

THE IMPACT OF SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMME ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

One of the major problems facing the youth today is unemployment. The problem of unemployment in Nigeria has given rise to all forms of vices in the society. This is currently having a negative impact on the individuals and the socio-economic development of the nation. This study is a descriptive survey, designed to identify skills in both private and public owned skill acquisition centres in Edo State in Nigeria. The study aimed at ascertaining the impact of skill acquisition programme on the social and economic status of the youths, and the society and the challenges associated with the programme. For the purpose of this study, ten (10) public and private skill acquisition centres in Edo State were used. The main instrument used was the questionnaire. 100 respondents were randomly selected from the skill acquisition centres. Findings revealed that much emphasis on academic excellence, lack of quality skilled trainers, acute shortage of facilities, inconsistent follow up by government and poor funding are problems militating against the youths' skills acquisition employment in Nigeria. Based on the premise of these findings, it was recommended that teachers require professional skills development, abilities, competence, years of experience, thorough understanding of the subject matter and effective involvement of the students in the instructional delivery. In this regards, government and stakeholders in the skills acquisition programme should ensure adequate funding of the skills acquisition programme to solve the problem of youth's employment in the country.

Keywords: *Skill, Unemployment, Acquisition, Creativity, Social economic, competence*

Background to the Study

Lack of acquisition of vocational skills on the part of the youths has been considered as the bone of contention in the socio-economic development of many African countries, including Nigeria. Sociologically, youth refers to an interface between childhood and adulthood. For analytical purposes, and in line with the Youth Employment Summit (YES) objectives, this study uses the age category 15-35 years as the definition of youth (Youth Employment Network, 2009). The term socioeconomic is a combination of two words - social and economic. Social condition of a person means culture; society is where a person is living and his interaction. Economy has to do with what and how to produce, and who is to produce; who to produce typically involving the skills acquired by the individual. Socio-economics is the study of the relationship between economic activity and social life. Socioeconomic status is the total of a combination of a person's work experience (or skill acquisition), income, education, productivity and occupation measured against others. The status may be classified as high, middle and low depending on income and social position of the individual in a society. The main concern of this study is on skill acquisition and the corresponding income to fit into the low socio-economic status.

In Nigeria, the school has become the primary means of preparing the youths for the future. As noted by Chigunta (2002), most institutions of learning are currently going through crisis in Africa, including Nigeria. Here, the term institutions of learning to refer to the educational system in all its forms and levels,

especially from primary up to senior secondary school level. The educational system operated at post independence placed remained lopsided: the emphasis is on theoretical knowledge rather than acquisition of vocational skills which prepares the individual to be productive in the society.

The trend has continued since without adapting it to the political, cultural, social and ethical values of our society. A fundamental change brought about by the fourth national policy on education was the recognition and introduction of vocational courses in the educational curriculum (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004; Oli 2000; Education and Skill Authority, 2010). The policy was considered laudable because it was capable of promoting the appropriate skills at various levels of our educational system and thus promoting individual and national productivity. It was also hoped that the system would help to check the high rate of unemployment and bring about economic and social revolution in the country by producing self reliant citizens. Unfortunately, the Nigeria experience has revealed that there is over-production of persons with little or no relevant vocational ability (Oli, 2000). The resultant unemployment rate has assumed an alarming proportion. Almost three decades after adoption of the laudable initiative, majority of Nigerian youths are idle while some are involved in various vices due to unemployment. A good number of students who have completed their secondary education, but failed to secure admission into institutions of higher learning are in dilemma. This is because they are not equipped with the requisite skills for self or paid employment (Opuwill, 2003).

In a context of declining growth and economic restructuring, the employment situation in Nigeria has become critical and labour absorption problematic. In particular, the problem of what is generally referred to as youth unemployment has increasingly come to be recognised as one of the more serious socio-economic problems currently faced in the country. Other supply-side factors are what some experts tend to describe as inappropriate school curricula, lack of employable skills training programmes (absence of artisanal and vocational skills) and curricula are said to be prominently biased towards preparing young people for formal sector wage jobs (Oli, 2000).

In its frantic effort to seek a way out of the problem of skill shortages in Nigeria 2008, the Federal Government constituted a committee known as the "Chukwuma Committee" to consider appropriate strategies for dealing with the mass unemployment problem in the country under the auspices of the Ministry of Employment Labour and Productivity (Akpan, 2008). Implementation of the Committee's report was to bridge the gap between theoretical and vocational skills for educated and semi-illiterate personnel. This eventually led to the institution of the national employment and vocational skill training and development programme and the establishment of skill acquisition centres. The scheme was specifically designed to promote acquisition of vocational skills and facilitate the spirit of creativity, self relevance and independence to promote gainful self-employment.

