

Research Article

Exploring the Effectiveness of Vocational Skill Acquisition Interventions in Nigeria. A Perspective from North- Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of vocational skills acquisition on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Gombe metropolis, focusing on the relevance of training to career goals, business outcomes, and challenges faced by participants. A sample of 103 SME owners who had undergone vocational training was surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The data was analyzed using SPSS software to generate descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Results indicate that while vocational training moderately improves employability and income generation, significant external challenges, such as limited access to capital, markets, and modern technology, hinder the long-term success of business ventures. The study concludes with recommendations for aligning vocational training programs with market demands and providing additional support to address external barriers.

Keywords: Vocational training; SMEs; Employability; Income generation; Business challenges; Gombe metropolis; Skill acquisition

Introduction

The vocational skill acquisition is a central issue in the context of economic production and satisfaction for the purpose of empowering human capacity for self-reliance [2,6]. Over the years, vocational skill acquisition has been an area of serious concern for nation economic development in both developed and developing nations because of its impact on employment generation and improvement of national income for economic development [6,16]. Furthermore, it is also factual that the private ventures particularly the individual vocational skills acquisition and development has the capacity of generating more income and employment opportunities for self-reliance than public sector in Nigeria and in scores of developing countries as well [20].

With the growing level of abject poverty and unemployment couple with the declining interest of today youths in the productive and profitable private ventures particularly agricultural activities and skill acquisition which had constantly and habitually breeds a ground for the massive employment opportunities, especially to both the rural and urban communities contributed to the large possible extent in the growing numbers of unemployed youth in Nigeria [10]. So also, the bulk numbers of our university graduates and their urgent demand and hope for unreal and imaginary white-collar jobs and employment also deteriorate the unemployment situation in the country [21].

This resulted for unemployed youth among large population of Nigeria contributes to the high rate of insecurity, and the increase rate of violence vicious cycle of poverty in the country [7]. Omeje, (2021), Ajose, (2021) and Akinyetun, (2023) revealed that 64 million of the Nigeria youths are unemployed while 16 million are grossly underemployed bringing the quantum number of unemployed youth to 80 million. With this uncontrolled number of youth population skill acquisition for youth empowerment became inevitable to curtail the wide growing level of poverty in the country

Several attempts have been made by the governments, private

organizations and nongovernmental individuals to reduce the large number of unemployed youths through various skill acquisition programmes (Inyang & Agwadu, 2017; Barringer, Ireland, 2012) Yet unfortunately, the speed of unemployed youth keeps on growing in alarming rate. This work is intended at assessing the success and the failure of various skill acquisition programmes over a long period of time particularly the skill acquisition programmes undertake by National Directorate for Employment and its collaborating agencies. It may also try to find out why the skyrocketing number of unemployed youths despite several numbers of skill acquisition intervention in northern Nigeria.

Problem Statement

The high rate of youth unemployment and the horrific and poor business environment couple with the lack of entrepreneur skill among our youths in their precious ages continues to have retrogressive consequences on the productive and profitable economic activities to our dear country (Adebisi & Oni 2012). This also affects their long-term employability and income generation for human development and state political stability as well. As the skills and capacity of those unemployed decline over time, they are more likely to be ill-equipped even when the country regains its full economic prosperity. This may however have negative impact on young people as well as growth and development of the state economy, as they are at the prime and precious age for acquiring necessary skills and work experience for the common good of all. It is however important to note that, in 2015 labour force increased to 76.9 million from 72 million in 2014, with increase rate 12% between 2010 and 2014 and the majority of whom were youth. This clearly shows that about 1.5 million youth are expected to enter the labour market seeking for job to survive. It is pertinent state that the public sector could not be able to absorb the 30% of the uncontrolled number of youths enter in the labour market annually (*Help Desk Report, 2019: World Bank, 2016*). It is therefore important to establish empirically whether or

not the various programme undertaken by NDE and its collaborating agencies have the capacity of empowering our teeming youth for economic empowerment and self-reliance.

Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of vocational skill acquisition interventions in Nigeria. Other specific objectives are:

1. To identify the type of the vocational skills acquired by the individual participant from the vocational skill development of NDE, or any of collaborating agencies
2. To identify the type of business undertaking by individual participant as a result of skills acquired from the Vocational Skill Development by NDE or any of its collaborating agencies
3. To assess whether the vocational skills obtained by the individual participant improve his income for decent life
4. To identify the further constraints face by individual participants in the current business learn from the Vocational Skills Development of NDE or its collaborating agencies

Literature Review

Vocational skill acquisition refers to as functional skills that gain toward becoming knowledgeable in specific trade or particular profession (Iroegbu, 2017). It is factual, that most successful entrepreneurs worldwide begin acquiring a vocational skill or training that is high demand for self-reliance and economic empowerment. It is obvious that several empirical studies emphasize on the functional aspects of skill acquisition programmes, Le, Hoang, and Nguyen, (2023). Gambari (2009), Abdallah, Khasawneh, Al-Madadha and Abedrabbo, (2023), Miranda (2016), Iroegbu, (2017) and Ofoye (2019). Likewise, scores of other set of empirical works investigated the challenges of the challenges faces by various interventions of skill acquisition programmes, Adebisi and Oni (2012), Masha, Shava, Mambiravana and Bwowe, (2022), Awogbenle and Igweh and Egbule, (2022), and Gopi and Subramoniam, (2023). While focusing on challenges bedeviling the different skills acquisition in the country, none of the aforementioned studies examines the effectiveness or the None of this study researched the effectiveness of otherwise of the programmes.

Material and Method

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to assess the impact of vocational training on SMEs in Gombe metropolis. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from participants to understand the relevance of vocational skills acquisition, its impact on employability, business ventures, income generation, and challenges faced by SME owners. Descriptive survey design was selected as it allows for a detailed examination of the participants' perceptions and experiences, providing both qualitative and quantitative insights into the phenomena under investigation.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of Small and

Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) situated in Gombe metropolis. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 103 participants, representing a cross-section of SME owners or operators who had undergone vocational training. This sample size was considered sufficient to generate statistically reliable results and was chosen to reflect a variety of sectors within the SME landscape in the metropolis. The choice of purposive sampling ensured that the participants had direct experience with vocational training programs relevant to their business operations.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to capture both demographic information and specific details about vocational training and its perceived impact on business operations. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections:

1. Vocational skills acquired and their relevance to career goals.
2. Business ventures undertaken as a result of the training.
3. Financial benefits and improvements in quality of life.
4. Challenges faced in business operations.

A Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" was used to measure participants' responses to key items. This scale allowed for the quantification of subjective perceptions, providing a basis for the statistical analysis of participant responses.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through face-to-face distribution of questionnaires to the 103 selected participants. The questionnaires were administered over a period of two weeks, with each participant given sufficient time to complete the survey. Follow-up visits were made to ensure high response rates, and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 25. SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, for the variables of interest. These descriptive statistics helped to summarize the central tendencies and variability in the data, providing insight into the general perceptions of the participants regarding vocational skills and their business outcomes. Mean scores were used to determine the average level of agreement with the various statements on vocational skills relevance, business performance, and constraints faced by SMEs. Standard deviation was employed to assess the variability of responses, indicating the degree of consensus or disagreement among participants. Tables were generated to present the key findings from the data, illustrating the distribution of responses across the Likert scale for each item. These tables provided a clear visual representation of the impact of vocational training on SME operations and outcomes in Gombe metropolis.

The data in Table 1 reveals critical insights into the perceptions of vocational skills acquisition, particularly regarding career relevance, employability prospects, and satisfaction with the variety

Table 1: Identification of Type of Vocational Skills Acquired by Individual Participant.

