

Perception on Skill Acquisition Programmes and Employability of Young Adults in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study, adopted survey research design to explore the perception of respondents on how skill acquisition can enhance employability of young adults in Ogun State. It was guided by two research questions. A sample of 367 was chosen from a population comprising 7,572 young adults aged 15 – 25 who were learners in project T. Max, Ogun State Skill Fund and Ogun State Gateway Skill Programmes. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Test – retest method was employed to assess the reliability of the scale using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient at 0.05 level of significance and an overall reliability coefficient (r) of 0.782 was obtained. Data was analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation. The study revealed, among others, that skill acquisition programmes do align with the current and future needs of industries in Ogun State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that functional monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be put in place to check the activities of skill acquisition programmes coordinators, facilitators and other members of staff managing the affairs of the centres.

Keywords: employability, skill acquisition programmes, young adults, Ogun state, project T. max

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving global economy, the acquisition of relevant skills and their alignment with the demands of the labour market have become crucial factors in fostering sustainable economic growth and development. Nowhere is this more evident than in Ogun State, Nigeria, where the employability of young adults and the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes have emerged as critical issues with far-reaching implications for the state's economic sustainability. This submission is evident in the provision of skill acquisition programmes by

the state government to cater for the myriads of problems associated with the issue of unemployment.

Notable among these problems is the significant challenge in addressing the growing disparity between the skills possessed by the young adult population and the skills required by employers. This mismatch has led to acute unemployment and underemployment among young adults, thereby posing a serious threat to the state's economy. In response to this challenge, the Nigerian government, in partnership with various organisations and stakeholders has implemented several skill acquisition programmes aimed at equipping young adults with relevant skills needed in the labour market. These programmes range from vocational training, technical training to entrepreneurship development. Fundamentally, a typical skill acquisition programme aims at transforming people, especially young adults, into specialists; as well as to create more jobs to make them self-reliant and economically independent. Good examples of such programmes include Project T Max, Ogun State Skill Fund and Ogun State Gateway Skill Programme.

Skill acquisition could be intellectual. It can be learning to listen, public speaking, social engagements, 21st century skills, and many more. In the submission of Ogbeide-Akugbe et al. (2024), skill acquisition refers to the process of learning a skill-oriented task. Skill acquisition programmes are specifically designed to train interested young adults in vocational, entrepreneurial, and technical skills. Such skills, in their submission, could involve furniture and fittings, welding, electrical/electronic repairs, health and safety, business skills, carpentry, plumbing, bricklaying, automobile mechanic, barbing, and fashion designing, among others. Skill acquisition, to this end, is a form of training offered to young adults with the sole aim of equipping them with knowledge and skills for self-employment or paid jobs (Okoye & Edokpolor, 2021).

It is very important to address issues concerning skill acquisition as skilled and employable young adults are not only vital contributors to economic productivity but also catalysts for innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustained economic growth. Conversely, high rates of youth unemployment can lead to a multitude of socio-economic problems, including poverty, social unrest, and reduced economic output, ultimately hindering the state's progress towards sustainable economy.

Industry skills' demands should be addressed by stakeholders especially by the educational institutions to ensure a prosperous and sustainable economy. In Ogun state, industry's demands are geared towards ensuring that young adults are equipped with the necessary skills, values, knowledge and competencies required to make them employable so as to contribute to the industries' growth and long-term development. According to Anumnu (2014), industries are very much interested in youths that can display essential employability and entrepreneurship skills like interpersonal skills, leadership skills, social skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, resourcefulness, creativity, and innovation. The author noted that these skills are in high demand and industries are ready to employ graduates and young people who can exhibit these skills beyond the educational or academic certificate earned.

Industry's demands in Ogun state are targeted towards young adults who are intrapreneurs. These are the categories of young people who can demonstrate resourcefulness and exhibit entrepreneurial skills within the organisation for growth, expansion, competitiveness, and sustainability. Intrapreneurs in the organisations create business expansion through innovation. Industries believe that graduates from skill acquisition outfits should be able to exhibit entrepreneurial skills to enhance the vocational skills acquired towards enterprise creation or organisational expansion (Yinusa & Adeku, 2021).

