RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining Youths' Response to Skill Acquisition as Panacea to Unemployment in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The reactions of Nigeria's youth to skill acquisition were examined. This was done using the Ile-Oluji/Oke-Igbo local government area as a case study. The research used both primary and secondary data. The former was through a structured questionnaire and oral interview schedule, while the latter was from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics official website and other relevant bodies' websites. A total of 400 respondents were randomly selected across the 10 zones of the Local Government. The results obtained showed that about 68% of the respondents were females, while 32% were males. About 34% of the respondents were self-employed with prevalent skills such as fashion, catering service, barbing and hairdressing, while 44% did not have any skills. Only 24% acquired skills for self-reliance, whereas 23% chose to pursue academic certificates ahead of skill acquisition. Peer influence was a factor which debars some of the respondents from acquiring skills. Other factors include lack of funds and epileptic power supply, which were represented by 18% and 10% of the youths, respectively. Another factor was early marriage, as about 5% got married early, and this stopped them from skill acquisition. The chi-square test carried out on the data at p-value ≤ 0.05 revealed that a significant percentage of the youths are not willing to acquire skills. Based on these premises, it is recommended that more orientation should be carried out about skills acquisition among the youths in Nigeria The contributory factors examined should also be addressed by relevant stakeholders to reduce the unemployment rate among our youths in Nigeria.

Keywords: Employment, skills acquisition, unemployment, youth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Skills are fast becoming the currency of the world, and their acquisition will provide employment for the holder, as this is needed among our teeming youths in Nigeria (National Board of Technical Education-NBTE, n.d.). Skill is defined as the capability of a person to carry out an assignment or a given task efficiently. When such work is done over time, the person becomes an expert in that area or field (Idoko, 2014; Mosaic, 2022). It is what the youth can do with their hands in terms of practicals after graduating from the institution of higher learning that will make them self-reliant and give them added income advantage when compared to their counterparts without skills (Magbagbeola, 2004; Okolocha *et al.*, 2019).

The rate at which graduates leave Tertiary Schools in Nigeria is high when compared to how many among them are employed thereafter. This has become a major challenge facing the youth, as observed by NIYEAP (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). The Government, on its own, are unable to provide the needed employment to graduates leaving our tertiary institutions in their thousands on a yearly basis. With skill acquisition by the youths, the level of unemployment among them will be reduced if not eliminated.

To achieve this, there is a need to examine the response of the youths to skill acquisition formally and informally. The result of this examination will give insights into what is on the ground, what is to be done and how to create employment for the youths with respect to skill acquisition by the relevant private and public stakeholders.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The majority of the youths in the country wait for the Government at the Federal, State, or Local levels to provide jobs for them, and this has not really yielded any positive reports (National Bureau of Statistics-NBS, n.d.; Patrick, 2022; Sasu, 2023; The Mitchell Group, 2003). Since the youths are having the challenge of getting jobs in the public sector, then they should learn a skill that will make them to be gainfully employed.

2.1. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are
1. To examine the level of youth participation in various skills in the study area,
2. To examine factors responsible for youths' response to skill acquisition and,
3. To determine how skill acquisition could help reduce unemployment in Nigeria.

2.2. Questions of the Study

Below are the questions to ask as a guide in achieving the set objectives stated above:
1. Are youths readily embracing skill acquisition in Nigeria?
2. What are the factors (independent variables) influencing skills acquisition in the area of study?
3. How will skill acquisition help to reduce unemployment among the youth?

2.3. Research Hypotheses

The formulated research hypotheses are three sets based on the study questions at a significance level of p-value ≤ 0.05, as stated below:
H_1: Youths are responding to skill acquisition in Nigeria.
H_2: All the independent variable influences skills acquisition.
H_3: Skill acquisition among the youths will reduce unemployment among them.

3. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010), The Mitchell Group (2003) observed that Nigerian youths face unemployment challenges that have become a nightmare for the country's government. Their population percentage keeps soaring every year. The sudden emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic also added to this crisis as more youths are thrown out of their jobs and back into the labour market.