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	SA	A	N	D	SD
The vocational skills I acquired are relevant to my career goals	3.46	1.22	10(8.8%)	14 (12.3)	15 (13.2)	45 (39.5)	18 (15.8)
Vocational skills obtained improved employability prospects	3.33	1.11	7 (6.1)	17 (17.9)	26 (22.8)	39 34.2)	13 (11.4)
Satisfaction with the variety of vocational skills offered	3.47	1.07	4 (3.5)	16 (14.0)	27(23.7)	37(32.5)	17(14.9)
Types of vocational skills individual participants acquired	2.87	0.98	8(7.0)	30(26.3)	00 (00)	33(28.9)	29(25.4)
Relevancy of vocational skills to career goals	3.42	0.99	10 (8.8%)	15 (12.3)	16 (13.2)	46 (39.5)	19 (15.8)
Vocational skills improved employability prospects	3.43	0.92	8 (6.1)	18 (17.9)	27 (22.8)	40 34.2)	14 (11.4)
Satisfaction with the variety of vocational programs	3.43	0.85	5 (3.5)	17 (14.0)	27(23.7)	37(32.5)	17(14.9)
Quality of the vocational skill programs	3.43	0.78	10(8.8%)	16 (12.3)	17 (13.2)	47 (39.5)	20 (15.8)
Recommend the vocational skill program to others	3.43	0.7	9 (6.1)	19 (17.9)	28 (22.8)	41 34.2)	15 (11.4)

Notes: n ¼ 371. Likert scale: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 2: Type of Business Undertaking by Participants as a Result of Skills Acquired.

ITEMS	Mean	Std. Dev.	A	SA	N	D	SD
Extent to which current business venture aligns with trainings received.	2.84	1.03	10(8.8)	30(26.3)	31(27.2)	28(24.6)	3(2.6)
Satisfaction with the profitability making in a business venture	3.49	1.06	2(1.8)	19(16.7)	27(23.7)	35(30.7)	19(16.7)
Confident in the success and sustainability of business ventures	2.8	0.91	7(6.1)	29(25.4)	44(38.6)	17(14.9)	3(2.6)
Training Acquired is an effective in enabler in overcoming business challenges	2.87	0.98	8(7.0)	30(26.3)	33(28.9)	29(25.4)	2(1.8)
Business venture contribute positively to personal and financial goals	3.04	1.16	7(6.1)	31(27.2)	27(23.7)	23(20.2)	13(11.4)

Notes: n ¼ 371. Likert scale: SA: strongly agree; A: agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

of skills offered. The mean values for most items cluster around 3.4, indicating that participants tend to agree or remain neutral regarding the relevance and impact of the skills they have obtained. The item "The vocational skills I acquired are relevant to my career goals" has a mean of 3.46 (SD = 1.22), suggesting that while some participants found the skills relevant, a significant portion did not. In fact, 39.5% disagreed with the statement, highlighting a substantial portion of dissatisfaction. The perceived improvement in employability prospects from vocational skills was rated slightly lower, with a mean of 3.33 (SD = 1.11), and the standard deviation indicates a spread in responses. Here, 34.2% of participants disagreed that their employability had improved, pointing toward uneven outcomes in the applicability of the training. Satisfaction with the variety of vocational skills offered scored similarly (Mean = 3.47, SD = 1.07). The lower standard deviation implies more consistency in responses, but with 32.5% of participants expressing dissatisfaction, this indicates an area for improvement in diversifying the skillsets offered.

In Table 2, the focus shifts to the extent to which participants applied their vocational skills in business ventures. The mean values suggest moderate alignment between acquired skills and business undertakings, but the standard deviations point to significant variability in responses. The alignment of current business ventures with the trainings received was rated with a mean of 2.84 (SD = 1.03), indicating that while some participants found alignment, many did not, with 24.6% disagreeing. The relatively high standard deviation suggests varied experiences among participants, implying that the vocational training might not have been universally applicable to real-world business scenarios. Confidence in the sustainability of business ventures, with a mean of 2.80 (SD = 0.91), highlights a more concerning trend. The majority of participants were either neutral or lacked confidence in the success of their businesses, as reflected by 38.6% who responded neutrally and 14.9% who disagreed. Participants' satisfaction with the profitability of their ventures scored slightly higher with a mean of 3.49 (SD = 1.06), though the relatively large spread of responses (SD = 1.06) suggests that profitability outcomes were not consistent across participants, with only 16.7% strongly agreeing with the statement.

