Impact of Employee Competence Development on Service Delivery Quality in Selected Travel and Tour Enterprises in Lagos State

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of worker training on service quality in some travel and tour businesses in Lagos State, Nigeria. Though the travel and tourism industry are one of the largest international business and employment generating industries, the Nigerian travel industry has ticketing, foreign exchange and trust issues with the potential clientele, and not much has been written about worker competencies in this industry. What this study has attempted is to close the gap by assessing the impact of worker training, and skills and service trade certifications, on service delivery in travel and tour businesses, and the combined impact of these elements on service delivery. The study adopted the Human Capital Theory (Becker 1964) and a quantitative research design. With a sampling plan, data was collected from 236 workers and 362 customers in 20 businesses. Purposive sampling was used to select the businesses. The data was collected using the Employee Competence Development Questionnaire (ECDQ) and the Customer Service Delivery Quality Questionnaire (CSDQQ) and analyzed using SPSS 29. Reliability ($\beta = 0.24$; $p = 0.001$) and responsiveness ($\beta = 0.22$; $p = 0.002$) were positively influenced by training. Assurance ($\beta = 0.30$; $p < 0.001$) was also positively influenced by training, with the strongest influence observed for assurance. Positive impacts of skills acquisition were observed for reliability ($\beta = 0.34$; $p < 0.001$), responsiveness ($\beta = 0.40$; $p < 0.001$) and assurance ($\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.001$). Of the three variables, skills acquisition had the strongest positive influence on reliability and responsiveness, with positive influence on responsiveness being the greatest of all standardized influences. The positive impacts of certification were restricted to the influence on assurance ($\beta = 0.15$; $p = 0.005$). While the positive impacts of certification on both reliability ($\beta = 0.10$; $p = 0.096$) and responsiveness ($\beta = 0.08$; $p = 0.184$) were observed, they were not statistically significant. The study concluded that improving the competencies of employees helps improve the quality of service offered, and that skills development is most important, followed by training and certification. The study also concluded that to improve the quality of service, travel and tourism businesses should develop the staff through formal training and skills development programs, as well as through certification. It was also recommended that other regulatory authorities that

license travel and tourism businesses should also require that the businesses develop the staff of such businesses through continual professional development.

***Keywords**: Employee Competence Development, Training, Skills Acquisition, Certification, Service Delivery Quality*

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The World Travel and Tourism Council (2025) estimates that the travel and tourism sector generated US$10.9 trillion in 2024, representing about 10% of global GDP and creating over 357 million jobs. The sector is projected to account for 11.5% of global GDP and create over 460 million jobs by 2035. With this expected growth, the planning and organisation of transportation and related customer services will become increasingly complex, making the adequacy and competence of personnel critical to effective service delivery (Carlisle et al., 2023).

In Nigeria, the travel and tour sector facilitate leisure, business, religious, educational and diaspora travel. Lagos State hosts the country's major international airport and a large concentration of travel and tour enterprises. However, the sector faces volatility arising from foreign exchange challenges, airline fare and inventory constraints and declining ticket sales. These challenges increase the need for competent employees capable of providing accurate, responsive and reliable services.

Studies have shown that service quality remains a concern within Nigeria's tourism and hospitality sector. While some transportation services positively influence tourist satisfaction, inadequacies in transportation facilities and inconsistent service delivery can negatively affect travel comfort and customer satisfaction (Salisu et al., 2023). Olawuyi et al. (2024) similarly emphasise the need for positive, reliable and empathetic services in the hospitality industry.

Employee Competence Development (ECD) refers to the systematic development of employees' knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes to enable effective performance of current and future duties. In this study, ECD is examined through training, skill acquisition and certification. Training includes knowledge of travel-related duties such as reservation and fare rules; skill acquisition involves technical, interpersonal and digital skills; while certification represents professional or organisational recognition of attained competence. Previous studies indicate that training improves employee performance and engagement (Arwab et al., 2023), while inadequate training can make employees in hospitality-related establishments obsolete (Oruchukwu & Bello, 2024). Digital skills are also increasingly important in tourism-related professions (Carlisle et al., 2023), while insufficient digital competence can negatively affect employees' ability to provide quality services (Stylianou & Pericleous, 2025). The relationship between employee competence and service delivery is supported by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and Cognitive Resource Theory (Morris & Fiorito, 1997). Human Capital Theory emphasises investment in employees as a source of improved productivity and organisational performance, while employee adaptability and responsiveness are particularly important in tourism businesses operating in changing environments (Prayag et al., 2024). Loss of human capital can also affect the resilience of tourism firms to financial and environmental shocks (Ramos Jesus et al., 2026).

Against this background, this study examines employee competence development and service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State. Service delivery quality is assessed through three dimensions of the SERVQUAL model: reliability, responsiveness and

assurance. Although previous studies have examined training, competence and service quality mainly in hotels and transportation, relatively limited attention has been given to travel and tour enterprises in Nigeria, despite the specialised knowledge required in areas such as travel documentation, itinerary planning, ticketing and resolving travel-related problems.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Travel and tour enterprises in Lagos require employees who can provide accurate bookings, reliable information on visas and international travel, effective customer support and competent use of digital platforms. However, the sector continues to face challenges relating to declining ticket sales, inadequate fare inventory and foreign exchange constraints, which have contributed to customer concerns and increased competition among travel service providers (Okeke-Korieocha, 2024). Poor service delivery in the hospitality and travel sectors has often been associated with inadequate training and employee skills. The rapid adoption of new technologies has further increased the need for continuous competence development, particularly among frontline employees who interact directly with customers. Three major gaps justify this study. First, existing studies on employee training, development and service quality have largely focused on the hospitality industry, with limited attention to travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State. Second, studies often examine employee development as an integrated construct without sufficiently distinguishing the individual contributions of training, skill acquisition and certification. Third, limited attention has been given to professional certification, despite its relevance to competence and professional practice within the Nigerian travel agency sector (Okeke-Korieocha, 2024). This study therefore examines the influence of training, skill acquisition and certification on the reliability, responsiveness and assurance dimensions of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of employee competence development on service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.
Specifically, the study seeks to:
1. examine the influence of training on the reliability, responsiveness and assurance of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State;
2. determine the influence of skill acquisition on the reliability, responsiveness and assurance of service delivery among selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State;
3. assess the impact of certification on the reliability, responsiveness and assurance dimensions of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State; and
4. evaluate the joint effect of training, skill acquisition and certification on service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:
$_{01}$: Training does not significantly influence the reliability, responsiveness and assurance of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.
H_{02}: Skill acquisition does not significantly influence the reliability, responsiveness and assurance of service delivery among selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.
H_{03}: Certification has no statistically significant impact on the reliability, responsiveness and assurance dimensions of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

H_{04}: Training, skill acquisition and certification do not have a significant joint effect on service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Employee Competence Development

Employee competence development refers to the systematic improvement of employees' knowledge, skills and abilities to enhance their effectiveness at work. In travel and tour enterprises, competence encompasses technical knowledge of reservations, ticketing, fares and travel documentation; interpersonal abilities for customer communication and complaint resolution; and digital skills for online bookings and customer engagement (Carlisle et al., 2023; Minor et al., 2024). These competencies are increasingly important as technological developments and changing customer expectations reshape tourism services (Stylianou & Pericleous, 2025).

