

Assessment of Skills Acquisition Programs in Bayelsa State: Implication for Economic Development

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Abstract

The study investigated the assessment of skills acquisition programs in Bayelsa State: Implication for economic Development. The study employed a descriptive survey design. A sample of 460 respondents was used for the study. The researcher employed purposive sampling technique to select respondents (only youths) for the study. Three research questions were answered. The research instrument for this study is a questionnaire titled Skill Acquisition Assessment Scale (SAAS). The reliability of the SAAS instrument was established through the cronbach alpha method; which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.83. The data obtained was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study showed that the extent to which skills acquisition program is carried out in Bayelsa state is low; the extent to which people in Bayelsa state enroll for skill acquisition program is very poor and the extent to which people in Bayelsa state utilize skill acquisition program for self-sustenance and job creation is discouraging. Among others, it was recommended that Soft loans and adequate equipment in the area of the acquired skill should be provided for beneficiaries.

Keywords: *Skill acquisition, Skills, Economic development*

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Background to the Study

Economic development can be described in terms of goals (e.g., creation of jobs, improvement of the quality of life) or as a process that influences growth in order to enhance the economic well-being of a community/society. In other words, economic development refers to “sustainable improvements in the material well-being of a society, as measured for instance by GDP per capita, GDP growth, productivity and employment” (Naudé, 2011).

Few years after Nigeria's independence, opportunities for employment abound for Nigerian graduates from Technical colleges and universities. In fact, it was the case that each recent graduate had at least three jobs from which to choose. More so, the movement from school to job was virtually automatic. It was a situation where companies and public establishments were hunting for people to give jobs, employers went to colleges and NYSC orientation camps to seek for employees. This was so because technical and vocational manpower (skilled acquisition) is the fulcrum of national development and international competitiveness (National Board for Technical education, NBTE, 2011). However, the study will consider economic development as the dependent variable while skill acquisition will be treated as the independent variable.

Today, it is very pathetic that the story line has changed as there is a disconnection between the world of learning and the world of work. Each job that appears in the labour market is now pursued by many old and new unemployed individuals and even highly politicized because of the growing population. We now have a situation where millions of graduates now jostle for job openings with few hundreds of available positions. By implication, unemployment rate has increased which has become a menace to the society, leading to poverty, crimes, youth-restiveness and ethnic agitations, and slowing down the pace of development because of untapped potentials or talents that are lying idle. Therefore, there is the need for the unemployed individuals to learn and acquire new skills which would make them self-employed by setting up their own businesses to create jobs for others too.

In some cases, the few who get a job are trained to acquire special skills before they can go ahead with the new job. Ajibade (2009) asserts that there is a big gulf between what the school offer and the demand of employers. Ogundele (2010) opines that employers want employees who can use their abilities and skills to evolve the organization. In fact, there is no job that does not require its own skill for manpower development. The place of skill acquisition cannot be over emphasized in the rapid development of all sectors of the economy. Okoro in Ogundele, Feyisetan, and Shaaba, (2014) is of the view that our industries need skilled and well-trained workers to ensure that goods manufactured in Nigeria are as good as those manufactured in other parts of the world. No wonder most multinationals employ expatriates who possess the required skills to do the jobs at the expense of Nigerian graduates thereby weakening economic growth. For this situation to change, policies and goals on skill acquisition must be put in a place and well implemented.

Statement of the Problem

Education has been established as one of the key transformational tool for nation building and socioeconomic empowerment. This led the government to form technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and other skill empowerment programs, which is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills from the world of work (Oluwale, Jegede & Olamide, 2013). One of the aims of this kind of training according to NBTE (2011) is to use education as a tool to improve the quality of life through skills acquisition and poverty reduction.

However, years after implementing these skill acquisition programs, the country is yet to witness a rapid growth in economic development and improvement in quality of life for the majority of the general public especially in Bayelsa state. Instead, a recent survey by National Board for Technical Education shows that there is a significant decline in the aggregate technical manpower turn-out by polytechnics in recent years (NBTE, 2011).

Another concern with skill acquisition program, is the overwhelming poverty and economic hardship witnessed by majority of the populace especially in Bayelsa state, a state laden with abundance of natural resources. Where the people should have enough practical skills to tap and utilize their immediate resources for self-sustenance and job creation. With these as background, the research has decided to study the “assessment of skills acquisition programs in Bayelsa State: Implication for economic Development.” This became necessary because of other researchers have done little or nothing (atleast not to the knowledge of the researcher) to improve the situation in Yenagoa LGA of Bayelsa State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the “assessment of skills acquisition programs in Bayelsa State: Implication for economic Development.” In specific terms, the objectives of this study seek to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which skill acquisition programs are carried out in Bayelsa state.
2. Determine the extent of enrolment into skill acquisition programs in Bayelsa state.
3. Determine the extent to which acquired skill is utilized for job creation in Bayelsa state.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are skills acquisition programs carried out by Bayelsa state?
2. To what extent do people enrol for skill acquisition program in Bayelsa state?
3. To what extent is acquired skills utilized for job creation?

