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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Workforce and Operational Resilience in the Retail Value Chain: Exploring the Degree Apprenticeship System

Bolum Isikwei*, Marvel Ogah, Paulinus Uche Ugwu

Lagos Business School, Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, 106104, Nigeria

Corresponding Author Email: bolum555@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: The retail value chain in Nigeria comes second only to agriculture as the country's largest employer of the labour force, accounting for more than 10% of the national Gross Domestic Product. However, it still struggles with challenges such as operational instability, skill deficits and disruption vulnerability. Due to these shortcomings, this study draws on the perspectives of stakeholders and degree-focused youths to explore the potential role of a formalised degree apprenticeship system, which may help improve the resilience and performance of the retail value chain's workforce.

Methods: Built upon the Resource-Based View theory, the study adopts a mixed-method approach, drawing interview data from 13 stakeholders within the retail value chain, combined with survey respondents from 100 degree-focused youths.

Results: The survey results suggest that there are differences among age and gender groups within the population in how they perceive degree apprenticeships can help with workforce stability and resilience. Thematic insights also showed the need for policy support, increased awareness and industry-academia partnerships to achieve successful implementation.

Conclusion: The study concluded with recommendations to create structured degree apprenticeships that would be a game-changer in the retail value chain, helping drive the nation's workforce development, operational resilience, and sustainable growth. However, the results are based on stakeholders' perceptions rather than actual impacts on operational resilience.

KEYWORDS

Degree; Apprenticeship; Degree Apprenticeship; Retail; Nigeria; Resilience; Workforce; Training

1. INTRODUCTION

The retail sector is a key contributor to developing economies, with retail sales in Africa amounting to over US$500 billion in 2018 (Food Business Africa, 2023). Within this market, the trade industry has been instrumental in driving growth, with wholesale and retail contributing around 15% to 18% to Nigeria's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2025).

This Nigerian sector is dominated mainly by SMEs, consisting of small, independent retailers. A 2022 study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) reported that these small retailers account for a massive 97% of national sales in Nigeria, especially sales of food, beverages and personal care products (BCG, 2022). Their dominance highlights the central role of the informal economy in meeting the daily needs of African consumers.

The retail value chain encompasses the sale of consumer goods and services for personal, family, or household use. It involves every sale to the final consumer (Vaja, 2015). Like every aspect of human endeavour, the world of retail is rapidly changing due to emerging trends (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). These trends include omnichannel shopping, personalised digital experiences powered by AI, sustainable business practices, and the growing influence of social and mobile commerce (Vhatkar et al., 2024). Retailers also adopt automation and immersive in-store technologies to remain competitive in an evolving landscape (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020; Battisti et al., 2022). Essentially, the retail sector in developing economies such as Nigeria is a significant economic force undergoing rapid transformation, driven by digital advancements, sustainability concerns, and evolving consumer behaviours.

Retail has gone beyond the traditional walk-in store buying and selling to include intangible services like hairdressing, dining out, visits to movie theatres, zoos, and local theme parks (Shi et al., 2021). These days, financial services like those rendered by e-payment platforms are also considered forms of retailing (Popkova et al., 2021). Retail holds a significant position within the global value chain, crucial for meeting consumer demand in its final stages (Jugu & Obaka, 2020). As a very competitive and customer-centric sector, it is vital to adopt practices that boost the effectiveness of the sector's supply chain (Madhani, 2022).

This is more important in recent times, given the rapid changes in customer preferences (Thangavelu, 2019) and "black swan" events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war (Caiado et al., 2025). Being very close to the final consumer, retail businesses in developing countries are prone to challenges arising from unforeseen circumstances, including those stemming from political or social unrest, as in the case of Shoprite Nigeria in 2020 (Salau, 2022). However, facts and figures show that the retail sector is of great value to developing economies. Demonstrating its substantial

value, the retail industry in Nigeria accounted for 27.5% of the employed workforce as of Q1 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). However, this vital sector remains vulnerable to events that periodically test its resilience and negatively impact the retail supply chain (Salau, 2022). Making it highly imperative to critically look at measures that can be taken to ensure effective operational management in the sector, especially in challenging times.

However, many skill gaps exist in the Nigerian retail value chain, and traditional apprenticeship systems, such as the Igbo apprenticeship model, are increasingly perceived as insufficient to meet the technical demands of modern retailing (Tabansi & Osang, 2021). The potential of degree apprenticeships to improve operational resilience remains under-researched, especially in developing economies such as Nigeria. Most studies on these programmes have focused mainly on more developed economies (Rampersad, 2026).

Also, research on operational resilience, particularly in retail, has primarily focused on the structural and technological aspects of supply chains, such as logistics, digitalisation, inventory management and responses to environmental shocks, often leaving out the human factor (Hosseini Shekarabi et al., 2025). This leaves a significant gap and highlights the need for studies examining operational resilience from a workforce development perspective, particularly how programmes such as degree apprenticeships could help strengthen it (Rampersad, 2026).

Due to the informal nature of Nigeria's retail value chain, dominated by SMEs, the sector experiences significant skill gaps, a limitation that exposes businesses within the value chain to disruptions (Ejikpese & Effiom, 2024). As a result of technological advancements and the rapid spread of e-commerce, existing apprenticeship systems, which are largely informal, may lack sufficient structure to compete globally due to inadequate digital and technical training (Yakubu et al., 2026). This study aims to explore stakeholders' perceptions of modern, more formal forms of apprenticeship that incorporate contemporary training and formal education, potentially boosting resilience across sectors within the value chain (Rampersad, 2026).

Merging two areas of research and building upon the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, this study explores stakeholders' perceptions of a formalised programme, such as degree apprenticeships, to equip the workforce and strengthen retail resilience in Nigeria, particularly from an operational perspective. Also, the study touches upon factors that may pose as challenges and opportunities for such a programme in the country. The study is, however, not based on the presumption that degree apprenticeship programmes have all it takes to help boost operational resilience; instead, it is focused on the perception of stakeholders on how such programmes may serve as a channel through which qualities such as adaptability, problem-solving, technical skills, and decision-making in practice may be developed in the retail value chain workforce (Rampersad, 2026).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Challenges Faced by Retail Businesses in Developing Countries

Businesses in the retail value chain of developing countries face numerous challenges. These challenges may include limited financial access, poor infrastructure, unskilled labour, lack of local supply sources, small population sizes, high rental charges, inflation, and currency fluctuations, all of which drive up operational costs (Retail Loop, 2023), thereby negatively affecting the growth and resilience of the sector (Retail Loop, 2023; Patil et al., 2023). Compared with retailers in developing countries, retailers in developed countries, such as the United States, may face fewer severe challenges. This is especially true in infrastructure and economic instability (Deloitte, 2023). The operational difficulties faced by retailers in developing economies may justify the need for effective strategies to improve resilience within their value chains (Retail Loop, 2023; Patil et al., 2023). Given the challenges retail businesses face in developing countries, implementing strategic measures may be necessary. To achieve this, an important direction to consider is adopting measures that support the development of an agile workforce (Petermann & Zacher, 2021).