According to Rufai et al. (2013), industries require youths who exhibit technical and vocational skills as well as being self-confident with high self-esteem and strong decision-making skills. In the opinion of Finch et al. (2013), skills such as written and verbal communication skills, problem-solving and analytical skills, interpersonal skills, creative thinking skills, information technology skills, adaptability skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, emotional intelligence skills, demonstration, and presentation skills are current industry skills valued by employers of labour. Individuals who fail to demonstrate the aforementioned skills risk being jobless in this 21st century.

The world is now in the 4th Industrial Revolution era where artificial intelligence and machine learning are gradually dominating. Technical skills in machine learning and artificial intelligence are the focus; however, the aforementioned skills provide the foundation to leverage the new skills required to fit into the new industry demands. For example, individuals who do not possess ICT skills or knowledge of computers will not fit into machine learning and artificial intelligence and such individuals will have to start from the scratch. Information and Communication Technology skills, programming skills, software engineering, software development, coding, data science, and data management skills are required for emerging and future industries. United Nations Development Programme (2015) reported that employers of labour are presently demanding for employees with good technical skills to take charge of all the technology inclined operations in their different outfits. Technical skills such as ICT skills, coding, programming, and software development are in high demand, improving the employability rate of graduates who possess these skills. This is not far-fetched given the need for every organisation to integrate technology to drive their business operations for competitiveness, relevance, scalability, and sustainability. However, it is worthy of note that soft skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence skills, communication skills, and social and interpersonal skills are germane in ensuring the success of the emerging and future projection industry demands.

Participation in skill acquisition programmes plays a vital role in economic growth, and poverty reduction as participants are equipped with the competencies needed to secure employment or start businesses. Bell and Blanchflower (2019) submitted that addressing unemployment through skills acquisition programmes is not just a necessity, but a strategic approach for employment creation and economic growth. By investing in training, many unemployed young adults can be empowered to create their own opportunities, contribute to the economic growth and build brighter future for themselves and their respective communities. They could become employers of labour rather than remaining idle. Likewise, Oge (2023) posited that skills acquisition programmes are organized to redress the problems of unemployment and poverty

among the teeming youths and graduates in Nigeria as these programmes will not only make them job creators but also wealth creators.

In the same vein, Ekong and Ekong (2016) argued that many states in Nigeria have successfully mounted skills acquisition programmes in their domains in a bid to address the challenge of unemployment, especially among the young adults in their localities. Furthermore, Isaac (2011) cited in Okolocha et al. (2020) argued that skill acquisition is a major tool for extreme poverty eradication and hunger with the aim of creating an avenue for jobs and wealth creation which will bring self reliance and sufficiency and contributing to the growth and development of the nation's economy.

Research questions

The following research questions guided from the study:

1. To what extent do skills acquisition programmes in Ogun State align with the current and future needs of industries within the state?
2. In what way does participation in skill acquisition programmes influence the employability outcomes of young adults in Ogun State?

Methodology

This research adopts survey research design. The target population comprises all young adults aged 15 to 25 who were learners in the three skills acquisition programmes in Ogun state, as depicted on table 1.

Table 1: Total population across the three skills acquisition programmes in Ogun State

S/N	Skill Acquisition Centres	Male	Female	Total
1	Project T. Max	1,217	1,258	2,475
2	Ogun State Skill Fund	1,328	1,405	2,733
3	Ogun Government Gateway skill Programme	1,145	1,219	2,364
	Total	3,690	3,882	7,572

Source: Project TMAX, (2024); Ogun Skill Fund, (2023); Ogun Gateway Skill Programme, (2024)

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) statistical model cited by Adam (2020). The model posited that given a total population of 7,572, if $\pm 5\%$ is taken for precision levels where confidence level is 95% and $p=.05$, the sample (n) should be = 367. Hence, a minimum threshold of 367 is considered as sample size.