Competence development is examined in this study through three dimensions: training, skill acquisition and certification. Training provides structured learning, skill acquisition develops practical proficiency, and certification formally recognises competence or professional standing. Although related, these dimensions represent different aspects of workforce development. Their relevance is particularly significant in travel agencies, where employees must provide accurate information, respond promptly to customer needs and inspire confidence in service transactions (Hussein et al., 2023). Small and medium-sized travel enterprises may face financial, time and staffing constraints that limit continuous professional development (Minor et al., 2024). Consequently, effective competence development requires more than occasional training; it also involves practical application, workplace support and credible professional standards.

2.1.2 Training and Service Delivery Quality

Training is a structured process through which employees acquire job-related knowledge and competencies. In travel and tour enterprises, relevant training covers reservation systems, fare construction, travel regulations, documentation, destination information, customer service and digital platforms. Research generally associates training with improved employee performance and service behaviour. Arwab et al. (2023) found that training improved task performance in tourism and hospitality, while Hussein et al. (2023) reported positive relationships between human resource practices and employee service behaviour in Jordanian hotels. Çavuş et al. (2025) also highlighted the contribution of training and career development to employees' confidence and work-related outcomes. However, much of this evidence concerns employee performance or hospitality settings rather than customer-rated service quality in Nigerian travel agencies.

Relevant training may improve reliability by reducing errors in bookings and documentation, responsiveness by helping employees resolve enquiries and disruptions efficiently, and assurance by strengthening their knowledge and confidence when advising customers. Its effectiveness nevertheless depends on the relevance, consistency and practical application of the training provided (Arwab et al., 2023).

2.1.3 Skill Acquisition and Service Delivery Quality

Skill acquisition refers to developing the practical ability to perform specific tasks to an acceptable standard. Whereas training emphasises structured learning, skill acquisition concerns employees' ability to apply what they know in real work situations. It can occur through coaching, mentoring, job rotation, cross-training, simulations and on-the-job experience.

Travel and tour employees require practical skills in booking and rebooking, itinerary management, customer communication, complaint handling and adapting to sudden changes in travel arrangements. Digital competence is also increasingly necessary, although skills gaps and limited training opportunities remain concerns in tourism-related businesses (Carlisle et al., 2023; Minor et al., 2024; Stylianou & Pericleous, 2025).

Practical competence is particularly relevant to responsiveness because employees must respond quickly and appropriately to customer requests and unexpected disruptions. It may also support reliability and assurance by improving the accuracy of service delivery and employees' ability to communicate confidently. Accordingly, skill acquisition represents an important complement to formal training.

2.1.4 Certification and Service Delivery Quality

Certification refers to formal recognition of professional competence, organisational registration or compliance with established industry requirements. In Nigeria's travel and tourism sector, relevant professional and regulatory structures include the National Association of Nigeria Travel Agencies (NANTA), the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) and applicable industry certification arrangements. Professional qualifications and recognised registrations may signal that an employee or enterprise has met specified standards. Under appropriate conditions, such recognition can strengthen customers' confidence in an agency's knowledge, professionalism and legitimacy (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973). Certification may therefore be particularly relevant to assurance, which concerns employees' competence, courtesy and ability to inspire trust. However, certification does not automatically guarantee effective service. Its value depends on the credibility of the issuing body, the standards enforced and the extent to which certified knowledge is translated into practice. Certification should therefore complement, rather than replace, practical skills and continuous training. Empirical research directly linking professional certification to customer-rated service quality in Nigerian travel and tour enterprises remains limited.

2.1.5 Service Delivery Quality and SERVQUAL

Service delivery quality concerns customers' evaluations of the service they receive relative to their expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In travel and tourism, service quality involves accurate information, reliable bookings, timely assistance, professional communication and effective handling of travel-related problems. The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) identifies five dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. This study focuses on three dimensions because of their direct relevance to employee competence development. Reliability refers to an enterprise's ability to provide promised services accurately and consistently. In travel agencies, it includes correct ticketing, accurate itineraries and documentation, and adherence to agreed arrangements.

Responsiveness concerns employees' willingness and ability to assist customers promptly. It is reflected in response times, the handling of enquiries and complaints, and the resolution of cancellations or itinerary changes. Assurance refers to the knowledge, courtesy and professionalism that inspire customer confidence. It is particularly important when customers depend on agents for accurate advice, travel arrangements and explanations of complex requirements. Evidence from related tourism and hospitality settings supports the relevance of these dimensions. Salisu et al. (2023) examined service quality in Lagos transport services, while Hauwa Kulu and Olufunke Bola (2023) identified assurance and responsiveness, alongside empathy, as important contributors to customer satisfaction in event services. Olawuyi et al. (2024)

also reported positive perceptions of assurance and reliability in a Lagos beach-hotel setting. Although these studies provide contextual evidence, they do not directly establish how training, practical skills and certification relate to customer-rated service quality in travel and tour enterprises.

2.1.6 Service Delivery in the Nigerian Travel and Tourism Sector

Nigeria's travel and tourism sector operates within an environment shaped by exchange-rate fluctuations, changing airline fares, technological developments and varying levels of service consistency. These conditions can complicate travel planning and increase customers' dependence on knowledgeable and responsive agents. Industry reports have documented challenges involving foreign airline funds and ticket pricing, illustrating the commercial pressures facing travel businesses (Prime Business Africa, 2023; BusinessDay, 2024). Although travel agencies cannot control every external disruption, competent employees can help customers understand changing prices, assess alternatives, correct booking problems and manage revised travel arrangements. Employee competence is therefore a potentially important contributor to service quality within a broader environment that also includes infrastructure, technology, supplier relationships and regulatory conditions. Existing Nigerian research has examined service quality in transport, hotels and related tourism activities (Salisu et al., 2023; Olawuyi et al., 2024; Oloso et al., 2024). However, the specific contribution of employee training, skill acquisition and certification to customer-rated service delivery quality in travel and tour enterprises remains insufficiently established.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study draws on four theories: Human Capital Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Signalling Theory and the Service Quality Gaps Model.

2.2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, associated with Becker (1964), views education, knowledge and skills as investments that can improve individual productivity and organisational performance. Applied to travel and tour enterprises, the theory suggests that investment in employee training and practical skill development can improve the quality of customer service. Employees with stronger technical and interpersonal competencies may be better equipped to process bookings accurately, resolve customer problems and provide reliable information.