By building resilient human capital, businesses within the retail value chain can ensure their workforce's adaptability and guarantee effective operational management practices during challenging times (Zheng et al., 2025). This approach equips the industry against disruptions and contributes to sustained economic growth in developing countries. Businesses in developing countries stand to benefit heavily from resilient practices (Ali et al., 2021). To produce a high-quality study on operational resilience in the retail value chain, relevant literature must be consulted to identify gaps in the research area.

Extant research exists on operational resilience. Joerin et al. conducted a 2016 study on Ghana's cocoa value chain, assessing its resilience to shocks such as price fluctuations and policy changes. In 2020, a study by Essuman et al. investigated how operational resilience, comprising disruption absorption and recoverability, affects operational efficiency amid disruptions. Analysing data from 259 firms in sub-Saharan Africa, structural equation modelling demonstrated that disruption absorption and recoverability positively affect operational efficiency. Findings revealed a relationship between operational resilience and efficiency, highlighting their dynamics across different levels of disruption (Essuman et al., 2020). Ufua et al. conducted a 2023 study investigating operational resilience through kaizen in the Nigerian livestock sector. The findings highlighted challenges in the livestock production process, leadership dynamics, and livestock mortality, emphasising the significance of member commitment and leadership support for sustainable kaizen practices (Ufua et al., 2023). The few studies highlighted in the introductory part of this paper confirm that operational resilience has piqued researchers' interest in recent years, and this work aims to build upon the existing literature, specifically as it relates to the Nigerian retail value chain.

Adaptive and resilient operational practices become increasingly important as retail sector trends change, with literature revealing that disruptions in developing countries have created challenges that required the development of an adaptive workforce (Caiado et al., 2025).

2.2 Operational Resilience Strategies

Due to the spontaneous nature of disruptions, organisations need to treat the concept of resilience with a high level of importance. According to Baghersad and Zobel (2022), resilience involves two different but interconnected capacities of organisations: robustness and recoverability. Robustness is the extent to which an organisation is prepared to cope with disruptions, while recoverability refers to the ability of an organisation to recover to an acceptable level (Baghersad & Zobel, 2022). Organisations with these qualities have a better chance of surviving through disruptions than those that do not have them.

As a formidable business obstacle, disruption happens suddenly. Disruption is any event that interrupts the normal flow of business operations (Park et al., 2021). It could come through three primary sources: natural, artificial, and pandemic-oriented (Alikhani et al., 2023). Natural disruptions are naturally occurring events like earthquakes, floods, or hurricanes; artificial disruptions are caused by human activities, such as cyberattacks, political instability, or market competition; pandemic-oriented disruptions, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, cause widespread interruptions across supply chains (Alikhani et al., 2023). The effects of disruptions make it a priority for businesses to develop strong resilience strategies, especially for sectors vulnerable to operational interruptions, like retail.

Existing research on the retail value chain in developing countries centres mainly around three main resilience anchors. One examines the role of logistics and transport network design as a source of supply chain vulnerability and resilience (Hultberg & Pal, 2021; Al Naimi et al., 2021). A second focuses on technological adoption, digitisation, inventory systems, and data infrastructure as a driver that contributes to the adaptive capacity of organisations (Hossain et al., 2022; Mubarik et al., 2022; Alikhani et al., 2023). A third addresses environmental and macro-level disruption, including climate and regulatory volatility (Sharma & Rautela, 2022; Neboh & Mbhele, 2020; Zobel, 2022; Burgos & Ivanov, 2021). Across all three streams, the unit of analysis is consistently structural or technological rather than human. The capability of the workforce appears, at most, as a contextual variable rather than an object of study in its own right. This concentration leaves a clear gap, which is the aspect of human capital strategies. This includes employee participation, skill development,

and intellectual capital, which remain comparatively underexamined as levers of retail supply chain resilience, despite their plausible centrality to operational resilience.

Having looked at studies that explored strategies involving non-human factors, other studies have explored strategies involving human factors. Employee participation has been identified as the most influential factor in improving resilience in all dimensions, with firms with higher levels of intellectual capital performing better in supply chain resilience than those with lower levels of intellectual capital (Mubarak, 2022). According to Alikhani et al. (2023), these strategies can be complementary or conflicting. Resilience strategies, such as backup suppliers, supplier reliability, fortification, reserved/excess capacity, safety stock, transhipment, multiple set covering, direct-to-store delivery, and process flexibility, can either complement or conflict with each other (Alikhani et al., 2023). Complementary strategies boost each other's impact, while conflicting strategies may negatively affect their effectiveness.

Building on the research by Alikhani et al. (2023) and Baghersad & Zobel (2022), further research can tilt towards studying the specific implementation of resilience strategies in retail supply chain networks. Researchers can investigate how a mix of resilience strategies impacts value chain components, such as transportation, inventory management, and supplier relationships. Further building on Mitsakis' (2020) findings regarding the impact of employee participation on supply chain resilience. Exploring the roles of leadership, organisational culture, and employee training in building a resilient retail organisation can also be very useful for practitioners. Another area of interest could be examining the effectiveness of resilience training programmes for retail employees and managers. These are addressed through this study; however, from an exploratory point of view.

Despite the heavy focus of operational resilience literature on structural and technological aspects, there is a need to explore the human factors surrounding the concept, especially responses to disruption. Resilience goes beyond technology and physical infrastructure (Mubarak, 2022). Intellectual capital, as identified by Mubarak (2022), which includes adaptability, problem-solving, knowledge sharing, and decision-making, is vital for operational resilience, yet these factors have been neglected in the studies around the concept, especially in developing economies.

There are some limitations that remain to be explored in the extant literature. These gaps stem from the fact that these works offer little to no explanation of how operational workforce abilities may be systematically developed. While elements like employee participation, leadership, organisational culture, and training have been pointed out to be key human factors of resilience (Su et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2022), they are yet to be examined in terms of how they may be developed through a structured learning programme, especially in a developing economic environment like Nigeria (Duchek, 2020; Scheuch et al., 2021). Resilience, being a trait that may be developed through anticipation and deliberate business practices, cannot be treated as an automatic human attribute (Duchek, 2020).

Degree apprenticeship programmes, which combine elements of academic theory with practical work experience, may be a vital solution to these challenges (Papadimitriou, 2022; Nawaz et al., 2022; Quew-Jones & Rowe, 2022). However, research on operational resilience and that on degree apprenticeships are relatively different areas of academic study. While works that have been carried out around apprenticeship centred on skill acquisition, employability, and labour-market transitions (Nawaz et al., 2022; Papadimitriou, 2022) those on operational resilience, majorly have their focus on how organisational factors like digital technologies, and supply chains anticipate, absorb, and adapt to disruption (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2023; Shao et al., 2024) leaving study gaps on how workforce capabilities technological constraints and the vulnerability of the supply chain may interact (Shao et al., 2024).