Table 2: Selection of participants

S/ N	Skill Acquisition Centers	No. of Participants	Proportionate selection	Male	Female	Total
1	Project T. Max	2,475	$\frac{2475}{7572} \times 367 = 120$	$\frac{1,217}{2475} \times 120 = 59$	61	120
2	Ogun State Skill Fund	2,733	132	$\frac{1,328}{2733} \times 132 = 64$	68	132
3	Ogun Government Gateway skill Programme	2,364	115	$\frac{1,145}{2364} \times 115 = 56$	59	115
Total		7,572	367			367

Table 2 shows the stratified random sampling selection of respondents according to the population size of each of the three programmes. This was done by dividing the target population in each programme by the total population of participants. The total proportionate sample equaled the required sample size for the study. Again, the proportion calculated for each of the programme was used to calculate the proportional selection of male and female participants across the three programmes. This was done by dividing the number of male and female in each programme by the total in each programme, multiplied by the proportionate sample calculated for each programme. This sampling technique was chosen based on the need to adequately represent each unit according to its size. Respondents were picked randomly until the required number for each programme had been exhausted. Hence, 367 respondents were selected for the study.

Structured questionnaire titled Skill Acquisition Programmes and Employability of Young Adults Scale (SAPEYAS) was developed and administered to the selected young adults. The instrument has two sections, 1 and 2. Section 1 measures respondents' perception on the alignment of skill acquisition programmes with the current and future needs of industries in Ogun State while section 2 measures respondents' perception of the influence of participation in skill acquisition programmes on employability outcomes of young adults in Ogun State. Section 1 of the questionnaire contains eight items while section 2 has seven items, making a total of fifteen items. Four (4) point Likert scale of Very High Extent (VHE) to Very Low Extent (VLE) was used in section (1) and the same type of scale with Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) options was used in section (2).

The questionnaire was piloted with a small group of respondents in PICMAC Skill Acquisition Centre in Ibadan, Oyo State that is not part of the main study. It was readministered after an interval of two weeks. Test-re-test method was used to assess the reliability of the scales using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the test gave an overall reliability coefficient (r) of 0.782 which is close to 1.0, indicating a good internal consistency. The research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation scores. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making. So, items with mean score of 2.50 and above were considered

accepted (agreed) while those below the benchmark of 2.50 were considered rejected (disagreed).

Presentation of results

Research question 1: To what extent do skills acquisition programmes in Ogun State align with the current and future needs of industries within the state?

Table 3: Respondents' perception on alignment of skills acquisition programmes with current and future needs of industries (N=361).

s / n	Items	VHE f(%)	HE f(%)	LE f(%)	VLE f(%)	\bar{x}	SD	Remarks
1	The skills provided in technical and vocational training programmes meet the immediate needs of industries in Ogun State.	138 (38.2)	217 (60.1)	6 (1.7)	0	3.37	0.52	Agreed
2	Skills acquisition programmes in Ogun State are updated regularly to reflect technological advancements in key industries.	140 (38)	217 (60.1)	4 (1.1)	0	3.38	0.51	Agreed
3	The entrepreneurial skills taught in these programmes equip young adults to meet the evolving demands of the business environment in Ogun State.	149 (41.3)	212 (58.7)	0	0	3.41	0.49	Agreed
4	Industries in Ogun State are actively involved in the design and development of the curriculum for skills acquisition programmes.	180 (49.9)	181 (50.1)	0	0	3.50	0.50	Agreed
5	Graduates of skills acquisition programmes are able to fill existing gaps in the workforce across critical sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and ICT.	145 (40.2)	216 (77.3)	0	0	3.40	0.49	Agreed
6	Skills acquisition programmes are designed to prepare young adults for the future needs of emerging industries in Ogun State.	157 (43.5)	204 (56.5)	0	0	3.43	0.49	Agreed
7	Employers in Ogun State express satisfaction with the relevance of the skills acquired by graduates of these programmes.	168 (46.5)	193 (53.5)	4 (1.1)	0	3.47	0.49	Agreed
8	To what extent do skills acquisition programmes in Ogun State adapt their curricula to reflect changing industry requirements.	166 (46)	195 (54)	0	0	3.46	0.59	Agreed
Grand mean						3.42		