Review of Literature

Economic Development

No single definition incorporates all of the different features of economic development. Economic development can be described in terms of goals (e.g., creation of jobs, improvement of the quality of life) or as a process that influences growth in order to enhance the economic well-being of a community/society (Tomaa, Grigorea & Marinescu, 2014). In this respect, economic development represents “the process of structural transformation of an economy towards a modern, technologically advanced economy based on services and manufacturing”. In other words, economic development refers to “sustainable improvements in the material well-being of a society, as measured for instance by GDP per capita, GDP growth, productivity and employment” (Naudé, 2011). Literally, economic development can be defined as “passage from lower to higher stage which implies change”. It include improvements in material welfare especially for persons with the lowest incomes, the eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy, disease and early death, changes in the composition of inputs and output that generally include shifts in the underlying structure of production away from agricultural towards industrial activities, the organization of the economy in such a way that productive employment is general among working age population rather than the situation of a privileged minority. Thus, economic development can be achieved through entrepreneurship which involves empowering the people to create jobs and enhancing nation building. More so, it is the

entrepreneur who shifts economic resources out of an area of lower productivity and moves them into an area of higher productivity. Equipping an individual with the necessary skill to become an entrepreneur is very necessary to growth of any nation.

Skills Acquisition

Skills Acquisition Training is an adult education programme which is designed to impart various skills on the participants, and meet immediate needs such as jobs, self-reliance and curb restiveness among youths (Uranta & Nlerum, 2017). Mike (2014) asserts that skill acquisition is the ability to be trained on a particular task or function. While Idoko (2014) defined skill acquisition as the form of training by individuals or group of individuals that can lead to acquisition of knowledge for self-sustenance. It involves the training of people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainers and the trainees for certain duration and under certain conditions.

Accordingly, Magbagbeola (2004) as cited in Idoko (2014) posited that skills acquisition requires the accumulation of different skills that enhances task performance through the integration of both theoretical and practical forms of knowledge. He enumerated the guidelines for the sustenance of skill acquisition programme to include the followings;

1. Provision of training that gives the trainees the opportunities to acquire skills that are appropriate for preparation in a field of trade for gainful employment.
2. Provision of definite skills that relate to each trade that makes one a professional in one field instead of the others.
3. That training have to be done by competent, experienced and qualified instructors
4. Skill acquisition requires much practice, patience, interest, ability, aptitude and personality traits.
5. Skill acquisition requires conducive environment.
6. Training requires constructive human relationship, business skills, imitation and constructive ideas.
7. The principles guiding training in a particular field in terms of attitude, customer-relationship, productivity, efficiency, supply and demand needs to be appreciated.

Skill Acquisition Theory

The basic claim of Skill Acquisition Theory, according to Dekeyser (2007), "is that the learning of a wide variety of skills shows a remarkable similarity in development from initial representation of knowledge through initial changes in behavior to eventual fluent, spontaneous, largely effortless, and highly skilled behavior, and that this set of phenomena can be accounted for by a set of basic principles common to acquisition of all skills" (p. 97). In sum, as mentioned by Speelman (2005), skill acquisition can be considered as a specific form of learning, where learning has been defined as "the representation of information in memory concerning some environmental or cognitive event" (p. 26). Therefore, according to him, skill acquisition is a form of learning where "skilled behaviors can become routinized and even automatic under some conditions" (p.26). And, as a general theory of learning, it claims that adults commence learning something through largely explicit processes, and with subsequent sufficient practice and exposure, move into implicit processes. Thus, the study is hinged on this theory.

Skill

A skill is the learned ability to carry out a task with pre-determined results often within a given amount of time, energy or both (Uchendu, 2015). Skill is the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience. Thus, it requires training to do well e.g. an art or trade (Rooney, 2001). . As defined by Vanpatten & Benati (2010, p. 39) "Skill refers to *ability to do* rather than underlying competence or mental representation". To clarify this concept, Cornford (1996) as cited in Masumeh (2014) has mentioned nine separate defining attributes of "skill" and "skilled performance" from a psychological perspective, argued to be the most valid in accounting for skill acquisition and performance by individuals. These defining attributes are:

1. Skill is learned;
2. Skill involves motivation, purpose and goals;
3. Skills require content and context knowledge;
4. Skills are performed and transferred in the presence of specific stimuli;
5. Skills involve problem solving relevant to the context;
6. Skill involves relative judgments with individual differences in skilled performance evident;
7. Standards of excellence are important;
8. Skill involves comparable replication;
9. Considerable periods of time are required to reach high levels of skill.

