship retention and completion among youths in Awka Education Zone. It can work alongside the traditional mentorship structures that have historically sustained the Igbo apprenticeship system. Therefore, strengthening guidance and counselling services in apprenticeship centers will help to retain more youths and produce more successful entrepreneurs.

Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings.

First, the study was limited to 65 school counsellors in public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone. Although census sampling was used to cover the entire population of counsellors in the zone, the relatively small and geographically bounded sample limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized beyond Awka Education Zone to other zones or states. Second, data were collected exclusively from the perceptions of school counsellors. The views of apprentices, master trainers "Ogas", and parents were not directly included. Consequently, the findings reflect counsellors' professional assessments of the role of guidance and counselling rather than the lived experiences of apprentices who are directly involved in the apprenticeship system. Third, the study adopted a descriptive survey design and relied on a self-reported questionnaire. The use of questionnaires limited the study to quantitative data, which may not have provided in-depth understanding of personal reasons for apprenticeship dropout or completion, may also be subject to social desirability and other response biases. Fourth, the analysis relied only on descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). While this established the perceived importance of guidance and counselling, it did not permit inferential testing of relationships or differences among variables such as correlation or regression analysis. Finally, the study focused mainly on guidance and counselling-related factors. Other systemic variables that may influence apprenticeship persistence, such as economic challenges, cultural expectations, family background, and master-apprentice relationship dynamics, were not extensively examined.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that guidance and counselling play a significant role in reducing apprenticeship dropout among youths in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State. The findings indicate that guidance and counselling strengthen apprentices' commitment to training, reduce frustration, improve emotional well-being, support the resolution of conflicts with masters, and develop problem-solving skills. Its influence on peer pressure, however, was found to be comparatively less pronounced. The study also concludes that guidance and counselling contribute substantially to improving apprenticeship completion rates. This is achieved by motivating apprentices, helping them set realistic vocational goals, building confidence in their occupational skills, and assisting them to overcome personal challenges that may hinder successful completion of training. Overall, the study concludes that guidance and counselling serve as a valuable complement to the informal mentorship traditionally provided by masters within the Igbo apprenticeship system. Expanding structured counselling services for youths before, during, and after apprenticeship placement could therefore contribute to improved retention and completion rates among apprentices in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Guidance and counselling services should be extended beyond the formal secondary school system to reach youths engaged in apprenticeship programmes in Awka Education Zone. School counsellors, community counselling centres, and relevant government agencies should collaborate to provide counselling interventions that focus on commitment building, emotional support, conflict resolution, and coping with peer pressure to reduce apprenticeship dropout among youths.
2. Structured counselling and career development programmes should be incorporated into apprenticeship training schemes in Awka Education Zone. Trade associations, apprenticeship masters "Ogas", and vocational training centres should collaborate with professional counsellors to provide regular sessions on goal setting, motivation, confidence building, and follow up support. These interventions will strengthen apprentices' commitment to training, reduce dropout, and increase completion rates.
3. The Anambra State Ministry of Education, in partnership with trade associations and masters, should establish guidance and counselling units in major markets and vocational training centres in Awka Education Zone. These units should provide services to apprentices before placement, during training, and after settlement to address emotional, vocational, and interpersonal challenges that may affect their progress. Masters in the Igbo apprenticeship system should be trained in basic counselling and conflict resolution skills as para counsellors. This will enable them to better mentor apprentices, manage expectations, and reduce cases of exploitation and misunderstanding that often lead to dropout.
4. Government and relevant NGOs should organize periodic workshops on goal setting, financial management, problem solving, and emotional resilience for apprentices. This will complement the technical skills taught by masters and reduce the high rate of business failure after settlement.
5. Community leaders, religious organizations, and media should be used to sensitize youths and parents on the importance of guidance and counselling in apprenticeship. This will reduce stigma and encourage apprentices to seek help when faced with challenges.
6. The government should develop policies that recognize and support the integration of formal guidance and counselling into informal apprenticeship systems. Partnerships between schools, counselling professionals, and master trainers will ensure a more holistic approach to youth empowerment in Awka Education Zone.

Suggestions for Further Research

Building on the limitations identified above, future studies should consider the following:

1. Expanding the sample beyond school counsellors to include apprentices themselves, so as to capture their lived experiences of dropout and completion directly.
2. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, to provide richer insight into the reasons apprentices leave or complete their training.
3. Undertaking comparative studies across different education zones or states to examine contextual variations in the apprenticeship system.
4. Applying inferential statistical techniques, such as correlation or regression analysis, to test relationships between counselling variables and dropout or completion outcomes.
5. Explicitly examining systemic barriers, such as economic constraints, cultural expectations, and master-apprentice dynamics, that may influence apprenticeship persistence independently of counselling support.

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