Vocational skills training and acquisition have continued to receive greater attention. In spite of this, it is not quite certain whether the programme has adequately promoted the skills desired for the Nigerian youths. There are indications and evidence based on the outcome/results of this study that the problem of appropriate skills acquisition by the Nigerian populace, particularly the youths, has remained intractable. Skill training and development requires facilities and resources, which must be made available in the appropriate quality and quantity in order to ensure success.

This paper, therefore, aimed at identifying the challenges facing both private and public owned skill acquisition centres in Edo State in Nigeria; examine the impact of the skill acquisition programme on the socio-economic status of youths in Nigeria and identify the challenges associated with the programme

Research Questions

Three research questions are raised to address the subject of the study namely:

1. What are the skills acquired by youths in the skill acquisition centres in Nigeria?
2. How do skills acquired by youth's impact on the socio-economic development in igeria?
3. What are the challenges of skill acquisition in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study was to elicit information on the impact of skill acquisition programme on the social and economic status of the youths, using descriptive survey design method. The main instrument used was the questionnaire. The case study comprises five (5) public and five (5) privately owned skills acquisition centres across the Edo State and this was obtained from the Ministry of Women Affairs, Youth and Social Development, Edo State. Through the use of random sampling technique, a population of 100 respondents was administered questionnaire; questionnaire was used as instrument for the study. The instruments were entitled "Impact of Vocational Skills Acquisition Programme on Youth Empowerment (IVSAPYE)" and "Impact of Vocational Skills Acquisition Programme on Economic Development of Nigeria" (IVSAPEDN). Responses were provided for the questionnaire in a four point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, and strongly disagreed). The detail, which nclude their mean ratings are as follows: 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively and giving a mean benchmark of 2.5 about which decision was taken.

Data Analysis and Results

In analyzing the data collected from the 5 public and 5 private skills acquisition centres, the mean () statistical technique was used because of the heterogeneous nature of skills acquisition centres in Edo State. The mean responses from each of the skill acquisition centres were rated. A mean response equal to or greater than 2.5 from the respondents was considered as agreed, while a mean rating less than 2.5 as disagreed. Tables 1 to 3 contained a summary of the results in line with the three questions raised.

Research Question 1: What are the skills acquired by youths in the skill acquisition centres in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Skills Acquired By Youths in the Skill Acquisition Centres in Nigeria

No	Item	Mean, \bar{X}	Decision
1	Building drawing skills (manual and computer)	3.431	Agreed
2	Ability to use machines for making plastics	3.765	Agreed
3	Ability to use hand tools for domestic electric wiring	3.370	Agreed
4	Brick and block Laying skills	3.314	Agreed
5	Carving skills acquired	3.324	Agreed
6	Food processing, packaging	2.500	Agreed
7	Ability to use bakery skills	3.431	Agreed
8	Carpentry and Joinery skills	3.110	Agreed
9	Hair dressing skills	3.039	Agreed
10	Tailoring	3.373	Agreed
11	Iron and welding skills	2.520	Agreed
12	Interior and exterior decoration skills	3.380	Agreed
13	Ability to raise animals, birds and eggs	3.231	Agreed
14	Ability to operate small scale business (buying and selling)	3.510	Agreed
15	Ability to rear animals commercially	3.331	Agreed
16	Plumbing skills	2.622	Agreed

Table 1 above clearly indicates all the skills acquired by the respondents from the ten skill acquisition centres. Respondents agreed that acquiring the skills mentioned above helped to facilitate spirit of creativity, self reliance and independence. These are 16 prominent skills that are currently on the programme in the ten training centres in Edo state, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: How do skills acquired by youths impact on the socio-economic development in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Skill Acquisition Impact on the Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

No	Item	Mean, \bar{X}	Decision
1	Job creation	3.431	Agreed
2	Self -reliance and self -employment	3.765	Agreed
3	Income generation	3.370	Agreed
4	Contribute to tax accumulation	2.314	Disagreed
5	Existence of small scale business	3.324	Agreed
6	Crime reduction through job creation	2.200	Disagreed
7	Increase in productivity with existence of small scale business	3.431	Agreed
8	Reduction in pressure for quest for payable jobs	2.110	Disagreed
9	Increase in gross national product through increase in productivity	3.039	Agreed
10	Reduction in presence of street youths, youth gangs and negative stereotyping of young people	2.373	Disagreed
11	Youth empowerment	2.520	Agreed
12	Preparation of the youths for their future	3.380	Agreed
13	Strong economy due to youth empowerment	3.231	Agreed
14	Improved standard of living due to income generation	3.510	Agreed
15	Production reduces importation.	3.331	Agreed
16	Export of products contributes to National earnings.	2.622	Agreed
17	Reduction of quest for abroad employment due to self employment of youths	3.510	Agreed
18	Reduction of image damaging associated with quest for abroad employment	2.331	Disagreed
19	Income earning for the youths boosts poverty reduction	2.622	Agreed
20	Increase in sense of nationality	2.421	Disagreed

Table 2 shows that out of 20 items, respondents agreed on item 14 and disagreed on item 6. This means that skill acquisition has impacted on the socio-economic status of youth in Nigeria.