This study addresses that gap by exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the feasibility of using degree apprenticeships as a workforce development tool in the Nigerian retail value chain. Apprenticeship is therefore not directly linked to operational resilience within this research; instead, the research explores the skills considered required in a workforce with apprenticeships and the conditions, from organisational and institutional perspectives, that may affect the use of the model. It serves as a foundation for understanding how an integrated academic and workplace learning model may help increase resilience in the workforce and, perhaps, in broader operations.

2.3 Apprenticeship Systems: Global Perspectives Vs Nigeria's Context

As a form of skill development, apprenticeships have existed for centuries. As a form of skill development, it can be considered the oldest form of technical education, as it has existed since the days of the ancient Egyptians (Lazaridis, 2010). All around the world, there are different forms of apprenticeship; countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland have very well-developed apprenticeship schemes to deliver formal vocational training (World Economic Forum, 2023). Research has also found that countries with well-established apprenticeship systems enjoy lower youth unemployment, enabling resilient growth, developing human capital, and accelerating economic equity (World Economic Forum, 2023). Hofmann et al. (2022) examined informal apprenticeship in developing countries, including Nigeria, where only about 27% of graduates acquire practical skills during their education and youth unemployment was reported at an all-time high of 53% in 2020, and about 93% of employed persons were in the informal sector (Praise, 2024). The study by Hofmann et al. (2022) emphasised the importance of compensation and revealed that the effectiveness of informal apprenticeship can be enhanced by focusing on the skills imparted.

Training and apprenticeship programmes in Nigeria are not as developed as in the West, with a labour force of 73.3 million and 26% employed in the retail sector (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Nigerian informal apprenticeships and vocational study programmes often suffer from serious shortcomings, including a mismatch between training and industry needs, a lack of proper regulation, and outdated curricula (Omotosho et al., 2026). As a result, industries experience a significant shortage of skilled labour.

In more developed countries, especially those in Europe, apprenticeship programmes are well structured, and they help support skill development that may be relevant across sectors, including retail. For example, in countries like Germany and Switzerland, apprenticeships are infused directly into the national education system. This practice blends classroom learning and structured on-the-job training with combined financing and administration between the government and private organisations, issuing government-recognised credentials (James Relly et al., 2021; Graf, 2021). The result of this is reflected in the employment rate of German dual-training graduates, who report a comparatively high level of success in the job market with top firms such as Siemens and Volkswagen (Pilz et al., 2023). However, this also requires high-level stability with a capital-intensive, sustained public-private coordination that may be costly to replicate in weaker economies such as Nigeria (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020; McGrath et al., 2020; Stockmann et al., 2021). In the United States, the system is a bit more privatised, running mainly through employer-led alternatives: Top organisations in the country such as Google and Amazon run independent technological apprenticeship programmes largely without government input, which allows for faster, sector-specific deployment but offers less standardised assurance of transferable skill outcomes across employers (Elliott et al., 2022).

Despite the success of the degree apprenticeships, the results of the scheme are not universal, however. Jones et al. (2022) pointed out that degree apprentice transitions in the UK are heavily dependent on sustained employer engagement, and attrition remains a documented risk where that support is inconsistent. Another challenge the scheme has faced over time is the financial and administrative bottleneck of running such programmes; this may include coordinating with a university partner and funding off-the-job training time (Cook et al., 2024; Knight, 2026; Mulkeen et al., 2017; Poole et al., 2023; Chadwick et al., 2025). For this reason, it is more easily absorbed by large employers like the BBC and Amazon than by SMEs. This fact may pose a challenge to having such programmes in Nigeria, as SMEs dominate Nigeria's retail sector, where 97% of national sales come from small, informal retailers (BCG, 2022).

However, in Nigeria, there is a need to tap into the Western model to improve apprenticeships. Where degrees are socially and culturally regarded as an outstanding achievement, degree apprenticeships could be a good tool to bridge the gap between academic qualifications and industry readiness (Cavaglia et al., 2022). These programmes allow participants to earn a degree while gaining hands-on experience, often

in high-demand fields such as engineering, technology, and healthcare (Mason, 2023). Top brands in the UK, like the BBC and Amazon, have partnered with universities to run these programmes, and 95% of employers believe degree apprenticeships help achieve strategic goals (Cook et al., 2024; Hunt et al., 2025). A programme with such a structure might benefit businesses in Nigeria within the retail value chain, which has a very high level of volatility.

The high value placed on formal education in Nigeria is not coincidental. Degrees are widely regarded as the primary legitimate pathway to social and economic mobility in Nigeria, reinforced by decades of public discourse that link university attainment to employability and status (Tabansi & Osang, 2021). Nigerian parents are often seen to encourage academic excellence (Yahya et al., 2022). Given the emphasis Nigerian families place on university education as a form of achievement and security, vocational or apprenticeship routes are frequently perceived, including by parents guiding their children's career choices, as a fallback for those unable to succeed academically, rather than a credible alternative pathway (Ugwoke et al., 2021). This dynamic surfaced directly in this study's interview data, where a respondent noted that many degree holders see apprenticeships beneath them (Section 5.2), a reference to the existing stigma that characterises Nigeria's apprenticeship system.

Despite the barriers confronting informal apprenticeships in Nigeria, one apprenticeship system that has been contributing significantly to the growth of Nigeria's retail value chain is the Igbo Apprenticeship System. The Igbo apprenticeship system was described in a 2017 TED Talk presentation by Robert Neuwirth as the world's most significant business incubator (Sulaimon, 2023). In his Harvard Business Review article titled "A Nigerian model for stakeholder capitalism", Ekekwe stated that this system had produced some significant names in the Nigerian retail value chain, like Innocent Chukwuma, the founder of Innoson Motors, the most crucial Indigenous automobile manufacturing company by sales in Africa; Ifeanyi Ubah, the owner of one of the largest private fuel depots in Africa, Capital Oil & Gas; and Cosmas Maduka, chairman of Coscharis Group (Ekekwe, 2021). The mentorship and seed capital given to the apprentices at the end of their training are considered the key drivers of this scheme (Tabansi & Osang, 2021). Despite its remarkable successes, the Igbo Apprenticeship System faces obstacles that limit its scalability.

Like other informal apprenticeship patterns in Nigeria, the Igbo system faces several challenges. These include the notion that it is for those who cannot succeed in formal education, making it discouraging to young graduates and degree-focused youths (Tabansi & Osang, 2021). Other challenges include settling apprentices at the end of their indentureship, malicious stealing by apprentices and abrupt dismissal of apprentices for the slightest reasons (Tabansi & Osang, 2021). These gaps in the informal apprenticeship system and the operational challenges businesses face in the retail value chain when tackling disruptions create the need to explore how building a formal apprenticeship system, such as a degree apprenticeship system, can help companies build a resilient workforce to protect enterprises against disruptions.