Note: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE)

Table 3 evaluates respondents' responses on how well skills acquisition programmes in Ogun State align with current and future needs of industries in Ogun State. The results show strong positive alignment across all measured dimensions. The highest-rated aspect is industry involvement in curriculum design, with 49.9% rating as "Very High Extent" and 50.1% as "High Extent" (mean = 3.50). This near-perfect split between the two highest categories indicates excellent industry-academia collaboration in programme development. Similarly, employers are perceived to express strong satisfaction with programme graduates' skills relevance (46.5% VHE, 53.5% HE, mean = 3.47), suggesting that the programmes are successfully producing job-ready candidates. Programmes demonstrate good adaptability to changing industry requirements (46% VHE, 54% HE, mean = 3.46), indicating dynamic curriculum updates that keep pace with evolving market demands.

In the same vein, the skill acquisition programmes effectively prepare young adults for emerging industries' future needs (43.5% VHE, 56.5% HE, mean = 3.43), showing forward-thinking programme design. The skills acquisition programmes successfully address workforce gaps across diverse sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, and ICT (40.2% VHE, 59.8% HE, mean = 3.40). In terms of entrepreneurship focus, entrepreneurial skills training effectively equips young people for evolving business environments (41.3% VHE, 58.7% HE, mean = 3.41). Both technical training content (38.2% VHE, 60.1% HE, mean = 3.37) and regular programme updates (38% VHE, 60.1% HE, mean = 3.38) receive strong ratings, though these are the lowest scores, suggesting room for improvement in keeping pace with rapid technological changes.

The grand mean of 3.42 indicates strong industry alignment. The consistently low standard deviations (0.49-0.59) show consensus among respondents. The virtual absence of "Low Extent" ratings (0-1.7%) demonstrates broad satisfaction with programme-industry alignment in Ogun State.

Research question 2: In what way does participation in skill acquisition programmes influence the employability outcomes of young adults in Ogun State?

Table 4: Respondents' perception on skill acquisition programmes and employability outcomes of young adults (N=361).

Items	SA f(%)	A f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
Participation in skills acquisition programmes has significantly improved my chances of gaining employment.	116 (32.3)	245 (68.3)	0	0	3.32	0.47	Agree
The skills I acquired through the programme directly meet the requirements of employers in my field of interest.	107 (29.6)	245 (67.9)	9(2.5)	0	3.27	0.49	Agree
Completing a skills acquisition programme has enhanced my ability to secure a well-paying job.	116 (32.1)	236 (65.4)	9(2.5)	0	3.30	0.51	Agree
The practical experience gained from the programme has made me more competitive in the job market.	130 (36)	225 (62.3)	6(1.7)	0	3.34	0.51	Agree
Participation in the skills acquisition programme has increased my confidence in pursuing self-employment or entrepreneurship.	123 (34.1)	231 (64)	7(1.9)	0	3.32	0.51	Agree
Employers value the certification and training I received from the skills acquisition programme.	136 (37.7)	220 (60.9)	5(1.4)	0	3.36	0.51	Agree
The programme has significantly broadened my job prospects in Ogun State and beyond	124 (34.3)	237 (65.7)	0	0	3.34	0.48	Agree
Grand mean					3.32		

Note: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table 4 shows respondents' perception of the influence of participation in skill acquisition programmes on employability outcomes of young adults. The data shows positive responses across all measured dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 3.27 to 3.36 on a 4-point scale. All items received an overall "Agree" rating, indicating general satisfaction with the programmes. The most striking pattern is the concentration of responses in the "Agree" category (60.9% to 68.3% across items) and "Strongly Agree" category (29.6% to 37.7%). Notably, very few respondents expressed disagreement.