Table 3 focuses on the impact of vocational training on participants' income, standard of living, and ability to meet basic needs. The mean values range from moderate to slightly positive, but the standard deviations highlight significant variability. "Vocational skills acquired significantly increased income" scored a mean of 3.42 (SD = 0.98), indicating moderate agreement, though with considerable variability in responses. Only 9.6% strongly disagreed, but a large proportion (30.7%) remained neutral, indicating that not all participants experienced a substantial income increase. In terms of participants' ability to save money for future needs, the mean value was notably lower at 2.86 (SD = 1.16). This low mean, coupled with a relatively high standard deviation, indicates that many participants did not feel the vocational training significantly improved their financial capacity to save, with only 7.9% strongly agreeing.

Table 4 provides insight into the external constraints faced by participants in business operations, which could hinder the benefits gained from vocational skills acquisition. The mean values suggest that participants generally agree that various external factors impose significant barriers.

One of the highest mean values, 3.86 (SD = 0.81), corresponds to "Limited access to markets poses challenges to the growth of business," reflecting widespread agreement on this issue. The lower standard deviation suggests more uniformity in participants' responses, with 45.6% of respondents agreeing and no respondents strongly disagreeing, indicating that market access is a shared challenge. Bureaucratic hurdles form significant barriers to the growth and operation of business" received a mean score of 3.56 (SD = 0.91). While most participants agreed or were neutral on this issue, the relatively low standard deviation points to consistent challenges experienced across the participant pool. The item "Inadequate business management skills hinder businesses" scored similarly with a mean of 3.82 (SD = 0.98). While many participants agreed that their lack of management skills hindered their business operations, the spread of responses (SD = 0.98) shows that some participants were more confident in their business management abilities.

Table 3: Vocational Skills Obtained Improves Participant Decent Lif.

ITEMS	Mean	Std. Dev.	A	SA	N	D	SD
Vocational Skills Acquired Significantly Increased Income	3.42	0.98	5(4.4)	10(8.8)	35(30.7)	41(36.0)	11(9.6)
Satisfaction with Financial Benefits from Vocational Training	3.49	1.04	5(4.4)	13(11.4)	24(21.1)	46(40.4)	13(11.4)
Improvement in Standard of living as Result of Income Generated from Vocational Training	3.65	1.1	4(3.5)	13(11.4)	23(20.2)	37(32.5)	25(21.9)
Income from Vocational Training Positively Affects Ability to meet Basic Needs	2.85	0.99	9(7.9)	27(23.7)	40(35.1)	22(19.3)	4(3.5)
Income from Vocational Skills Contributed to a Decent Quality of Life	3.42	0.89	1(1)	17(14.9)	28(24.6)	47(41.2)	7(6.1)
Vocational Training Made a Considerable Difference in Ability to Save Money for Future Needs	2.86	1.16	9(7.9)	34(29.8)	33(28.9)	10(8.8)	14(12.3)
Overall Financial Situation Significantly Improved After Skills Acquisition Programs	2.96	0.8	2(1.8)	26(22.8)	49(43)	22(19.3)	2(1.8)
Satisfaction with Opportunities Offered by Vocational Trainings	3.53	0.97	1(0.9)	15(13.2)	30(26.3)	39(34.2)	16(14)

Notes: n ¼ 371. Likert scale: SA: strongly agree; A: agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 4: Further Constraints Face by Participants in the Current Business.