Building a resilient workforce is key when considering the challenges retailers face in developing countries, such as a lack of competitive edge, consumer sophistication, unskilled labour, the dominance of informal retail systems, poor infrastructure, and lack of price regulation (Neboh & Mbhele, 2020; Patil et al., 2023; Kshetri, 2021; Harrison, 2022; Adekuajo et al., 2023; Sani, 2022; Mendy et al., 2021). Investing in workforce development may help retail businesses mitigate the effects of these challenges. However, these works have not addressed how to build a resilient workforce to future-proof firms in the retail value chain against disruption through a well-designed apprenticeship system; this leaves a gap that this research intends to address.

Beyond conventional retail skills, today's workforce must be prepared for digital commerce. E-commerce demands technical and strategic abilities, such as platform management, online sales optimisation, and cybersecurity awareness, often not included in informal training schemes (Manchem, 2025). Through degree apprenticeships, practical models can be used to prepare the next generation for the realities of modern e-commerce.

RQ1: What factors do stakeholders perceive could make degree apprenticeships more appealing to degree-focused youths in Nigeria?

RQ2: How do stakeholders perceive the potential contribution of degree apprenticeships to workforce resilience in Nigeria's retail value chain?

3. FRAMEWORK

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Before being embedded within Porter's (1985) value chain, it flows through the primary activities of inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, and service, supported by the enabling functions of human resource management, technological development, and company infrastructure. The dual approach was adopted to demonstrate the distinct contribution of each theory: Porter's value chain identifies where apprenticeship-trained talent in the retail operation may have impact, while RBV explains why that talent constitutes a durable source of advantage rather than a replicable input. Together, the framework predicts that a degree apprenticeship which satisfies the RBV resource criteria and is distributed across value chain stages and enablers will translate into operational resilience (OR), the study's dependent variable.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The RBV is known as one of the most potent theories for understanding organisations (Barney, 1991). It is a managerial framework used to identify strategic resources that can confer a firm's comparative advantage (Khan and Hefny, 2019). According to the RBV, valuable, rare, unique, and non-substitutable resources enable an organisation's competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Khan & Hefny (2019) also utilised the RBV to explain how organisations stay competitive.

The RBV represents a clear theoretical perspective on workforce resilience as a competitive organisational advantage. As Barney mentioned in 1991, the RBV states that those resources which are valuable, inimitable, rare, and difficult to imitate or replace provide the grounds upon which organisations create a continuous competitive advantage. In this respect, a resilient workforce characterised by adaptability, problem-solving capability, and the ability to recover from disruptions can fall squarely within the ambit of RBV precepts (Pal et al., 2024). Workforce resilience provides organisations with resistance to external shocks, maintains operational efficiency, and thus enables adaptation to changing environments, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability of organisations (Yuan et al., 2022).

Degree apprenticeships contribute to workforce development by combining classroom teaching with practical skills training; this may create a pipeline of competent and agile professionals to help meet business needs (Elliott et al., 2022). In regions where they are already established, these programmes have been reported to help equip workers with those rare and valuable competencies needed to face sector challenges (Mason, 2023). This approach not only develops individual workers' capabilities but also contributes to the organisation's collective resilience.

From an RBV perspective, degree apprenticeships involve enriching human capital as a non-imitable and non-substitutable resource. Unlike generic training, the apprenticeship approach is tailored to the organisation's needs and provides rare and relevant skills (Mason, 2023). Scholars such as Khan and Hefny (2019) state that strategic resources must be utilised to maintain their competitive advantage. Therefore, this study examines stakeholders' perceptions rather than the performance of firms operating an established degree apprenticeship. The study does not establish that degree apprenticeships automatically create strategic or non-substitutable human capital. Instead, the RBV provides a theoretical perspective through which their potential contribution to workforce capability and resilience can be considered.

3.3 Research Objectives

• To explore the possibility of introducing degree apprenticeships to Nigeria as a tool for helping businesses achieve operational resilience, especially within the retail value chain.

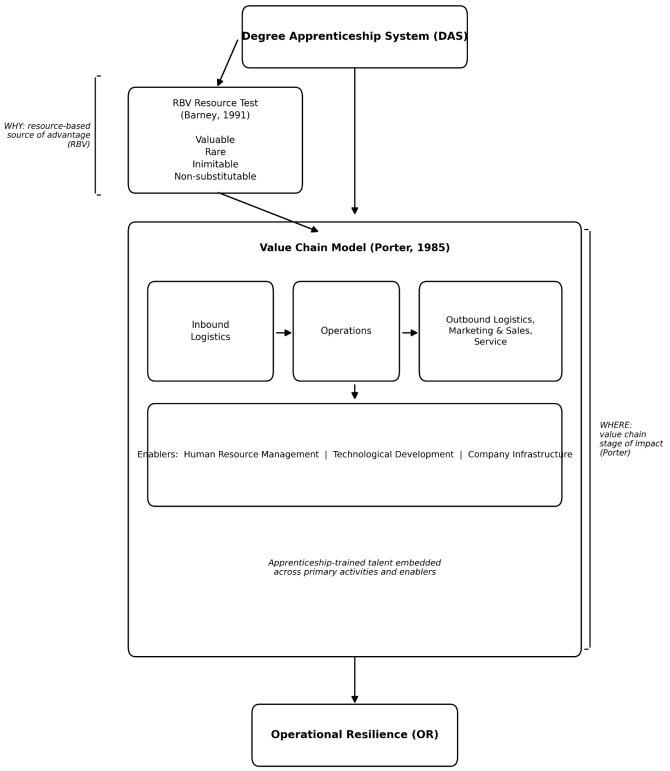


Figure 1 The Degree Apprenticeships as a Resource Input that Is First Evaluated against the Resource-Based View's VRIN (Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-Substitutable) Criteria (Barney, 1991)

• To propose strategies for employers, universities and policymakers to implement degree apprenticeships that address the skill gaps and disruption vulnerability identified in the retail value.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design, combining a quantitative survey, interview questions and secondary data. Through this approach, survey responses were examined and merged with interview insights from stakeholders, primarily regarding their perceptions of degree apprenticeships (Fetters & Tajima, 2022).

4.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

For sampling, a total of 113 respondents participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling based on their characteristics: 100 degree-focused youths who either have a graduate or first degree, are pursuing a degree, or intend to pursue one. Also, 13 stakeholders from diverse sectors in the retail value chain were selected based on their experience and knowledge of challenges being faced in that area (Campbell et al., 2020). Consequently, the findings are interpreted as insights into participants' perceptions of degree apprenticeships and their potential contribution to workforce resilience, rather than as representative estimates of the entire Nigerian retail workforce (Campbell et al., 2020).

4.3 Questionnaire Development, Validation and Pilot Testing

Based on the study's objective, which was mainly to explore perceptions, relevant literature was reviewed and analysed; the insights from literature further assisted in drafting research questions and instruments, after which pilot testing, which involved 10 respondents different from the final participants, and expert review were conducted (Agarwal et al., 2021; Kumari et al., 2021). However, because no formal psychometric reliability analysis, such as Cronbach's alpha or test-retest reliability, was conducted, the study does not claim to have established scale reliability or construct validity (Agarwal et al., 2021). Also, the researchers employed triangulation to ensure rigour (Fetters & Tajima, 2022; Jiang et al., 2022; Liu, 2022).