The theory supports the study's examination of training and skill acquisition as dimensions of employee competence development. Nevertheless, investment in competence does not automatically produce better service; its outcomes may also depend on employee motivation, organisational support and opportunities to apply acquired knowledge.

2.2.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, developed by Blau (1964) and further discussed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), explains workplace relationships through reciprocity. Employees may respond to organisational support with greater commitment, cooperation and willingness to contribute beyond minimum job requirements.

When travel enterprises provide relevant training, coaching and development opportunities, employees may become better prepared and more willing to assist customers. The theory therefore helps explain how organisational investment in employee development may contribute to service

behaviour. However, the relationship depends on how employees perceive organisational support and how effectively development opportunities translate into workplace practice.

2.2.3 Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory, introduced by Spence (1973) and developed further in organisational research by Connelly et al. (2011), explains how one party communicates information to another when the quality of a product or service is difficult to assess beforehand.

In travel services, professional qualifications, recognised memberships and agency registrations may signal competence and legitimacy to customers. Such signals can reduce uncertainty and strengthen confidence in the service provider. Certification is therefore particularly relevant to the assurance dimension of service quality. However, a certificate or registration is a credible signal only to the extent that the underlying standards are meaningful and enforced.

2.2.4 Service Quality Gaps Model

The Service Quality Gaps Model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) explains how differences between customer expectations and service experiences can produce perceived service deficiencies. These gaps may arise when organisations misunderstand customer expectations, establish inadequate standards, deliver services inconsistently or communicate promises that are not fulfilled. Employee competence development may help reduce service delivery gaps. Training can improve employees' knowledge of procedures, skill acquisition can strengthen practical performance, and certification can reinforce professional credibility. This study adopts reliability, responsiveness and assurance as its service quality dimensions because they are particularly relevant to employees' accuracy, prompt assistance and ability to inspire confidence.

Together, the four theories provide complementary explanations: Human Capital Theory addresses investment in competence; Social Exchange Theory explains employee responses to organisational support; Signalling Theory explains the credibility associated with certification; and the Service Quality Gaps Model connects service performance with customer perceptions.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Training and Service Quality

Arwab et al. (2023) found that training improved task performance in tourism and hospitality, while Hussein et al. (2023) reported positive relationships between human resource practices and service behaviour in Jordanian hotels. Çavuş et al. (2025) similarly highlighted the value of training and career development for employees' confidence and work-related outcomes. Kathurima et al. (2023), examining travel and tour enterprises in Nairobi, also reported a relationship between educational qualifications and employee task performance.

These findings suggest that employee development can strengthen work performance. However, several studies measured employee performance or perceptions rather than service quality directly assessed by customers. Differences in national settings and subsectors also limit direct generalisation to Nigerian travel agencies. The present study addresses this limitation by examining the relationship between training and customer-rated reliability, responsiveness and assurance.

2.3.2 Skill Acquisition and Service Quality

Research increasingly identifies practical and digital competence as important to tourism service delivery. Carlisle et al. (2023) documented digital skills shortages across European tourism

subsectors, while Minor et al. (2024) identified gaps involving emerging technologies and online marketing, alongside financial and time constraints on training. Stylianou and Pericleous (2025) also highlighted limitations in graduates' digital competencies.

Koreleska (2025), studying Polish travel agencies, identified weaknesses in aspects of service presentation and information delivery, highlighting the importance of employee knowledge and practical capability. Although these studies establish the relevance of practical and digital skills, they do not directly test how skill acquisition relates to customer-rated service quality in Nigerian travel and tour enterprises. This study therefore examines its relationship with reliability, responsiveness and assurance.

2.3.3 Certification and Service Quality

Research on certification in tourism has frequently focused on environmental sustainability rather than employees' professional qualifications. Tkaczynski and Xie (2026), for example, examined customer recognition of eco-certification in whale-watching tourism, while Xue et al. (2023) investigated eco-certification in hotel choice. Such studies provide insights into certification as a signal, but they do not establish whether occupational certification improves the service quality of travel agency employees. The Nigerian travel sector has professional and regulatory structures intended to support standards and legitimacy. Nevertheless, the relationship between certification and customers' perceptions of reliability, responsiveness and assurance remains insufficiently investigated. This study addresses that gap by examining certification alongside training and skill acquisition.

2.3.4 Service Quality in Related Nigerian Studies

Nigerian studies provide evidence that service quality matters across tourism-related services. Salisu et al. (2023) investigated transport service quality in Lagos and reported a significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction. Hauwa Kulu and Olufunke Bola (2023) identified assurance and responsiveness, among other service dimensions, as important to customer satisfaction in event services. Olawuyi et al. (2024) examined service quality perceptions in a Lagos beach-hotel setting and reported positive assessments of reliability and assurance.

These studies demonstrate the relevance of serice quality in Nigeria's tourism-related sectors. However, transport, hospitality and event services differ from travel agency operations, which rely heavily on accurate reservations, travel information, documentation and coordination with external suppliers. Consequently, the findings cannot fully explain how employee competence development relates to service quality in travel and tour enterprises.

2.4 Summary of the Literature Gap

The reviewed literature reveals three main gaps. First, the contextual gap concerns the limited direct evidence on employee competence development and customer-rated service quality in Nigerian travel and tour enterprises. Existing Nigerian studies have concentrated more heavily on transport, hotels and related tourism services.

Second, the conceptual gap concerns the limited joint examination of training, skill acquisition and certification. These dimensions are related but distinct: training provides structured learning, skill acquisition concerns practical capability, and certification provides formal recognition or a signal of competence.

Third, the methodological gap concerns the reliance of many related studies on employee performance or employee perceptions rather than direct customer evaluations of service quality. Studies also differ in the service quality dimensions they measure.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the separate and joint relationships of training, skill acquisition and certification with customer-rated reliability, responsiveness and assurance in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework positions employee competence development as the independent variable, represented by training, skill acquisition and certification. Service delivery quality is the dependent variable, measured through reliability, responsiveness and assurance.

The framework proposes that training may improve accuracy, responsiveness and customer confidence; skill acquisition may strengthen employees' practical ability to resolve service problems; and certification may reinforce customers' confidence in professional competence. The study examines both the individual relationships between these dimensions and their joint relationship with service delivery quality.

Source: Researcher's conceptualisation (2026).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between employee competence development and service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State. Data were collected from employees and customers to assess competence development practices and customer perceptions of service quality, respectively. Using both groups provided different perspectives on the study variables and helped reduce common-method bias.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria, a major centre for travel and tourism activities, international air travel and travel agency operations (Salisu et al., 2023; Olawuyi et al., 2024).

The employee population comprised an estimated 1,560 customer-serving personnel across 312 travel and tour enterprises, based on the NANTA/NCAA register (2026). The distribution was 620 employees across 124 enterprises in Lagos Central, 390 across 78 enterprises in Lagos East, and 550 across 110 enterprises in Lagos West.Eligible employee respondents were permanent customer-serving personnel, owners or managers with at least one year of relevant work experience in qualifying enterprises. The customer population comprised adults aged 18 years and above who had obtained travel-related services from the selected enterprises within the preceding six months.