Research question 3: What are the challenges of skill acquisition in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Challenges of Skill Acquisition in Nigeria

No	Item	Mean, \bar{X}	Decision
1	Poor funding affect the development of skills	3.131	Agreed
2	No money to expand my business though I acquired the skill	2.765	Agreed
3	Lack of machines and hand tools to put into practice the skills acquired	3.101	Agreed
4	Lack of financial empowerment for re-training after completion of programme	2.514	Agreed
5	Level of education affects skill acquisition and development	3.324	Agreed
6	I have employed ten workers for food processing, packaging in my shop	2.500	Agreed
7	Poverty in the society affects skills acquisition	2.631	Agreed
8	Attitude of individuals towards participation is a major problems affecting skills acquisition	4.111	Agreed
9	Competency of trainers/instructor is one of the problems affecting skill acquisition	4.039	Agreed
10	Location or proximity of the centres is a major problem	2.373	Disagreed
11	Quality standards in performance	2.520	Agreed
12	Establishment of productive working techniques	3.380	Agreed
13	Adaptability to workplace requirements	3.516	Agreed
14	Lack of guidance on vocational and technical skills	3.730	Agree
15	Stigma associated with low status	2.333	Disagreed

Table 3 shows that two items out of 15 items listed, respondents disagreed and agreed on 13 items. This means that skill acquisition programmes are faced with so many challenges that need immediate attention in Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

Table 1 show that there are a number of benefits reaped from the establishment of skill acquisition centres in Nigeria. The respondents agreed that 16 prominent skills acquired by the youths have significantly helped them in reducing poverty and therefore some societal vices; making the youth self employed and therefore, self reliant; uplift their socioeconomic status, make them creative and help in the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs). These skills include building drawing skills (manual and computer), ability to use machines for making plastics, a ability to use hand tools for domestic electric wiring, brick and block Laying skills and carving skills. Others are food processing, packaging, ability to use bakery skills, carpentry and Joinery skills, hair dressing skills, tailoring, iron and welding skills, interior and exterior decoration skills, ability to raise animals, birds and eggs, ability to operate small scale business (buying and selling) and ability to rear animals commercially. These findings confirmed that of earlier reports by {Curtain, (2000); Chigunta, (2002); Opuwill, (2003) and Grierson, (1997)}.

In Table 3, the challenges facing skill acquisition in Nigeria were identified and responses sought. Respondents agreed that the following were the major challenges; poor funding; lack of machines and hand tools to put into practice the skills acquired, lack of financial empowerment for re-training after completion of the programme, level of education and competency of trainers/instructor. Others are poverty in the society, attitude of individuals towards participation establishment of productive working techniques, adaptability to workplace requirements, lack of guidance on vocational and technical skills, proximity to the

centres and stigma associated with low status. However, on the issues of location or proximity of the centres and quality standards in performance, the general consensus is if boarding accommodation are provided and the programme is handled by competent staff, assessment is regular and properly supervised, they could be effectively tackled.

Conclusion

The study revealed that skills acquisition programme is beneficial in its entirety; there was significant correlation between the vocational training and employability. The skill acquisition of the programme makes the youth self employed and therefore, self reliant, uplift their socio-economic status, make them creative, capable of reducing some societal vices and help in the achievement of the MDGs. This implies that skill acquisition centres are capable of providing trainees with functional and desirable competencies that make them employable.

Recommendations

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

Introduction of more skill acquisition centres. This change has to occur at all levels of learning, from primary school up to university. Since a number of university graduates have also been found not possess any vocational skills to be self-reliant. Partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors in the country to create and sustain employability centre which would provide training, links to jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities, promotion of initiatives and contributions to training by funding.

The youths should be encouraged by providing stipends or scholarships to acquire relevant and quality skills that can contribute to socio-economic development of the country.

This will require doing the following:

- I. Increasing investment in skill acquisition training centres
- II. Establishment of entrepreneurial programmes to enhance youth empowerment in Nigeria.
- III. Introducing flexible training programmes,
- IV. Decentralising skill acquisition training centres to local authorities, including local artisans at the semi-urban and village level, and
- V. Linking the skill acquisition training centres to the labour market or what the society desires.
- VI. Government initiatives that promote skills acquisition for youth employment programmes should be encouraged. Examples should include National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Programme.
- VII. Provide approaches and tool kits to private sector initiatives to support youth employment programmes Nigeria

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