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative part of the study consisted of in-depth open-ended interviews with 13 purposively selected stakeholders across the various segments of the retail value chain. The findings from the survey were complemented by the stakeholders' perspectives in the interviews on the relevance of degree apprenticeships, what they think apprentices might be able to learn, and what might make degree apprenticeships possible in Nigeria.

Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used to analyse quantitative data in the survey to explore patterns of responses and differences in the perceptions of degree apprenticeship by participant characteristics. The results were interpreted in accordance with the study's significance, the sample composition, and its exploratory nature, thereby distinguishing statistically significant results from suggestive patterns. The analyses helped identify patterns and associations within the sample and do not establish a cause-and-effect relationship between degree apprenticeships and operational resilience.

4.5 Integration of Findings and Triangulation

To better generate insights, responses were matched and compared with data from secondary literature, and triangulation was ensured by employing divergence and convergence methods (Fetters & Tajima, 2022; Shannon-Baker, 2022). The adoption of triangulation was relevant to the study; even if the main focus was not to measure cause and effect, it helped provide better recommendations and insights regarding stakeholder perception (Jiang et al., 2022; Liu, 2022; Meydan & Akkaş, 2024).

4.6 Sample Size and Methodological Limitations

For a sector like retail, which is considered one of Nigeria's largest employers of labour, 113 participants may not be enough to support sector-wide recommendations. Also, participants were drawn from different sectors of the retail value chain rather than exclusively from Nigeria's largely informal retail sector. Therefore, further research could expand the sample population and focus exclusively on the retail sector.

The study's findings should consequently be treated as exploratory insights into stakeholders' perceptions of the potential of a programme like degree apprenticeships in Nigeria's retail value chain, rather than as research-backed evidence of the relevance of such programmes to operational resilience. Further studies could also adopt causal testing and draw on evidence from implemented apprenticeship programmes to assess their contribution to operational resilience more directly (Campbell et al., 2020; Fetters & Tajima, 2022).

5. ANALYSIS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 100 survey respondents, while Table 2 shows their distribution by employment sector.

Table 3 shows the chi-square test of perceptions of degree apprenticeships across age groups.

For the item "Builds Workforce Resilience & Stability," the chi-square test indicated an association between age group and responses to the statement that degree apprenticeships could build workforce resilience and stability ($\chi^2(4, N = 99) = 10.79$, $p = 0.0291$, Cramér's $V \approx 0.33$). Descriptively, 64.7% of respondents aged 18–25 selected "Agree", compared with 47.6% of those aged 26–35. However, when "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" are combined, the proportions are 64.7% and 84.2%, respectively. This suggests that the

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative (%)
Age	18–25	17	17.0	17.0
	26–35	82	82.0	99.0
	36–45	1	1.0	100.0
Gender	Female	45	45.0	45.0
	Male	55	55.0	100.0
Educational level	Secondary	2	2.0	2.0
	Diploma (OND)	1	1.0	3.0
	Bachelor's/Higher National Diploma	52	52.0	55.0
	Graduate degree	45	45.0	100.0
Work experience	0–5 years	35	35.0	35.0
	6–10 years	28	28.0	63.0
	11–15 years	14	14.0	77.0
	15+ years	23	23.0	100.0
Total		100	100.0	

Source: Authors' computation from survey (2025)

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents by Employment Sector

Employment sector	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative (%)
Education	20	20.0	20.0
Retail, manufacturing & logistics	39	39.0	59.0
Finance, business & professional services	18	18.0	77.0
ICT, technology & healthcare	7	7.0	84.0
Others	16	16.0	100.0

Source: Authors' computation from field survey (2025)

response distributions differed between the age groups, with respondents aged 26–35 showing higher combined agreement. The result indicates an association between age group and perceptions of workforce resilience; it does not establish why the groups differed or demonstrate that degree apprenticeships would produce greater resilience in practice.

For the item "Reduces Informal Employment Reliance," the association between age group and responses to the statement that degree apprenticeships could reduce reliance on informal employment was weaker, meeting the 10% significance threshold but not the 5% threshold ($\chi^2(4, N = 99) = 7.94$, $p = 0.0938$, Cramér's $V \approx 0.28$). Combined agreement ("Agree" or "Strongly Agree") was 76.5% among respondents aged 18–25 and 68.2% among those aged 26–35. This descriptive pattern suggests that younger respondents were more likely to endorse the statement. However, given the marginal statistical result, the finding should be treated as tentative rather than conclusive evidence of a difference in perceptions.

5.1 Inferential Analysis

As Table 4 shows, the chi-square test indicated an association between gender and the distribution of responses to the statement that degree apprenticeships could build workforce resilience and stability ($\chi^2(4, N = 99) = 10.32$, $p = 0.0345$, Cramér's $V \approx 0.32$). Combined agreement was 75.6% among women and 85.2% among men. Thus, although the overall response distributions differed statistically, the descriptive results do not support the claim that women expressed stronger positive perceptions than men. The finding indicates an association between gender and responses in this sample; it does not establish the reasons for the difference or imply that one gender would benefit more from degree apprenticeships.

5.2 Thematic Analysis (with Quantitative Insights)

The interviews provided rich insights into respondents' perceptions of degree apprenticeships in Nigeria's retail value chain. Chi-square tests of survey data have been integrated to deepen these findings and add statistical backing. This helped highlight statistically significant differences across age and gender. Table 5 presents the interview responses by sector and role, and Table 6 summarises the resulting themes. Together, these sources reveal four key themes.

Table 3 Chi-Square Test of Perceptions of Degree Apprenticeships by Age Group. The Results of the Chi-Square Analysis by Age Group Are Summarised

Item	Age	Agreement Level (%)					χ^2	P-value
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
Alternative to traditional university	18 – 25	1(5.9)	0	2(11.8)	8(47.1)	6(35.3)	0.92	0.921
	26 – 35	5(6.1)	3(3.7)	8(9.8)	33(40.2)	33(40.2)		
Bridge industry-academia skill gap	18 – 25	1(5.9)	0	1(5.9)	9(52.9)	6(35.3)	1.76	0.7804
	26 – 35	6(7.3)	1(1.2)	5(6.1)	30(36.6)	40(48.8)		
Employers value apprenticeship experience	18 – 25	3(17.6)	1(5.9)	6(35.3)	5(29.4)	2(11.8)	4.96	0.2911
	26 – 35	5(6.1)	7(8.5)	19(23.2)	27(32.9)	24(29.3)		
Builds Workforce resilience & stability	18 – 25	1(5.9)	1(5.9)	4(23.5)	11(64.7)	0	10.79	0.0291*
	26 – 35	4(4.9)	1(1.2)	8(9.8)	39(47.6)	30(36.6)		
Enhances Youth adaptability in work	18 – 25	1(5.9)	0	1(5.9)	12(70.6)	3(17.6)	4.70	0.319
	26 – 35	4(4.9)	1(1.2)	2(2.4)	39(47.6)	36(43.9)		
Reduces Informal Employment reliance	18 – 25	2(11.8)	0	2(11.8)	12(70.6)	1(5.9)	7.94	0.0938**
	26 – 35	5(6.1)	6(7.3)	15(18.3)	33(40.2)	23(28)		
Boosts national Workforce competitiveness	18 – 25	1(5.9)	1(5.9)	1(5.9)	11(64.7)	3(17.6)	7.48	0.1126
	26 – 35	3(3.7)	0	4(4.9)	42(51.2)	33(40.2)		
Degree apprenticeship is feasible	18 – 25	1(5.9)	0	1(5.9)	12(70.6)	3(17.6)	2.87	0.6144
	26 – 35	3(3.7)	1(1.2)	3(3.7)	45(54.9)	30(36.6)		