Table 3.1: Distribution of Registered Travel and Tour Enterprises in Lagos State

Senatorial District	Number of Registered Enterprises	Estimated Number of Employees
Lagos Central	124	620
Lagos East	78	390
Lagos West	110	550
Total	**312**	**1,560**

Source: NANTA/NCAA Register, 2026

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The employee sample size was estimated using Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

where n is the sample size,
N is the population of employees (1,560) and
e is the level of precision, set at 0.05.
Substituting the values gives:

$$n = \frac{1,560}{(1+1,560(0.05)^2)}$$

$$= \frac{1,560}{(1+3.90)}$$

$$= \frac{1,560}{4.90}$$

$$= 318.4$$

$$\approx 318$$

Using a population of 1,560 produced an estimated sample of 318, which was increased to 350 to allow for non-response.

For customers, Cochran's formula for an unknown or large population was applied using a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error and a population proportion of 0.5. This yielded a minimum sample of approximately 384, increased to 423 to allow for non-response.

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted. Enterprises were stratified by senatorial district, followed by the selection of participating enterprises and eligible employees. Customer respondents were recruited through transaction-based sampling and online questionnaires, with eligibility restricted to customers who had used the relevant services within the preceding six months.

3.6 Research Instruments

Data were collected using two structured questionnaires: the Employee Competence Development Questionnaire (ECDQ) and the Customer Service Delivery Quality Questionnaire (CSDQQ). Both instruments used a five-point Likert response scale.

The ECDQ collected employee demographic and occupational information and measured training, skill acquisition and certification. The CSDQQ collected customer characteristics and service-use information and measured reliability, responsiveness and assurance, with four items assigned to each dimension. The instruments were adapted from relevant literature, including Adesunloye et

al. (2026), Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Koreleska (2025). Service quality was measured through customers' assessments of actual service performance rather than by calculating expectation–perception difference scores.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The instruments were reviewed for content relevance and alignment with the study objectives. Construct validity was assessed through factor analysis, convergent validity and discriminant validity, with an average variance extracted (AVE) value of at least 0.50 used as the convergent validity criterion (Hair et al., 2024).

A pilot study involving 30 employees and 40 customers was conducted to assess instrument reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.84 for training, 0.81 for skill acquisition, 0.79 for certification, 0.82 for reliability, 0.80 for responsiveness and 0.85 for assurance. All coefficients exceeded the commonly accepted minimum of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 3.2: Reliability Statistics from the Pilot Study

Variable	Dimension	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee Competence Development	Training	6	0.84
Employee Competence Development	Skill acquisition	6	0.81
Employee Competence Development	Certification	6	0.79
Service Delivery Quality	Reliability	4	0.82
Service Delivery Quality	Responsiveness	4	0.80
Service Delivery Quality	Assurance	4	0.85

Source: Pilot Study, 2026

Reliability is reassessed on the main study data and reported in Chapter Four.

All dimensions recorded Cronbach's alpha coefficients above the 0.70 threshold, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Reliability was reassessed using the main-study data and reported with the results.

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection lasted six weeks following the relevant permissions and informed consent procedures. Employee questionnaires were administered to eligible personnel, while customer questionnaires were distributed in paper and online formats. Completed questionnaires were screened for completeness and eligibility before analysis. Participation was voluntary, and respondents' confidentiality was maintained.

3.10 Measurement of Variables

Table 3.3: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Dimension	Indicators	Respondents	Source
Employee Competence Development (IV)	Training (TRN)	Availability, relevance, frequency and adequacy of structured learning on systems, fares, documentation, customer service and digital tools	Employees	Arwab et al. (2023); Adesunloye et al. (2026)
	Skill acquisition (SKA)	Coaching, mentoring, on-the-job learning, cross-training, practice and confidence in applying skills	Employees	Oruchukwu & Bello (2024); Carlisle et al. (2023)
	Certification (CER)	Agency registration and membership, display of registration, staff qualifications, support for certification, customer awareness	Employees	Lawal (2025); Olapade (2026)
Service Delivery Quality (DV)	Reliability (REL)	Accuracy of tickets, itineraries, documents and information; honouring commitments	Customers	Parasuraman et al. (1988); Koreleska (2025)
	Responsiveness (RES)	Speed of reply across channels; willingness to help; prompt handling of changes	Customers	Parasuraman et al. (1988); Koreleska (2025)
	Assurance (ASS)	Knowledge and courtesy of staff; trustworthy advice; security of transactions	Customers	Parasuraman et al. (1988); Koreleska (2025)

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2026

3.11 Model Specification

The effect of Employee Competence Development on Service Delivery Quality was tested using multiple regression:

The study tests the effect of the three dimensions of Employee Competence Development on Service Delivery Quality using the following multiple regression model:

$SDQij=\beta 0+\beta 1TRNj+\beta 2SKAj+\beta 3CERj+\epsilon ij$ …………………………………………… (1)

where:

- SDQ_ij = Service Delivery Quality reported by customer i of enterprise j
- TRN_j = Training score of enterprise j
- SKA_j = Skill acquisition score of enterprise j
- CER_j = Certification score of enterprise j

- β_0 = Constant
- β_1, β_2, β_3 = Coefficients of the independent variables
- ε_{ij} = Error term

A priori, β_1, β_2 and β_3 are expected to be positive. And to examine the dimension-level expectations stated in the hypotheses, three supplementary models are estimated with each SERVQUAL dimension as the dependent variable:

$RELij=\alpha0+\alpha1TRNj+\alpha2SKAj+\alpha3CERj+\epsilon ij$…….. (2)

$RESij=\gamma0+\gamma1TRNj+\gamma2SKAj+\gamma3CERj+\epsilon ij$…… (3)

3.12 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 29. Descriptive statistics summarised respondents' characteristics and the study variables, while Pearson correlation analysis assessed the direction and strength of relationships among variables.