The population of Nigeria was estimated to be 141 million, out of which 29% are between the ages of 15 and 29. By the year 2050, the country's estimated population will be 200 million, and based on the current estimation, the youth will have a larger percentage by then (National Bureau of Statistics-NBS, n.d.). In 2011, about 35% of the youths in Nigeria did not have jobs, and this status was kept with a slight reduction in the first quarter of 2020 to 33% (Sasu, 2023). Urgent steps need to be taken to reduce the joblessness among these youths ahead of this population growth.

Another setback for the youths, according to Patrick (2022), is their inability to secure jobs due to incompetence. Some youths are not good academically but will be sound in learning a skill, but because Nigerians place more emphasis on college certificates, they opt to go to school rather than learn a skill. The Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021) rolled out by the Federal Government of Nigeria to tackle unemployment among the youths did not yield any results because jobs have not been created for the ever-increasing youth population. The failure of this programme led to the introduction of the National Employment Policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017) and the National Youth Policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Unfortunately, none of these policies has been able to address the problem in a sustainable manner that would lead to a significant decrease in the youth unemployment rate.

According to Nwankwor and Ifejiofor (2014), the level of unemployment in Nigeria has grown to a level that drastic measures need to be taken as the problems of crime, public disorder, low productivity, internet and all cybercrimes among the youth are traced to unemployment. The devil will find work for idle hands.

In their study, Ayinla and Ogunmeru (2018) discovered that unemployment among the youths led so many of them to terrorism, as occasioned by the militia and Boko Haram in the Niger Delta and

Northern areas of Nigeria respectively. Some industries are already laying off some of their staff due to the nation's economic crises; when this is done, the youths are mostly the victims, according to Ayinla and Ogunmeru (2018). As the rate of unemployment surges where there are no white-collar jobs, these youth results in crimes such as rape, murder, drug abuse, oil bunkering, cultism, ritual killings, prostitution, human trafficking, terrorism and kidnapping.

Based on this background, this study attempted to examine youths' responses to skill acquisition. The information we get from this study will help to know the area concerning skills that need to be focused on and other things to do for skills acquisition to alleviate the unemployment rate among youths in Nigeria. With skills, the youths will no longer be as restive as they currently are in the country.

4. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study includes the study scope, the design, the sampling technique and the statistical software used for the analysis of data generated.

4.1. Scope of Study

Ile Oluji/Oke Igbo Local Government, with an estimated population of 171,876 as of 2006 according to the National Population Census and a projection of 261,589 by the year 2022 according to National Bureau of Statistic-NBS (2018) has 10 zones where this research was carried out. The sample size was based on this projection, and Taro Yamane's (1), according to Saka *et al.* (2020), was used to calculate it.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \tag{1}$$

The sample size, *n*, is to be calculated while the estimated population of 261,589 is N. The percentage error from (1) is represented by e, and it is given as 0.05. Therefore, our sample size was 399.

The 10 zones of the study area are made up of units and wards, and we have 6 for the Ile-Oluji community and 4 for the Oke Igbo community. In each of the 6 zones of the Ile-Oluji community, simple random sampling was used to select 40 youths, while for each of the 4 zones in the Oke-Igbo community, 35 youths were randomly selected. Two (2) teachers each were randomly picked from the secondary schools of the 4 zones in the main town, and one teacher each was picked out of the remaining two zones in the villages of the Ile-Oluji community. This was replicated for Oke Igbo, where two teachers each were randomly picked out of the two zones in Oke-Igbo Township, while one teacher each was now randomly picked from their two zones in their villages. Finally, 4 technologists/instructors were selected randomly from the Federal Polytechnic situated in the local government. This gave us 380 youths and 20 Tutors/Technologists/Instructors, making a total of 400 respondents for the study.