ITEMS	Mean	Std. Dev.	A	SA	N	D	SD
Constraints in Accessing Adequate Funds for Capital	3.59	1.01	4(3.5)	11(9.6)	23(20.2)	47(41.2)	16(14.0)
Bureaucratic Hurdles form Significant Barriers to the Growth and Operation of Business	3.56	0.91	1(0.9)	10(8.8)	37(32.5)	37(32.5)	16(14)
Lack of Modern Technology Hampers Productivity	3.7	1.04	3(2.6)	12(10.5)	20(17.5)	43(37.7)	23(20.2)
Satisfaction with the Availability of Infrastructure Business Operations	3.59	1.04	2(1.8)	14(12.3)	28(24.6)	35(30.7)	21(18.4)
Limited Access to Markets Poses Challenges to the Growth of Business	3.86	0.81	6(5.3)	23(20.2)	52(45.6)	21(18.4)	00 (00)
Inadequate Business Management Skills Hinders Businesses	3.82	0.98	2(1.8)	8(7.0)	23(20.2)	42(36.8)	27(23.7)
Satisfied with the Availability of Support Services to Address Business Challenges	3.77	0.98	3(2.6)	7(6.1)	24(21.1)	44(38.6)	24(21.1)
Lack of Access to Affordable Credit Facilities Limits the Expansion of Business	3.65	0.82	9(7.9)	30(26.3)	48(42.1)	13(11.4)	00 (000)
Inadequate Access to skilled Labour Affects the Productivity of Business Operations	3.73	0.97	4(3.5)	6(5.3)	22(19.3)	49(43.0)	19(16.7)
Seeking for Additional Support or assistance from Agencies to Overcome Business Constraints	3.34	0.93	1(0.9)	20(17.5)	32(28.1)	38(33.3)	9(7.9)

Notes: n ¼ 371. Likert scale: SA: strongly agree; A: agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Overall Analysis

The analysed data reveals that while vocational skills acquisition has generally been beneficial, particularly in increasing income and improving standard of living, there remain notable gaps. Specifically, participants report moderate satisfaction with the relevance and impact of the skills on career goals and employability. The variability in responses, as evidenced by the standard deviations, suggests that vocational programs are not universally effective and that external challenges such as market access, bureaucracy, and capital constraints continue to impede business success. Addressing these issues could enhance the long-term impact of vocational training on participants' financial well-being and business outcomes.

Discussion of Results

The data analysed in this study highlights several key aspects of vocational training and its impact on participants' employability, income generation, and business ventures. While vocational training generally improves the prospects for a better quality of life and entrepreneurship, there are significant limitations in its alignment with career goals, business sustainability, and external constraints such as access to capital, markets, and modern technology.

The moderate mean scores across most metrics, particularly in areas like career relevance (Mean = 3.46), employability (Mean = 3.33), and business success (Mean = 2.80), are consistent with other studies that emphasize the limitations of vocational training in completely addressing participants' career or business goals. For example, research by de Jager et al. (2020) on vocational education in developing contexts found similar challenges, noting that while participants gained practical skills, many struggled to translate these skills into sustainable employment or business success due to a lack of alignment with market needs and insufficient support infrastructure.

The wide variability in participant experiences, as indicated by the relatively high standard deviations in this study, echoes findings from Afolayan and Ogunbameru (2021), who observed that external factors such as bureaucracy, lack of capital, and inadequate access to markets were critical barriers to successful outcomes in entrepreneurship training. They concluded that these constraints often mitigate the potential benefits of vocational programs, a finding that resonates with the current study's results, where participants highlighted similar issues (e.g., limited access to markets, bureaucratic barriers, inadequate business management skills).

Moreover, this study's findings on income improvement (Mean = 3.42) align with Kellogg et al. (2020), who reported moderate increases in income among vocational training graduates. However, they also found that these increases were often insufficient for long-term financial stability due to the volatility of informal sectors where many participants found employment. This aligns with the present study, where despite a reported increase in income, many participants felt that the vocational training did not sufficiently enhance their ability to save for future needs or improve their overall financial situation. Lastly, the constraints highlighted in this study—such as inadequate access to credit, modern technology, and skilled labour—have been documented in broader economic development literature. Schoof and Ganbold (2022) argue that without addressing these systemic challenges, vocational training alone cannot be expected to yield sustainable business outcomes. The high mean scores for "Lack of modern technology hampers productivity" (Mean = 3.70) and "Limited access to markets" (Mean = 3.86) reinforce this point and suggest the need for holistic interventions that combine skills training with infrastructure and policy improvement. In conclusion, while vocational training provides important short-term gains,