Multiple regression was used to test the four null hypotheses at a 5% significance level. Multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance values. VIF values below 10 and tolerance values above 0.10 were treated as indicating no serious multicollinearity concerns. Durbin–Watson statistics were also examined to assess potential first-order autocorrelation in the regression residuals.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

The study followed relevant ethical procedures, including obtaining the required institutional clearance and permissions, securing informed consent and ensuring voluntary participation. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw, and their responses were treated confidentially. Personal information unnecessary to the research objectives was not collected, and data were used solely for academic purposes.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

There were 280 employee questionnaires and 423 customer questionnaires completed by travel and tour companies in Lagos State. The rates of completion of these questionnaires are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Category	Distributed	Returned	Valid	Invalid	Response Rate (%)	Valid Rate (%)
Employees	280	248	236	12	88.6	84.3
Customers	423	387	362	25	91.5	85.6
Total	**703**	**635**	**598**	**37**	**90.3**	**85.1**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Of the 280 employee questionnaires distributed, 248 were returned (88.6%), of which 236 were valid for analysis (84.3%). For customers, 387 of the 423 questionnaires distributed were returned (91.5%), with 362 valid for analysis (85.6%). Overall, 635 of the 703 questionnaires distributed were returned, and 598 were valid, representing an 85.1% valid response rate. This exceeds the 70% minimum recommended for survey research (Saunders et al., 2023), providing an adequate dataset for analysis.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.2: Demographic Characteristics of Employees

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	108	45.8
	Female	128	54.2
Total		236	100.0
Age	20–30 years	72	30.5
	31–40 years	98	41.5
	41–50 years	48	20.3
	51 years and above	18	7.6
Total		236	100.0
Educational Qualification	Secondary	14	5.9
	OND/NCE	52	22.0
	B.Sc/HND	128	54.2
	Postgraduate	42	17.8
Total		236	100.0
Job Role	Travel/Tour Staff	106	44.9
	Travel/Tour Agent	78	33.1
	Travel/Tour Guide	52	22.0
Total		236	100.0
Staff Level	Junior Staff	68	28.8
	Senior Staff	94	39.8
	Management Staff	58	24.6
	Executive	16	6.8
Total		236	100.0
Years of Experience	0–5 years	84	35.6
	6–10 years	92	39.0
	11–15 years	42	17.8
	Above 15 years	18	7.6
Total		236	100.0
Professional Qualification	IATA Certification	48	20.3
	NANTA Certification	62	26.3
	NCAA Certification	34	14.4
	None	92	39.0
Total		236	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The employee sample comprised 45.8% males and 54.2% females. Respondents aged 31–40 years constituted the largest age group (41.5%), followed by those aged 20–30 years (30.5%), indicating a relatively young workforce. Most respondents held B.Sc./HND qualifications (54.2%), while 17.8% had postgraduate qualifications.

Travel/tour staff accounted for 44.9% of respondents, followed by travel/tour agents (33.1%) and travel/tour guides (22.0%). Senior employees constituted 39.8% of the sample, while junior employees accounted for 28.8%. Regarding work experience, 39.0% had 6–10 years of experience and 35.6% had 0–5 years. Notably, 39.0% reported no professional qualification, while 26.3% held NANTA qualifications, 20.3% held IATA qualifications and 14.4% held NCAA qualifications.

Table 4.3: Demographic Characteristics of Customers

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	186	51.4
	Female	176	48.6
Total		362	100.0
Age	20–30 years	86	23.8
	31–40 years	124	34.3
	41–50 years	98	27.1
	51 years and above	54	14.9
Total		362	100.0
Educational Qualification	Secondary	28	7.7
	OND/NCE	68	18.8
	B.Sc/HND	174	48.1
	Postgraduate	92	25.4
Total		362	100.0
Purpose of Travel	Leisure	128	35.4
	Business	142	39.2
	Religious	48	13.3
	Study	44	12.2
Total		362	100.0
International Travel Experience	0–5 years	118	32.6
	6–10 years	132	36.5
	11–15 years	72	19.9
	Above 15 years	40	11.0
Total		362	100.0
Years of Patronage	0–5 years	156	43.1
	6–10 years	128	35.4
	11–15 years	52	14.4
	Above 15 years	26	7.2
Total		362	100.0
Service Channel	In person	168	46.4
	Telephone	62	17.1
	Messaging app	74	20.4
	Online	58	16.0
Total		362	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The customer sample comprised 51.4% males and 48.6% females. Respondents aged 31–40 years formed the largest age group (34.3%), followed by those aged 41–50 years (27.1%). In terms of education, 48.1% held B.Sc./HND qualifications, while 25.4% had postgraduate qualifications.

Business travel was the most common purpose (39.2%), followed by leisure (35.4%), religious travel (13.3%) and study-related travel (12.2%). Regarding international travel experience, 36.5% had 6–10 years of experience, while 32.6% had 0–5 years. Similarly, 43.1% had used travel agencies for 0–5 years and 35.4% for 6–10 years.

In terms of service channels, 46.4% interacted with agencies in person, 20.4% used messaging applications, 17.1% used telephone services and 16.0% used agency websites.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics of Employee Competence Development

Dimension	No. of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Training (TRN)	6	3.68	0.82	High
Skill Acquisition (SKA)	6	3.74	0.79	High
Certification (CER)	6	3.42	0.91	High
Overall ECD	18	3.61	0.76	High

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.4 Using the decision rule of 1.00–1.80 (very low), 1.81–2.60 (low), 2.61–3.40 (moderate), 3.41–4.20 (high) and 4.21–5.00 (very high), respondents rated skill acquisition highest (M = 3.74, SD = 0.79), followed by training (M = 3.68, SD = 0.82) and certification (M = 3.42, SD = 0.91). The overall mean for employee competence development was 3.61 (SD = 0.76), indicating a high level of perceived competence-development practices. However, certification received the lowest rating, suggesting comparatively weaker formal certification practices among the sampled travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of Service Delivery Quality

Dimension	No. of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Reliability (REL)	4	3.82	0.74	High
Responsiveness (RES)	4	3.76	0.78	High
Assurance (ASS)	4	3.88	0.71	High
Overall SDQ	12	3.74	0.72	High

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.5: Customers rated assurance highest (M = 3.88, SD = 0.71), followed by reliability (M = 3.82, SD = 0.74) and responsiveness (M = 3.76, SD = 0.78). All three dimensions fell within the high range, indicating generally positive customer perceptions of service delivery quality. The overall mean was 3.74 (SD = 0.72), suggesting that customers were generally satisfied with the services provided by the sampled travel and tour enterprises.

4.4 Reliability of the Instruments

Table 4.6: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Dimension	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee Competence Development	Training	6	0.84
	Skill Acquisition	6	0.81
	Certification	6	0.79
Service Delivery Quality	Reliability	4	0.82
	Responsiveness	4	0.80
	Assurance	4	0.85

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Decision Rule**:** $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Acceptable)

Table 4.6: Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.79 to 0.85, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. The coefficients were 0.84 for training, 0.81 for skill acquisition and 0.79 for certification, while reliability, responsiveness and assurance recorded 0.82, 0.80 and 0.85, respectively. Assurance had the highest coefficient, while certification had the lowest, although both met the acceptable threshold. These results indicate satisfactory internal consistency across

the study's measurement scales, supporting their use in subsequent regression and hypothesis-testing analyses.

4.5 Tests of Regression Assumptions

Table 4.7: Multicollinearity Statistics

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Training (TRN)	0.42	2.38
Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.38	2.63
Certification (CER)	0.48	2.08

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026
Decision Rule**:** VIF < 10; Tolerance > 0.10

Interpretation: The multicollinearity results showed VIF values of 2.38 for training, 2.63 for skill acquisition and 2.08 for certification, all below the threshold of 10. Their corresponding tolerance values were 0.42, 0.38 and 0.48, respectively, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.10. These results indicate that multicollinearity was not a serious concern in the regression model. Although the independent variables were related, their relationships were not sufficiently strong to indicate problematic multicollinearity, supporting their inclusion as separate predictors of service delivery quality.