Note: * and ** represent statistical significance at 0.05 and 0.1 levels of significance, respectively. SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree, N – Neutral, A – Agree, SA – Strongly Agree. Source: Authors' computation from field survey (2025).

Table 4 Chi-Square Test of Perceptions of Degree Apprenticeships by Gender. The Gender-Based Chi-Square Analysis is Presented

Variable	Gender	Agreement level (%)					χ^2	P-value
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
Alternative to traditional university	Female	2(4.4)	2(4.4)	4(8.9)	19(42.2)	18(40)	1.04	0.9036
	Male	4(7.4)	1(1.9)	6(11.1)	22(40.7)	21(38.9)		
Bridge industry-academia skill gap	Female	3(6.7)	1(2.2)	3(6.7)	4(37.8)	21(46.7)	1.32	0.8572
	Male	4(7.4)	0	3(5.6)	22(40.7)	25(46.3)		
Employers value apprenticeship experience	Female	4(8.9)	4(8.9)	13(28.9)	14(31.1)	10(22.2)	1.12	0.8918
	Male	4(7.4)	4(7.4)	12(22.2)	18(33.3)	16(29.2)		
Builds workforce resilience & stability	Female	3(6.7)	2(4.4)	6(13.3)	27(60)	7(15.6)	10.32	0.0345*
	Male	2(3.7)	0	6(11.1)	23(42.6)	23(42.6)		
Enhances youth adaptability in work	Female	3(6.7)	0	2(4.4)	28(62.2)	12(26.7)	7.03	0.1342
	Male	2(3.7)	1(1.9)	1(1.9)	23(42.6)	27(50)		
Reduces informal employment reliance	Female	3(6.7)	2(4.4)	6(13.3)	26(57.8)	8(17.8)	5.26	0.2616
	Male	4(7.4)	4(7.4)	11(20.4)	19(35.2)	16(29.6)		
Boosts national workforce competitiveness	Female	3(6.7)	0	2(4.4)	26(57.8)	14(31.1)	3.20	0.5241
	Male	1(1.9)	1(1.9)	3(5.6)	27(50)	22(40.7)		
Degree apprenticeship is feasible	Female	3(6.7)	0	2(4.4)	26(57.8)	14(31.1)	2.40	0.6630
	Male	1(1.9)	1(1.9)	2(3.7)	31(57.4)	19(35.2)		

Note: * and ** represent statistical significance at 0.05 and 0.1 levels of significance, respectively or denote results with $0.05 < p < 0.10$. SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree, N – Neutral, A – Agree, SA – Strongly Agree. Source: Authors' computation from field survey (2025).

Table 5 Interview Responses on Appeal, Deterrents and Workforce Resilience, by Sector and Role

Strategies to make degree apprenticeship programmes appealing	Factors discouraging traditional apprenticeships	Importance of resilience in the retail workforce	Strengthening retail workforce resilience	Sector	Role
Flexibility, recognition, and reward	Not rewarding enough	Gives the needed experience to excel	An avenue to learn on the job	Retail	Procurement Manager
Incorporate a university certificate and retain settlement	Lack of mentorship, finance, and stability	Practical skills for employment/self-employment	Use of business tools and communication	Management Consulting	Learning & Development Manager
Create awareness and update training with recent trends	Lack of awareness and archaic training methods	Helps the workforce balance and flexibility	Tailored courses for apprenticeship	Supply Chain Management	Operations Manager
Ensure competitive rewards and career alignment	Stigma	Strengthens workforce, economic stability	Career growth and hands-on skills	Banking	Customer Service Officer
Nomination via companies	Certification-focused culture	Merges real-life experience with theories	Encourages innovative problem-solving	FMCG	Trade Marketing
Promotion linked to programme participation	Career growth linkage	Informs knowledge and boosts productivity	Use of technology and tools	Retail Goods	Managing Director
Promote awareness, align with youth aspirations, offer hybrid programmes, and guarantee employment	Cultural stigma, family pressure, and lack of awareness	Improves decision-making, adaptability, and customer management	Structured courses and practical exposure	E-commerce/Retail	Head of Retail
Mobilise recent graduates	Proliferation of white-collar job preferences	Supports GDP and knowledgeable entrepreneurs	Integrated technical and career development skills	Education	Research
Work-and-study approach	Lack of structure and loyalty to the system	Builds industry-specific knowledge	Combines practical application with operational expertise	Logistics and Supply Chain	MD/CEO
Incentives and elite branding	Poor awareness and distrust	Blends theory with practical experience	Clear career paths and early exposure	Supply Chain and Logistics	Third-Party Logistics Manager
Increase the number of study centres and online platforms, and remove paper processes	Cost and physical registration challenges	Tailor academic principles to industry challenges	Teach up-to-date skills	Oil & Gas (Downstream)	Lead, Maintenance & Projects
Make it compulsory as an elective course	Societal rating	Tackles real-life challenges	Provides firsthand experience	Fashion Industry	Production Manager
Highlight benefits, quality education, and mentorship	Cultural stigma and low earnings	Enhances adaptability and sector resilience	Blends theory with practice	Banking	Funds Transfer Officer

Table 6 Thematic Analysis of Interview Data: Themes, Key Insights and Examples

Theme	Key insights	Examples
Strategies to make degree apprenticeships appealing	Flexible schedules, study centres, online platforms, and hybrid models.	More study centres, online registrations, and learning platforms.
	Career progression, competitive remuneration, guaranteed employment.	Ensure competitive financial rewards and alignment with career growth.
	Awareness campaigns and branding.	Promote awareness and benefits of such programmes.
	Structured mentorship and appealing incentives.	Route programmes through companies are used to nominate staff with potential.