Skill acquisition is a training programme that empowers participants to acquire skills in the area of electronics, masonry, carpentry, electricity wiring/installation, hair dressing, barbering, driving, vehicle repair and maintenance, plumbing, fittings, mobile phone repair, computers repair and appreciation among others. The purpose of skill acquisition programme as a means of youth empowerment according to Ogundowolo in Idoko (2014) is to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in future. He maintained that ideal skill acquisition is capable of ensuring value re-orientation among the youths and transforming them into creators of wealth and employment instead of seekers. Basically, the creation of wealth and employment will lead to poverty reduction and increase of welfare status of individuals in the country. When a skill is acquired in any discipline, it is assumed that the future gains that would result from it are of greater significance to productivity. The growing concern over globalization, among other things, has made the acquisition of lifelong skills imperative for all categories of people. This is considered very important for future professionals' growth because it will determine how successful and productive a person will be in the work place. Shaffer (1997) observed that human capital is created when they acquire transferable skills that can be applied in many settings and occupations. It is an important index of sustainable development of any nation. In view of this, he considers it as both a social prerogative and an economic necessity. With skill acquisition, one acquires capabilities to compete favourably within the context of globalization. Thus, the only irreplaceable capital and organization processes are the knowledge and ability (skill) of its people.

Types of Skill Acquisition Programs



Snail Farming



Fish Farming





Bead Making



Welding Skills Training

Welding and Fabrication



Catering Services



Fashion Designing



Computer Training

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey is that in which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population and describes certain characteristics of the sample as they are at the time of study (Nwankwo, 2016).” The ordinary descriptive survey makes use of research questions only. Also according to Ukwuije and Obowu-Adutchay (2012) “descriptive survey also employ the use of samples to represent the entire population and it uses data collection techniques such as questionnaire, tests, interview etc.” The study is a descriptive survey because the researcher collected data from a large sample of respondent in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa state.

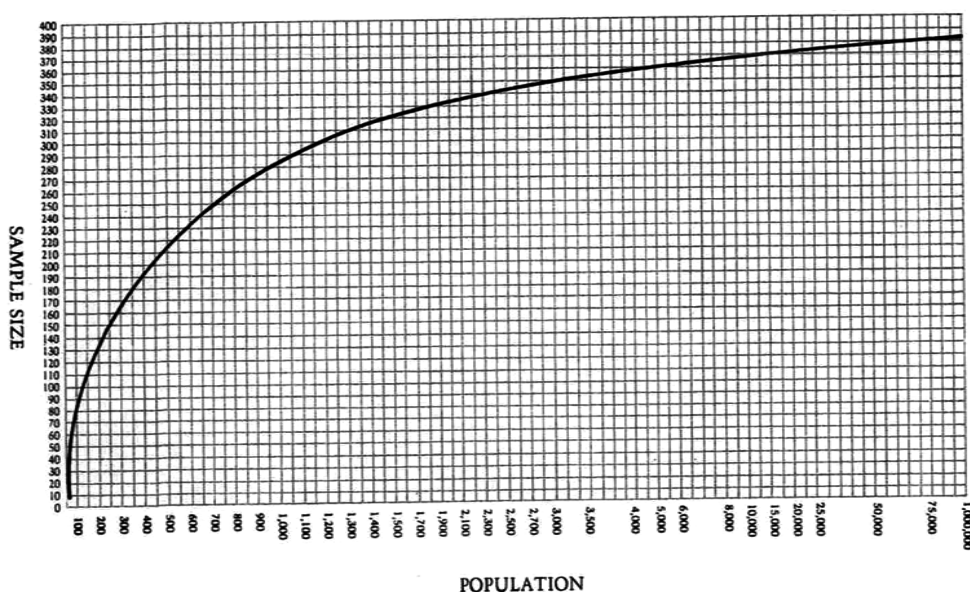
Population of the Study

The population for this study consists of all youths in Yenagoa Local Government area of Bayelsa state. Yenagoa Local Government Area constitutes a population of 353, 344 (National Population Census 2006 as cited in Kainga & Johnson, 2012).

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size of 460 respondents was chosen for the study; this is above the minimum estimated sample of 385, which was statistically drawn using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) graph as cited by Kpolovie (2011) in Fig.1 below. This method for determining sample size is in line with Nwankwo (2013), which states “that you need a larger sample size than what the formula for minimum sample size estimates.” Thus, larger the sample size the less error involved in generalization (Ukwuije & Orulwene, 2012).