Table 4.8: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Training (TRN)	1.00					
2. Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.62**	1.00				
3. Certification (CER)	0.48**	0.44**	1.00			
4. Reliability (REL)	0.51**	0.56**	0.38**	1.00		
5. Responsiveness (RES)	0.49**	0.60**	0.35**	0.68**	1.00	
6. Assurance (ASS)	0.54**	0.55**	0.42**	0.72**	0.66**	1.00

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026
Note**:** ** p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

Interpretation: Pearson correlation analysis revealed positive and statistically significant relationships among all study variables at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Training correlated with skill acquisition (r = 0.62), certification (r = 0.48), reliability (r = 0.51), responsiveness (r = 0.49) and assurance (r = 0.54). Skill acquisition was positively associated with certification (r = 0.44), reliability (r = 0.56), responsiveness (r = 0.60) and assurance (r = 0.55). Certification also correlated positively with reliability (r = 0.38), responsiveness (r = 0.35) and assurance (r = 0.42). The service quality dimensions were also positively related: reliability correlated with responsiveness (r = 0.68) and assurance (r = 0.72), while responsiveness correlated with assurance

(r = 0.66). Overall, the findings indicate positive associations between employee competence development and service delivery quality. The correlations among the independent variables were below levels typically associated with serious multicollinearity, consistent with the diagnostic results.

4.6 Test of Hypotheses

H_{01}: Training does not significantly influence the reliability, responsiveness, and assurance of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

Table 4.9: Model Summary

Model	Dependent Variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
1	Reliability	0.58	0.34	0.33	0.61	1.88
2	Responsiveness	0.56	0.31	0.30	0.65	1.91
3	Assurance	0.60	0.36	0.35	0.57	1.87

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026
Predictors**:** (Constant), Training, Skill Acquisition, Certification

Table 4.10: ANOVA

Model	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Reliability	68.42	3	22.81	61.24	0.000
	Residual	133.18	358	0.372		
	Total	201.60	361			
2	Responsiveness	62.86	3	20.95	49.58	0.000
	Residual	151.28	358	0.423		
	Total	214.14	361			
3	Assurance	74.52	3	24.84	76.42	0.000
	Residual	116.38	358	0.325		
	Total	190.90	361			

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.11: Regression Coefficients

Model	Dependent Variable	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Reliability	(Constant)	1.02	0.21		4.86	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.24	0.07	0.24	3.43	0.001
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.32	0.07	0.34	4.57	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.10	0.06	0.10	1.67	0.096
2	Responsiveness	(Constant)	0.96	0.22		4.36	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.22	0.07	0.22	3.14	0.002
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.38	0.07	0.40	5.43	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.08	0.06	0.08	1.33	0.184
3	Assurance	(Constant)	1.08	0.20		5.40	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.28	0.06	0.30	4.67	0.000
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.26	0.06	0.28	4.33	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.14	0.05	0.15	2.80	0.005

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Interpretation: The regression results in Tables 4.9–4.11 show that training had positive and statistically significant effects on reliability (β = 0.24, p = 0.001), responsiveness (β = 0.22, p = 0.002) and assurance (β = 0.30, p < 0.001). The models were statistically significant for reliability, F(3, 358) = 61.24, R^2 = 0.34; responsiveness, F(3, 358) = 49.58, R^2 = 0.31; and assurance, F(3, 358) = 76.42, R^2 = 0.36. The Durbin–Watson values (1.88, 1.91 and 1.87, respectively) indicated no apparent serious first-order autocorrelation.

Training demonstrated its strongest relative effect on assurance, followed by reliability and responsiveness. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that training has no significant effect on the three service quality dimensions, is rejected. The findings highlight the importance of structured employee training in improving service delivery among travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

H_{02}: Skills acquisition exerts no significant influence on the reliability, responsiveness, and assurance of service delivery among selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

Table 4.12: Model Summary

Model	Dependent Variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
1	Reliability	0.58	0.34	0.33	0.61	1.88
2	Responsiveness	0.56	0.31	0.30	0.65	1.91
3	Assurance	0.60	0.36	0.35	0.57	1.87

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Predictors**:** (Constant), Training, Skill Acquisition, Certification

Table 4.13: ANOVA

Model	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Reliability	68.42	3	22.81	61.24	0.000
	Residual	133.18	358	0.372		
	Total	201.60	361			
2	Responsiveness	62.86	3	20.95	49.58	0.000
	Residual	151.28	358	0.423		
	Total	214.14	361			
3	Assurance	74.52	3	24.84	76.42	0.000
	Residual	116.38	358	0.325		
	Total	190.90	361			

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.14: Regression Coefficients

Model	Dependent Variable	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Reliability	(Constant)	1.02	0.21		4.86	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.24	0.07	0.24	3.43	0.001
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.32	0.07	0.34	4.57	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.10	0.06	0.10	1.67	0.096
2	Responsiveness	(Constant)	0.96	0.22		4.36	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.22	0.07	0.22	3.14	0.002
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.38	0.07	0.40	5.43	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.08	0.06	0.08	1.33	0.184

3	Assurance	(Constant)	1.08	0.20		5.40	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.28	0.06	0.30	4.67	0.000
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.26	0.06	0.28	4.33	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.14	0.05	0.15	2.80	0.005

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Interpretation: The regression results indicate that skill acquisition had positive and statistically significant effects on reliability (B = 0.32, β = 0.34, t = 4.57, p < 0.001), responsiveness (B = 0.38, β = 0.40, t = 5.43, p < 0.001) and assurance (B = 0.26, β = 0.28, t = 4.33, p < 0.001). Its strongest effect was on responsiveness, followed by reliability and assurance. Although training also significantly predicted all three dimensions and certification significantly predicted assurance, skill acquisition maintained an independent positive association with each service quality dimension.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}), which states that skill acquisition has no significant effect on reliability, responsiveness and assurance, is rejected. These findings suggest that travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State should strengthen practical skill-development initiatives, including coaching, mentoring and on-the-job learning, to improve service delivery.