Table 6 (Continued)

Theme	Key insights	Examples
Factors discouraging degree-focused youths from traditional apprenticeships	Social stigma and preference for white-collar jobs.	The stigma is a major factor.
	Lack of awareness, archaic methods, poor orientation.	Lack of awareness and archaic ways of carrying out training.
	Financial constraints, lack of mentorship, systemic inefficiencies.	Economic uncertainties, lack of financial access, and mentorship.
Importance of resilience in the retail workforce	Apprenticeships provide workforce stability and adaptability.	It helps manpower planning and positions the sector to continue contributing to GDP.
	Exposure to theoretical and practical experiences enhances decision-making.	Workers develop a blend of technical and interpersonal skills, making them versatile during economic shifts.
	Knowledge transfer boosts productivity.	It informs their knowledge and helps productivity.
Strengthening retail workforce resilience	Combining practical and theoretical learning fosters adaptability.	Tailor academic principles to solve real and current challenges.
	Industry-specific challenges improve resilience.	Constant use of business tools and communication sharpens these skills.
	Reduces unemployment by enhancing employability.	Higher employability reduces unemployment and underemployment.
Improving technical and soft skills tools	Exposure to retail technologies and improves technical skills.	Practical exposure to retail technologies.
	Customer interaction develops communication, teamwork, and empathy.	Soft skills like communication and teamwork.
	Programmes provide up-to-date industry-specific skills.	Teach up-to-date skills tailored to industry needs.
Challenges in integrating degree apprenticeships	Distrust of systemic inefficiencies and corruption.	Distrust stems from systemic inefficiencies and corruption.
	Negative societal views of apprenticeships.	Public perception and preference for white-collar jobs over apprenticeship.
	Lack of structure, loyalty, and awareness.	Lack of structure and loyalty to the system.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Strategies to Make Degree Apprenticeships Appealing

Respondents emphasised the need for flexible schedules, hybrid learning models, competitive remuneration, structured mentorship, and awareness campaigns to make degree apprenticeships attractive. For instance, several participants suggested linking programme completion to career progression and promotion and offering programmes with a hybrid model; i.e., online and in-person formats.

Quantitative reinforcement: The chi-square analysis indicated a marginal association between age group and responses to the statement that degree apprenticeships could reduce reliance on informal employment ($\chi^2 = 7.94$, $p = 0.0938$, Cramér's $V \approx 0.28$). The result meets the 10% significance threshold but not the conventional 5% threshold and should therefore be interpreted cautiously. Descriptively, 76.5% of respondents aged 18–25 selected either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree", compared with 68.2% of those aged 26–35. Although this pattern suggests differences in responses between the two age groups, the analysis does not establish why these differences occur or demonstrate that age determines perceptions of degree apprenticeships. The finding should be treated as tentative evidence of an association rather than conclusive evidence of a substantive difference.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Factors Discouraging Youths from Traditional Apprenticeships

Interviewees cited cultural stigma, preference for white-collar jobs, out-dated training methods, and systemic inefficiencies as significant barriers to the traditional apprenticeship system in Nigeria. One respondent noted, "The stigma is a major factor: many degree holders see apprenticeships as beneath them."

Quantitative reinforcement: The results from the chi-square showed that younger respondents (18–25) were more likely than older ones (26–35) to believe apprenticeships could reduce reliance on informal employment ($p = 0.0938$). This suggestion may explain why younger individuals may be more open to apprenticeships as a pathway to formal, structured work while stigma persists.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Importance of Resilience in the Retail Workforce

Many participants strongly linked degree apprenticeships with adaptability, problem-solving, and workforce stability; these factors are essential in ensuring resilience. For example, a participant who happens to be a procurement manager explained, "It gives the needed experience to excel in unpredictable retail environments." This shows participants believe that retail apprenticeships may be of value in helping firms ensure resilience.

Quantitative reinforcement: The survey analysis identified associations between respondents' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of degree apprenticeships. Responses to the workforce resilience and stability item differed by age group ($p = 0.0291$) and gender ($p = 0.0345$). However, the descriptive results showed higher combined agreement among respondents aged 26–35 than those aged 18–25, and among men than women. The association between age and perceived reductions in reliance on informal employment was weaker ($p = 0.0938$) and met only the 10% significance threshold. These findings indicate differences in response patterns within the sample, but they do not establish why these differences occurred or demonstrate that degree apprenticeships produce greater workforce resilience.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Challenges to Integration and Implementation

Some negative factors or systemic inefficiencies, like corruption and lack of structure, were widely cited as threats to implementing the degree apprenticeships in Nigeria. Some respondents also mentioned challenges like capacity gaps in organisations, with some noting that their organisations lacked the resources to support such structured programmes without government or institutional backing, even if the company may want to run such a programme.

Quantitative reinforcement: The descriptive analysis from the survey data collected showed that only 31% of organisations reported readiness, with about 32% stating that they could be ready if they had additional resources. This aligns with interviewees' concerns about capacity, which indicates a strong need for policy and institutional support as a prerequisite for large-scale adoption.

The integration of qualitative themes with statistical tests helps show us that while broad consensus exists on the value of degree apprenticeships, differences occur across age and gender. Younger respondents associate apprenticeships with reducing reliance on informal work, older respondents emphasise resilience, and women perceive apprenticeships as essential to job stability. These insights provide a richer, multidimensional understanding of stakeholders' perceptions and help suggest different strategies touching on various focal points of strategy for programme design and implementation.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To the knowledge, this is among the first studies to explore stakeholders' perceptions towards degree apprenticeship programmes as a tool for building a resilient workforce for Nigeria's retail value chain. A significant 90% of the respondents from the quantitative survey agreed or strongly agreed that degree apprenticeships could make firms in Nigeria's retail sector more competitive, particularly in adapting to technological advancements in retail operations. This aligns with Barney's RBV Theory (Barney, 1991). This result reflects respondents' expectations about the potential benefits of such programmes rather than evidence of improved competitiveness in practice. If adopted, the system could help players in the retail value chain boost adaptability and build a resilient workforce in the long run (Arora, 2023).

The statistical tests in the study further showed significant details. They showed that the older ones among young people (26–35) valued apprenticeships more for building job skills, and that men agreed more strongly with this than women. This fact may suggest that perceptions of degree apprenticeships are not evenly distributed across groups but may be especially significant for some. In relation to the theory used for this study (RBV), this shows that apprenticeships can also serve as a unique and context-specific resource. This means that the scheme may respond to the needs of different workforce segments in various ways to benefit the organisation where the workforce belongs and the industry.

The diversity in industry representation also strengthens the study's findings. The conventional retail sector, which accounts for 28% of respondents, aligns directly with the study's focus on workforce resilience in Nigeria's retail value chain. Other well-represented sectors include education (20%) and manufacturing (9%). Besides education, different industries, such as manufacturing, logistics, ICT, agriculture, and finance, fall within the broader retail value chain (Oosthuizen et al., 2021). The workforce's activities in these industries are to add value to retail products along their lifecycle, from production to distribution and after-sales (Stark, 2022). This broad representation ensures that the study benefits from stakeholders' views of the retail ecosystem, making the findings more applicable and relevant. Most respondents agree that degree apprenticeship programmes can be an appropriate tool to enhance operational resilience in the value chain.