4.2. Collection of Data

Data were collected through a questionnaire designed to capture the objectives of the study and also through oral interviews with some of the respondents to clear grey areas. Secondary data was also sourced from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics official website and other relevant bodies' websites for the course of the study. The employment status of respondents was taken as the dependent variable, while the independent variables were those factors influencing the dependent variable, which included respondents' level of education, skills obtained, age, marital status, willingness to acquire skills and a host of others as captured in the questionnaire.

4.3. Analysis of Data

The data collected was analyzed through descriptive statistics on the software Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 2013 version. Chi-square was employed to establish the level of relationship between the dependent and independent variables at the statistically significant level of *p*-value below 0.05.

5. Results and Discussion

The first analysis of the result from the study was about the demographic characteristics of the respondents (see Table I).

The percentage of the female respondent was 68, while that of their male counterpart was 32. This showed that the females outnumbered the males in the study area. The age range of 15–20 and 21–25 were 40% each, while 11% of these youths were between age 26 and 30. Those between age 31 and 35 were just 5%, while 3% were from age 36 to 45. About 78% of the respondents were Christians, while 17% were Muslims, making these two religions predominant among the youths in the study

TABLE I: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic variable	Percentage (%)
Sex	
Male	32
Female	68
Age	
15–20	40
21–25	40
26–30	11
31–35	5
36–40	2
41–45	1
46–50	1
Religion	
Christianity	78
Islamic	17
Traditionalist	5
Marital Status	
Single	84
Married	9
Divorced	4
Separated	3

TABLE II: Willingness of Youth to Skill Acquisition

Response	Percentage (%)
Willingness to acquire skills	
Yes	10
No	90
Response to skill acquisition (%)	
Less than 40	46
41–50	36
51–60	18

area, whereas only 5% among these youths were traditionalists. Interestingly, 84% of these youths were single, while 9% were married. Only 4% and 3% of these youths were divorced and separated from their spouses, respectively. Okolocha *et al.* (2019), in their study on the effect of skill acquisition on youth employability in Nigeria, equally observed the highest percentage of the age range 15 and 25 and also in terms of religion and marital status as singles, which corroborates our finding as well.

5.1. Analysis of the Research Questions

The first research question to be tested was, *"Are youths readily embracing skill acquisition in Nigeria?"* Table II answers this question. It was observed here that 90% of the youth in the study area were not willing to acquire skills, while only 10% were willing to learn skills. Their response to skill acquisition was based on the premise of immediate reward for their efforts. Hence, they prefer doing menial jobs that will give them money at the end of each day.

It was equally discovered that only 18% of the youths scored above 50% with respect to their readiness to learn skills that will make them self-employed. These were willing on the surface but will not readily be available to be trained as appropriate. In their study, Okolocha *et al.* (2019) equally observed that unemployment keeps soaring among the youths because of their unwillingness to acquire skills to work with.

Table III specifically states the various skills that the youths in the study area acquired. It was observed that 8% of these youths have no skills while 27% of them have fashion skills, which is basically tailoring with less or no commensurate patronage as observed on the field. About 12% and 11% of them have skills in catering services and barbing/hairdressing, respectively. This may be a function of the percentage of the female gender, which is higher than their male counterparts. They are the ones with the fashion, catering and hairdressing skills.

The second research question to be tested was, *"What are the factors (independent variables) influencing skills acquisition in the area of study?"* Table IV answers this research question. About 24% of the youths acquired one skill or the other for self-reliance, while 23% of them did not because there

TABLE III: TYPE OF SKILLS ACQUIRED BY YOUTH

Type of skill	Percentage (%)
Fashion	27
Catering services	12
Barbing/hairdressing	11
Bead-making/traditional attire	7
Electrical/electronic repairs	7
Computer/ICT	6
Automobile mechanic	4
Fish farming	4
Photography	3
Welding and fabrication	2
Cocoa farming	1
Soap/cream making	1
Poultry farming	1
Snailery	1
Home fitting	1
Graphic art	1
Bricklaying	1
Carpentry	1
Cobbler	1
No skill	8