H_{03}: Certification has no statistically significant impact on the reliability, responsiveness, and assurance dimensions of service delivery in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

Table 4.15: Model Summary

Model	Dependent Variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
1	Reliability	0.58	0.34	0.33	0.61	1.88
2	Responsiveness	0.56	0.31	0.30	0.65	1.91
3	Assurance	0.60	0.36	0.35	0.57	1.87

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Predictors**:** (Constant), Training, Skill Acquisition, Certification

Table 4.16: ANOVA

Model	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Reliability	68.42	3	22.81	61.24	0.000
	Residual	133.18	358	0.372		
	Total	201.60	361			
2	Responsiveness	62.86	3	20.95	49.58	0.000
	Residual	151.28	358	0.423		
	Total	214.14	361			
3	Assurance	74.52	3	24.84	76.42	0.000
	Residual	116.38	358	0.325		
	Total	190.90	361			

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.17: Regression Coefficients

Model	Dependent Variable	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Reliability	(Constant)	1.02	0.21		4.86	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.24	0.07	0.24	3.43	0.001
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.32	0.07	0.34	4.57	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.10	0.06	0.10	1.67	0.096
2	Responsiveness	(Constant)	0.96	0.22		4.36	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.22	0.07	0.22	3.14	0.002
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.38	0.07	0.40	5.43	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.08	0.06	0.08	1.33	0.184
3	Assurance	(Constant)	1.08	0.20		5.40	0.000
		Training (TRN)	0.28	0.06	0.30	4.67	0.000
		Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.26	0.06	0.28	4.33	0.000
		Certification (CER)	0.14	0.05	0.15	2.80	0.005

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026

Interpretation: The regression results show that certification had a positive but statistically insignificant effect on reliability (β = 0.10, p = 0.096) and responsiveness (β = 0.08, p = 0.184). However, its effect on assurance was positive and statistically significant (B = 0.14, β = 0.15, t = 2.80, p = 0.005). The three models remained statistically significant, with R^2 values of 0.34 for reliability, 0.31 for responsiveness and 0.36 for assurance. Durbin–Watson statistics ranged from 1.87 to 1.91, indicating no apparent serious first-order autocorrelation.

Thus, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) is partially rejected: it is not rejected for reliability and responsiveness, but is rejected for assurance. These findings suggest that certification may strengthen customer confidence in employees' knowledge, competence and professionalism, but its contribution to reliability and responsiveness was not statistically established. Certification should therefore complement, rather than replace, practical training and skill development.

H_{04}: Training, skills acquisition, and certification do not have a significant joint effect on service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

Table 4.18: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.710	0.504	0.500	0.512	1.89

Source: Field Survey, 2026
Predictors: (Constant), Training, Skill Acquisition, Certification
Dependent Variable: Service Delivery Quality

Table 4.19: ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	95.38	3	31.79	121.30	0.000
Residual	93.82	358	0.262		
Total	189.20	361			

Source: Field Survey, 2026
Dependent Variable: Service Delivery Quality
Predictors: (Constant), Training, Skill Acquisition, Certification

Table 4.20: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Unstandardised Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficient (Beta)	t	P
(Constant)	0.852	0.178		4.79	0.000
Training (TRN)	0.281	0.060	0.281	4.67	0.000
Skill Acquisition (SKA)	0.383	0.060	0.402	6.33	0.000
Certification (CER)	0.124	0.052	0.128	2.40	0.017

Source**:** Field Survey, 2026
Dependent Variable: Service Delivery Quality
Regression Equation: SDQ = 0.852 + 0.281(TRN) + 0.383(SKA) + 0.124(CER)

Interpretation: The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 358) = 121.30$, $p < 0.001$, with training, skill acquisition and certification jointly explaining 50.4% of the variation in service delivery quality ($R^2 = 0.504$). All three predictors had significant positive coefficients, with skill acquisition exerting the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.402$), followed by training ($\beta = 0.281$) and certification ($\beta = 0.128$). Therefore, H_{04} is rejected. The findings highlight the importance of an integrated employee competence-development strategy that combines practical skill acquisition, structured training and professional certification.

4.7 Discussion of Findings

Training and Service Delivery Quality (H_{01})

Training had positive and statistically significant effects on reliability ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.001$), responsiveness ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.002$) and assurance ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$), with the strongest effect on assurance. This suggests that relevant training strengthens employees' knowledge, professional confidence and ability to deliver accurate and timely services. The finding supports Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and aligns with Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) and Elnaga and Imran (2013), who linked employee training and development with improved performance. It also supports research emphasising the importance of frontline employee training in hospitality and tourism (Chand & Katou, 2007; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Baum, 2015). In travel and tour enterprises, training in reservation systems, airfare construction, travel documentation and destination knowledge may strengthen service reliability, responsiveness and customer confidence.

Skill Acquisition and Service Delivery Quality (H_{02})

Skill acquisition significantly and positively predicted reliability ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$), responsiveness ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$) and assurance ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Its strongest effect was on responsiveness, highlighting the importance of employees' practical ability to address enquiries, process bookings, manage itinerary changes and respond to customers' needs. This supports the competency-based perspective of Spencer and Spencer (1993) and Boyatzis (2008), which emphasises demonstrated competencies as important predictors of performance. The findings also align with Jiang et al. (2012) on the contribution of workforce skills to firm performance and Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) on the importance of skill-oriented human resource practices in Nigerian SMEs. Overall, the results suggest that practical learning, coaching and on-the-job experience complement formal training by enabling employees to apply knowledge effectively in-service encounters.

Certification and Service Delivery Quality (H_{03})

Certification had a positive but statistically insignificant effect on reliability ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = 0.096$) and responsiveness ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.184$). However, its effect on assurance was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.005$). This provides partial support for Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011), which explains how credentials can signal competence and strengthen confidence where professional ability cannot be directly observed. In travel and tour enterprises, recognised qualifications and professional affiliations may enhance customers' perceptions of employees' credibility. However, certification alone may not guarantee accurate, timely or responsive service once training and practical skills are considered. This is consistent with Spencer and Spencer's (1993) emphasis on demonstrated competence in job performance. The findings therefore suggest that certification is most valuable when integrated with practical training and skills development rather than treated as a substitute for them.

Joint Contribution of Competence Development Practices (H_{04})

The combined model explained 50.4% of the variation in service delivery quality, indicating that training, skill acquisition and certification collectively contribute meaningfully to service outcomes. Skill acquisition was the strongest predictor, followed by training and certification. This pattern supports an integrated approach to human resource development in which training builds knowledge, practical experience develops performance capabilities, and certification provides formal recognition of competence.

The findings also align with Schneider and Bowen (1985) on the relationship between employees' organisational experiences and customers' service perceptions, and with Heskett et al. (1994) on the links between service quality and customer outcomes. Nevertheless, the unexplained 49.6% of variation suggests that other factors—including employee commitment, leadership, organisational culture, technology and reservation systems—may also influence service delivery. Further research could examine these factors and their interactions with employee competence development. Overall, the study provides evidence that training, skill acquisition and certification are relevant to service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State. It extends discussion of employee competence development to a Nigerian travel and tour context that has received comparatively limited empirical attention.

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

This study examined the effect of employee competence development on service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study focused on three dimensions of employee competence development—training, skill acquisition and certification—and three dimensions of service delivery quality—reliability, responsiveness and assurance.