The researcher employed a simple random sampling and purposive sampling technique. The researcher used a simple random sampling to select specific sites within Yenagoa Local Government Areas of Bayelsa State, while the researcher employed purposive sampling technique to select respondents (only youths) for the study.



Source: Krejcie and Morgan 1970 in Kpolovie 2011:34

Figure 1: Determination of minimum sample size from population

Instrument for Data Collection

The research instrument for this study is the Skill Acquisition Assessment Scale (SAAS). The SAAS is a self-developed, non-cognitive multivariate instrument made up of two parts. Part A explains the purpose of the study and the personal data of respondents, while Part B consist of nine items. The items of the instrument are responded on a 4-point Likert scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) for the first four items. While, Strongly Agree (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used for the other five items.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The ASAS instrument was validated by three experts from the field of Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the ASAS instrument was established through the cronbach alpha method; which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.83.

Methods of Data Analysis

Simple percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions for the study.

Results

The results of the analysed data for each research questions and its corresponding hypothesis are presented on tables.

Research Question 1: To what extent are skills acquisition programs carried out by Bayelsa state?

Table 1: Skill acquisition programs carried out in Bayelsa state

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Fashion designing	2.6543	.90279	Low Extent
2.	Welding & fabrication	1.6391	.89057	Low Extent
3.	Catering	2.0674	.98010	Low Extent
4.	Bead making	2.6761	.97097	Low Extent
	Criterion Mean (X) = 2.5	Grand Mean = 2.4		

From the above table, based on a criterion mean of 2.5, skill acquisition programs carried out in Bayelsa state had low mean scores. The result showed that catering skill was the most predominant skill while welding and fabrication was the least skill carried out in Bayelsa state. Nonetheless, the grand mean score ($x = 1.79 < 2.5$) implies that on the whole the extent to which skills acquisition program is carried out in Bayelsa state is low.

Research Question 2: To what extent do people enrol for skill acquisition program in Bayelsa state?

Table 1: Level of enrolment into Skill acquisition programs in Bayelsa state

S/NO	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	I have participated in a skill acquisition program in Bayelsa state	1.5739	.93874	Disagreed
2.	I know someone who is a beneficiary of a skill acquisition program in Bayelsa state	1.7239	1.00969	Disagreed
	Criterion Mean (X) = 2.5	Grand Mean = 1.649		

From the above table, the mean scores for level of enrolment into skill acquisition programs is far below the criterion mean of 2.5, which implies that the extent to which people in Bayelsa state enroll for skill acquisition program is very poor. This raises concern on trust in the effectiveness of skill acquisition program, hence, the unserious attitude of the public towards this skill or empowerment programs.

Research Question 3: To what extent do people utilize acquired skills for self-sustenance?

Table 3: Utilization of acquired skills for self-sustenance

S/No	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	I earn a living through skill acquired in Bayelsa state	1.4261	.67072	Disagreed
2.	I know a beneficiary of a skill acquisition program who is earning through it in Bayelsa state	1.7913	.75547	Disagreed
3.	I know a beneficiary of a skill acquisition program who have people working under them	1.5957	.66796	Disagreed
Criterion Mean (X) = 2.5		Grand Mean = 1.604		

From the above table, the mean scores for level of utilization of acquired skill for self-sustenance is below the criterion mean of 2.5, which implies that the extent to which people in Bayelsa state utilize skill acquisition program for self-sustenance and job creation is discouraging. This situation is very poor if skill acquisition is the way out from poverty and economic recession.

Summary of Findings

Below is the summary of the findings of the study; they are as follows:

1. The extent to which skills acquisition program is carried out in Bayelsa state is low.
2. The extent to which people in Bayelsa state enroll for skill acquisition program is very poor.
3. The extent to which people in Bayelsa state utilize skill acquisition program for self-sustenance and job creation is discouraging.

Conclusion

The world is embracing a knowledge-based economy. We need to acquire more knowledge and skills for economic growth because every sector needs better skills to keep it running. By accommodating this, we need to equip the youths and working adults with employment skills and knowledge to meet the increasing demand for technical manpower by various sectors of the nation's economy either through formal, non-formal or informal training. With skill acquisition, one acquires capabilities to compete favourably within the context of globalization. Thus, the only irreplaceable capital of any organization or nation is the knowledge and ability (skill) of its people or workers.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made

1. Government should look into and improve programs that will encourage skill acquisition for our youths. This could be done by effective supervision and monitoring.
2. Enough training facilities need to be provided to replace obsolete training equipment in this era of digitalization, in order to meet modern standard.

3. Soft loans and adequate equipment in the area of the acquired skill should be provided for beneficiaries.
4. The wide gap between the classroom and the industry should be bridged by skill acquisition policy in every field.

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