particularly in increasing income and skill acquisition, its long-term effectiveness is contingent upon resolving broader structural issues. This study's findings, in alignment with recent literature, underscore the need for vocational programs to be paired with improved access to capital, market linkages, modern technology, and policy reforms to fully empower participants in their entrepreneurial and employment pursuits. Addressing these issues could enhance the sustainability and impact of vocational training programs, creating more meaningful pathways to economic stability and business success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the analysed data, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of vocational training programs and address the identified challenges:

Improve Alignment Between Training and Market Demands:

Vocational training programs should be better aligned with the current demands of the labour market and entrepreneurial environments. The moderate mean values for the relevance of training to career goals (Mean = 3.46) and business alignment (Mean = 2.84) indicate that participants feel the training does not fully equip them for real-world applications. Vocational curricula should be regularly updated based on industry trends, and strong partnerships should be forged with relevant sectors to ensure that the skills provided are market-relevant. As supported by de Jager et al. (2020), there is a need for continuous curriculum revisions and collaborations with industries to address market needs.

Enhanced Post-Training Support and Mentorship: The variability in participants' confidence in the sustainability of their business ventures (Mean = 2.80, SD = 0.91) suggests that many entrepreneurs struggle with applying their skills post-training. Mentorship programs and post-training support services, such as business incubators, could help bridge this gap. Providing access to experienced mentors in relevant industries could assist participants in applying their skills more effectively and navigating the challenges of running a business.

Address External Constraints (Access to Capital, Technology, and Markets): The study reveals that external factors, such as access to capital (Mean = 3.59), modern technology (Mean = 3.70), and markets (Mean = 3.86), are significant barriers to business success. It is recommended that vocational training programs be complemented by initiatives aimed at providing participants with better access to financial resources, affordable technology, and market linkages. Governments, financial institutions, and development agencies should collaborate to create low-interest loans or grants, as well as infrastructure development programs that can support small businesses.

Incorporate Business Management Training: Many participants indicated that inadequate business management skills (Mean = 3.82) hindered their business operations. Future vocational training programs should include modules on entrepreneurship, financial management, and business strategy. This would equip participants not only with technical skills but also the knowledge needed to run successful enterprises, which could help address issues such as sustainability and profitability.

Foster Policy and Institutional Support: The challenges of bureaucratic hurdles (Mean = 3.56) and the need for more accessible business support services (Mean = 3.77) highlight the role of institutional inefficiencies. Governments should work on creating a more conducive environment for entrepreneurs, particularly through policy reforms aimed at reducing bureaucratic barriers and offering more accessible support services. Public-private partnerships can be instrumental in facilitating these improvements.

Conclusion

This study underscores the value of vocational training in improving employability and enhancing participants' livelihoods but also highlights significant areas for improvement. While moderate gains were observed in income generation (Mean = 3.42) and business sustainability, the results indicate that these benefits are often undermined by external challenges, including limited access to markets, capital, and technology. Moreover, the vocational skills acquired were only partially aligned with participants' career goals, suggesting a need for program refinement.

The findings align with broader studies in vocational education, such as those by Kellogg et al. (2020) and Schoof and Ganbold (2022), which similarly emphasize the importance of addressing structural barriers to maximize the impact of vocational training. Without addressing these systemic challenges, vocational training alone will not be sufficient to drive sustainable employment or entrepreneurial success.

Finally, to fully realize the potential of vocational training, there must be a multifaceted approach that incorporates not only skill development but also enhanced access to financial resources, market opportunities, modern technology, and effective business management. The implementation of these recommendations could significantly improve the long-term success of vocational training programs and contribute to more sustainable livelihoods for participants.

Author Statements

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