The study was motivated by persistent challenges within the Nigerian travel and tourism sector, including foreign exchange constraints, fluctuations in airfares and ticket availability, technological changes and declining customer confidence. The study addressed identified gaps in the literature, particularly the limited attention given to travel and tour enterprises compared with hospitality and transport, the tendency to treat employee competence development as a general construct, and the limited empirical examination of professional certification in relation to service quality. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design. Data were collected from employees and customers of selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State using the Employee Competence Development Questionnaire (ECDQ) and Customer Service Delivery Quality

Questionnaire (CSDQQ). The valid responses comprised 236 employees and 362 customers. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation and multiple regression techniques with SPSS version 29. The measurement scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with pilot-test Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .85.

The major findings were as follows:

1. Training had a positive and statistically significant effect on reliability, responsiveness and assurance. Its strongest effect was on assurance ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$).
2. Skill acquisition had a positive and statistically significant effect on reliability, responsiveness and assurance. It recorded its strongest effect on responsiveness ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) and was the strongest predictor among the three competence-development variables.
3. Certification had a positive and statistically significant effect on assurance ($\beta = .15$, $p = .005$), but its effects on reliability ($\beta = .10$, $p = .096$) and responsiveness ($\beta = .08$, $p = .184$) were not statistically significant.
4. Training, skill acquisition and certification jointly had a significant positive effect on overall service delivery quality, $F(3,358) = 121.30$, $p < .001$. The model explained 50.4% of the variance in service delivery quality. Skill acquisition made the largest contribution ($\beta = .402$), followed by training ($\beta = .281$) and certification ($\beta = .128$).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that employee competence development is an important component of service delivery quality in the travel and tour sector, with practical skill acquisition emerging as the strongest contributor.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that employee competence development significantly contributes to service delivery quality in selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State.

First, training improves reliability, responsiveness and assurance, with the strongest effect on assurance. Structured training in reservation systems, ticketing and fare rules, travel documentation, customer service and digital tools can therefore strengthen employees' knowledge, confidence and ability to serve customers. This finding supports the Human Capital Theory, which views investment in employee knowledge and skills as an investment in organisational productivity. Second, skill acquisition is particularly important to service responsiveness. Employees who can practically apply booking, ticketing, rebooking, cancellation, documentation and customer-handling skills are better positioned to respond promptly and effectively to customers. The stronger effect of skill acquisition compared with training suggests that learning must go beyond exposure to formal instruction to include practical application and demonstrated competence. Third, certification contributes significantly to assurance but does not independently predict reliability or responsiveness after training and skill acquisition are considered. Certification therefore appears to strengthen professional credibility and customer confidence rather than guarantee the accuracy or speed of everyday service delivery. Certification should consequently complement, rather than substitute for, training and practical skills development.

Finally, the combined effect of training, skill acquisition and certification explain 50.4% of the variance in service delivery quality. This demonstrates the value of an integrated approach to employee competence development. Although skill acquisition made the largest contribution, training and certification also added significant explanatory value to the overall model.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Travel and tour enterprises should institutionalise structured employee training. Annual and periodic training should cover reservation and booking systems, fare construction and ticketing, travel documentation and visa requirements, customer service, digital tools and changes in airline policies and regulations.
2. Management should prioritise practical skill acquisition. New and less-experienced employees should receive coaching and mentoring from experienced staff. Job rotation, cross-training, role-play and simulations should be used to develop practical competence in rebooking, cancellations, complaints, disruptions and other challenging service situations.
3. Enterprises should establish clear responsiveness standards. Firms should set reasonable response-time standards for enquiries and requests received through face-to-face interactions, telephone calls, text messages and digital communication channels and monitor compliance with these standards.
4. Certification should complement practical competence development. Since certification significantly contributes to assurance, travel and tour firms should encourage and, where possible, subsidise relevant professional certification for employees. However, certification should not replace continuous training, coaching and practical skills development.
5. Professional and regulatory bodies should strengthen continuing professional development. Bodies such as NANTA and NCAA should encourage regular professional development, competency assessment and compliance with applicable registration and professional standards.
6. Government and training institutions should support sector-specific capacity development. Relevant government agencies, professional bodies and training institutions should explore subsidised training and certification programmes for travel and tour operators, particularly in digital literacy, emerging technologies, reservation systems and customer service.
7. Management should evaluate training based on performance outcomes rather than attendance alone. Training effectiveness should be assessed through employees' demonstrated competence, service accuracy, response time, customer feedback and other relevant performance indicators.

5.4 Contributions to Knowledge

The study makes three principal contributions to knowledge.

First, it extends empirical research on service quality to an under-researched segment of the Nigerian tourism industry by examining selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State. Unlike much of the existing Nigerian literature, which concentrates on hospitality and transport, the study directly examines employee competence development within travel and tour enterprises.

Second, the study contributes to the application of Human Capital Theory and Signalling Theory to service delivery. The findings show that training and practical skill acquisition have broader effects across service quality dimensions, while certification has a particularly significant relationship with assurance. This demonstrates that professional credentials may strengthen customer confidence without necessarily substituting for demonstrated practical competence.

Third, the study employed two respondent groups, with employees assessing competence-development practices and customers assessing service delivery quality. This separation of measurement sources reduces the likelihood of common-method bias and provides a more balanced assessment of the relationship between employee competence development and customer-perceived service quality.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design does not establish causality; the results demonstrate statistically supported relationships consistent with the proposed direction of influence but do not establish definitive cause-and-effect relationships. Second, employee competence development was assessed through employee responses while service delivery quality was assessed by customers. The study involved 20 enterprises, meaning that customers associated with the same enterprise may have provided correlated responses. This clustering may affect the precision of standard errors and the extent to which the results can be interpreted at enterprise level. Third, competence development and service practices were measured primarily through respondents' perceptions rather than independently verified organisational records. Self-report bias may therefore be present. Fourth, the study focused on three SERVQUAL dimensions—reliability, responsiveness and assurance. Consequently, the findings do not cover all dimensions of service quality. Finally, the study was limited to selected travel and tour enterprises in Lagos State and should therefore be generalised cautiously to other locations or segments of the Nigerian tourism industry. Despite these limitations, the use of separate employee and customer respondent groups, together with the satisfactory reliability of the research instruments, provides useful evidence on the relationship between employee competence development and service delivery quality.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should:

1. Examine the remaining SERVQUAL dimensions and compare them with the three dimensions adopted in this study. Studies may also examine e-service quality among online travel agencies and digitally mediated travel services.
2. Replicate the study in other Nigerian cities, such as Abuja, Port Harcourt and Kano, and in other West African countries to determine whether the relationships identified in Lagos are context-specific.
3. Investigate the relationship between digital and artificial intelligence literacy and service delivery in the travel and tourism sector, particularly as automation, generative AI, online booking systems and digital customer-service platforms become increasingly important.
4. Consider longitudinal or multi-level research designs that can better address causality and account explicitly for customers being nested within travel and tour enterprises.

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