As presented in the conceptual framework by Porter (1979), degree apprenticeships can be a strategic tool for enhancing workforce resilience within Nigeria's retail value chain. The workforce is essential at every value chain level, from production to final sales and after-sales services (Arora, 2023). At the manufacturing point, employees such as procurement specialists and quality control inspectors make sure that the products meet the required standards. During supply chain and logistics operations, logistics coordinators, warehouse staff, and transport staff aid in efficiently moving and storing goods. In retail operations, sales associates, store managers, and visual merchandisers interact directly with customers and drive sales.

In contrast, marketing teams, social media managers, and promoters create brand awareness and boost demand. Furthermore, customer service representatives, technical support staff, and returns teams ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty through after-sales services. Roles that require innovation, such as data analysts, e-commerce specialists, and IT support teams, are increasingly important in retail digital transformation (Battisti et al., 2022). Individuals who handle these roles may have the opportunity to be well-equipped with practical skills and theoretical knowledge relevant to these roles. This will aid these degree apprentices in responding more appropriately to industry changes, such as advances in retail technologies and changing market requirements. Based on the findings from this study, recommendations may be made to practitioners in the industry, academia and policymakers alike. These recommendations are vital in enhancing workforce adaptability, sectoral growth and overall economic development in Nigeria.

6.1 Recommendations for Practitioners in the Retail Value Chain

Responses from participants in this study's data collection suggest that the potential implementation of degree apprenticeship programmes offers significant promise in building an adaptable and resilient workforce across the entire retail value chain. Policymakers in the industry may collaborate with universities. These universities may help design and integrate these programmes into career progression pathways. For example, staff members who are high-performing graduate retail employees may be enrolled in a partner institution for an MBA programme. Such a programme may be structured as a degree apprenticeship scheme. These individuals who may have completed these programmes could be promoted to managerial roles afterwards. Research conducted in the UK strongly supports this approach. According to the study, 95% of employers reported a substantial enhancement in organisational performance through degree apprenticeship programmes. Furthermore, 89% acknowledged a positive impact on staff retention, and 93% emphasised the critical role of these programmes in future growth and their effectiveness in attracting top talent (Nawaz et al., 2022). These findings strongly align with the results of this study, where 81% of respondents agreed that degree apprenticeship programmes would contribute to a more resilient workforce within the retail value chain.

6.2 Other Practical Implications

Youth employability: Younger respondents (18–25) were likelier to see degree apprenticeships as a path out of informal work characterised by Nigeria's existing traditional apprenticeship systems. This is a significant highlight of degree apprenticeships' potential to address youth unemployment and the problem of underemployment in Nigeria.

Gender inclusivity and resilience: There was a statistically significant difference in the survey findings between gender and perceptions of the resilience-building benefits of apprenticeships, with a higher percentage of men (85.2%) than women (75.6%) agreeing on both. Gender-specific approaches, including recruitment and mentorship programmes, might be necessary to ensure that women can access these programmes and can realise their benefits, as they are less likely to endorse this benefit.

Organisational capacity: Respondents from the interview revealed that many firms lacked the resources to implement structured apprenticeships. This reinforces the need for policy incentives, funding support, and partnerships between universities and industry to build capacity, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Awareness and stigma: While awareness of degree apprenticeships was relatively high, interviews showed that stigma and misconceptions remain for the traditional apprenticeship system. National awareness campaigns and clear career progression frameworks would help to build trust and change perceptions about the value of apprenticeships through a structured degree apprenticeship.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy Makers and Academia

Qualitative responses support the idea that apprenticeships must be designed explicitly for industry challenges, such as retail technologies and current best practices, to be genuinely effective. The alignment between the quantitative and qualitative data provides complementary insights into stakeholders' perceptions of degree apprenticeships and the conditions that may influence their implementation. The make-up of the participants provides exploratory insights into how respondents view the potential adoption of degree apprenticeships in Nigeria. This is evidenced by the age distribution of respondents. This is heavily concentrated on the youth and young adults, with 82% of the respondents falling between the ages of 26 and 35, and 17% falling within the age bracket of 18 to 25. This age bracket goes well with the research in question. This is because it seeks to find out how degree-oriented youths regard the concept of apprenticeships. Since younger individuals often represent the most active segment of the workforce and are the primary targets for educational and training reforms, this age distribution ensures that the study captures the view

of the key demographic likely to be impacted by such initiatives. Policymakers and educational institutions could use the findings as an initial basis for consulting employers, universities and prospective apprentices about the design of a structured system. Any proposed implementation should be accompanied by evaluation to establish whether it improves skills development, employment pathways or workforce resilience.

Because of the absence of a structured degree apprenticeship in Nigeria, these results may offer practical guidance for building one, starting with firms in the retail value chain. Policymakers need to do more than just design formal structures. They should focus on tackling the negative social perceptions of apprenticeships in Nigeria due to the shortcomings of the traditional apprenticeship system. Policymakers should encourage firms to participate and tailor policies to the needs of different groups:

- Young people want pathways into formal employment.
- Women may need targeted outreach and mentorship, as their agreement on the resilience benefits of apprenticeships was lower than men's.
- Employers and organisations may require the help of a skilled and properly trained labour force to support them in overcoming constraints and ensuring organisational and sector-wide resilience.

Building on the insights gained from this study, future research direction may aim to explore the long-term economic implications of degree apprenticeships, particularly their role in boosting innovation, reducing youth unemployment, and bridging skill gaps in Nigeria's evolving labour market. A multi-study approach incorporating industry-specific and macroeconomic perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how such a system could drive sustainable workforce development and national economic resilience.

In a nutshell, the findings suggest that stakeholders perceive degree apprenticeships as a potentially useful approach to workforce development in Nigeria's retail value chain. By tying the study to the RBV theory, this study shows that degree apprenticeship is not just another training scheme but an effective platform that can help to build strategic human capital. However, this study examined perceptions rather than the outcomes of an established degree apprenticeship. Future research should evaluate pilot programmes using longitudinal data and organisational or employment indicators to determine whether the anticipated benefits translate into measurable outcomes.

7. CONCLUSION

Drawing on participants' responses, degree apprenticeship was viewed largely positively, mainly as a programme that may help rectify skill deficits, equip youths with the necessary skills to transition into formal employment, and build adaptability in the retail value chain's workforce. However, views were not shared across all age and gender groups. There was a statistically significant difference in perceptions, by age and gender, of whether degree apprenticeships could help build workforce resilience. The interviews revealed that the primary barrier to the adoption of such a programme in Nigeria may be a lack of capacity within organisations, especially SMEs.

The findings are exploratory due to the small sample size, diversity in sectors represented and lack of a formal programme for evaluation. They illustrate stakeholders' perceptions of the potential for degree apprenticeships but do not show the impact degree apprenticeships have on operational resilience. This relationship should be explored in the future with larger, retail-specific samples and evidence from operating programmes. Meanwhile, the results provide firms, universities and policymakers with a foundation for developing pilots focused on awareness, incentives and firm capacity.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Lagos Business School does not operate a formal institutional ethics review board for social science survey and interview research of this nature. In the absence of formal committee approval, the study adhered to standard ethical research principles, including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity of responses, and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

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