TABLE IV: INDEPENDENT FACTORS INFLUENCING SKILL ACQUISITION IN YOUTH

Independent factors	Percentage (%)
Self-reliance	24
Emphasis on academic certificate	23
Peer influence	18
Lack of fund	18
Epileptic power supply	10
Single mother	05
Age when married (15–20)	02

TABLE V: YOUTHS' EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employment status	Percentage (%)
No employment	44
Self-employed	34
Working in the private sector	14
Working in the public sector	8

was much emphasis laid on academic certificates, so they opted to have the degrees first ahead of skill acquisition. About 18% of the youths did not acquire any skills because of peer influence or lack of funds. The epileptic power supply made about 10% of the youths not acquire any skill, while just 5% and 2% of them did not because they had a baby to take care of and married early, respectively.

The third research question to be tested was, *"How will skill acquisition help to reduce unemployment among the youth?"* Table V answers this research question. It was discovered that 44% of these youths do not have specific skills to work with. About 34% have skills to work with, and they are self-employed, whereas 14% of them work in private-owned companies and organizations in their locality, and just 8% work in government-owned ministries, departments, agencies, parastatals, and so on.

This result (Table V) shows that a larger percentage of the youths do not have the skills to start their own business. Assume the 44% who do not have a skill have one and work with it, then we would have about 78% self-employed youths while the remaining 22% work with both the private and public sector. Hence, the rate of unemployment among the youth will drastically be reduced if it is totally eliminated.

5.2. Hypothesis Testing

The null hypothesis is rejected if the p-value is below 0.05; otherwise, the null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE VI: RESPONSE OF YOUTH TO SKILL ACQUISITION

Chi-square value	df	p-value
1.925	2	0.382

Note: 9 cells (100.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.36.

TABLE VII: INFLUENCE OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON SKILL ACQUISITION

Chi-square value	df	p-value
11.110	4	0.025

Note: 9 cells (100.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.36.

TABLE VIII: SKILL ACQUISITION REDUCES UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG THE YOUTH

Chi-square value	df	p-value
54.755	16	0.000

Note: 9 cells (100.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.36.

5.2.1. H_1: Youths are Responding to Skill Acquisition in Nigeria

From Table VI, it was seen that the p-value is 0.382, which is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted that the youths are not responding to skill acquisition in Nigeria.

5.2.2. H_2: All Independent Variables Have an Influence on Skills Acquisition

As shown in Table VII, the p-value is 0.025, which is below 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This result suggests that the independent variables have a significant influence on skills acquisition by the youth.

5.2.3. H3: Skill Acquisition Among the Youth Does Not Reduce their Unemployment

From Table VIII, the chi-square test carried out on the data obtained from the study area shows that the p-value is below 0.001, which is below the 0.05 acceptance region. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. That is, skill acquisition among the youths of Ile Oluji/Oke Igbo Local Government Area has a significant effect on unemployment reduction.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

The response of Youths in the Ile Oluji/Okeigbo Local Government Area to skills acquisition was examined, and it was discovered that only 34% of the 400 respondents were self-employed based on the skill acquired. The prevalent skills in the study area include fashion, catering services, barbing and hairdressing. Peer influence, emphasis on academic certificates, lack of funds, epileptic power supply and early marriage are some of the factors influencing the response of the youths in the study area to skill acquisition. About 44% of the respondents do not have a job due to a lack of skills. It is concluded that youths in the study area are not significantly responding to skills acquisition.

6.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings from this study:

1. The government should urgently start an orientation programme to educate the youths on the need for skills acquisition as the panacea for unemployment in each of the local governments of Nigeria.
2. Aside from the regular tertiary institutions' certificates, the curriculum of the institutions should be structured to have skills as a separate entity, with certificates given at the end of the study.
3. There should be seminars, coaching, trainings and the likes for the youths in each of the Local Governments in respect to skill acquisition.

4. While the government provides the enabling environment, like fixing the epileptic power supply and basic amenities like good roads and potable water, the private sector should equally fund the training for the youths as their community service.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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