Also, 37.7% strongly agreed that employers value their programme certification (mean = 3.36), and 36% strongly agreed that practical experience made them more competitive (mean = 3.34). The results suggest that the programmes were effectively delivered on multiple fronts. 32.3% strongly agreed that their chance of gaining employment has significantly improved. Again, 29.6% strongly agreed that the skills they possess have greatly helped them in meeting

employers' requirements. On job security enhancement, 32.1% strongly agreed that the programmes have enhanced their ability to secure and maintain well-paid jobs.

Similarly, 34.1% strongly agreed that the programme has increased their confidence in pursuing self-employment. The programme appears to have successfully broadened opportunities beyond the immediate area, with 34.3% strongly agreeing that it has expanded job prospects in Ogun State and beyond. The consistently low disagreement rates and high agreement scores indicate that these skill acquisition programmes are meeting their intended objectives of improving employability and career prospects for participants.

Discussion of findings

Findings from research question 1 substantiated that skill acquisition programmes do align with the current and future needs of industries in Ogun State. This finding corroborated the submission of Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz (1998) which stressed the need for collaboration and synergy between the industries, training outfits or educational institutions. These scholars are of the view that such synergy and collaboration will bring about innovations and creativity among graduates and it will in turn bring about economic sustainability. The finding is also in support of Rufai et al. (2013) which noted that industries require youths who exhibit technical and vocational skills as well as being self-confident with high self-esteem and strong decision-making skills.

Findings from research question 2 revealed a clear and meaningful relationship between programme participation and employability outcomes among young adults in Ogun State. The finding is in accord with the submission of Bell and Blanchflower (2019) which stated that addressing unemployment through skills acquisition programmes is not just a necessity, but a strategic approach for employment creation and economic growth. By investing in training, many unemployed young adults can be empowered to create their own opportunities, contribute to the economic growth and build brighter future for themselves and their respective communities. Besides, they can as well become employers of labour rather than remaining idle. Likewise, the finding from the study backs the submission of Oge (2023) who argued that skills acquisition programmes are organized to redress the problems of unemployment and poverty among the teeming youths and graduates in Nigeria as these programmes will not only make them job creators but also wealth creators.

Conclusion

The problem of unemployment among the young adults is largely created by lack of relevant skills and the mismatch between the skills possessed by the young adults and the skills required by industries. This has informed the creation of skill acquisition programmes in Ogun State. The programmes (Project T. Max, Ogun State Skill Fund and Ogun State Gateway Skill Programmes) have turned out many graduates that are readily available to cater for the demands of industries. Apart from this, many of these graduates have also had the opportunity of establishing their own businesses, thereby making them employers of labour to reduce the nation's unemployment rate. Being an employee of a firm or a self-employed person helps a lot to fortify the nation's labour force; thus making economic sustainability a reality.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Due to the prevalence of inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, poor remuneration of facilitators and other related problems, the federal government in particular is enjoined to review its policy on the funding of education to conform to the recommendation made by the international conference on funding adult education for development held in Bonn, Germany in 2009. The conference propagated the need to allocate a minimum of 6% of GNP to education within which a minimum of 6% is allocated to skill acquisition programmes and other adult education programmes. Such a review will, to a large extent, help to improve the provision of skill acquisition programmes across the length and breadth of the country.

2. Functional monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be put in place to check the activities of skill acquisition programmes coordinators, facilitators and other members of staff managing the affairs of the centres. Frequent and scheduled visit by these monitoring and evaluation teams to these centres will always help to keep the members of staff on their toes while the available facilities/infrastructures will also be adequately conserved.

3. In order to fully sensitize the public about the available skill acquisition programmes and their significance in the life of the citizens, the government and all other stakeholders like Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), philanthropists and well-meaning Nigerians that engage in the provision of skill acquisition programmes are enjoined to form alliance in staging elaborate awareness campaigns in different regions of the country. Such elaborate campaigns will go a long way to increase the programme enrolment rate while the perception of many citizens towards skill acquisition programmes will also change for better.

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