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The Skills Acquisition Programme and Youth Empowerment in Ondo State of Nigeria: An Empirical Study

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Abstract- Youths are said to be the future leaders of any country in the world, Nigeria inclusive. It is also a general belief that government all over the world try to invest strategically in her youth for them to be able to assume the position of leadership when the time comes. In spite of this, it appears that the training, the investment of the Nigerian governments as well as the socialization of youth in Nigeria and Ondo State, in particular, seem to be inadequate because many of them instead of contributing meaningfully to the development of the society, they are doing otherwise. The Ondo State government in one of its spirited effort to combat this problem introduced the Skills Acquisition Programme to develop, empower and engage the youth in the State. This empirical study, therefore, assessed the level of impact this programme has on Youth empowerment and development in the State. 27 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the trainers at the skill acquisition centers, while 557 copies were given to the beneficiaries of the skills acquisition programme in Ondo State. Thirteen members of the coordinating departments were chosen for an in-depth interview. Findings revealed that the skills acquisition programme has been able to provide employment opportunities for youth beneficiaries, reduce their involvement in social vices, improved their standard of living.

Keywords: *youth, skills acquisition, youth empowerment.*

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Abstract- Youths are said to be the future leaders of any country in the world, Nigeria inclusive. It is also a general belief that government all over the world try to invest strategically in her youth for them to be able to assume the position of leadership when the time comes. In spite of this, it appears that the training, the investment of the Nigerian governments as well as the socialization of youth in Nigeria and Ondo State, in particular, seem to be inadequate because many of them instead of contributing meaningfully to the development of the society, they are doing otherwise. The Ondo State government in one of its spirited effort to combat this problem introduced the Skills Acquisition Programme to develop, empower and engage the youth in the State. This empirical study, therefore, assessed the level of impact this programme has on Youth empowerment and development in the State. 27 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the trainers at the skill acquisition centers, while 557 copies were given to the beneficiaries of the skills acquisition programme in Ondo State. Thirteen members of the coordinating departments were chosen for an in-depth interview. Findings revealed that the skills acquisition programme has been able to provide employment opportunities for youth beneficiaries, reduce their involvement in social vices, improved their standard of living as well as increase the rate at which the youth participate in governance. This study concluded that the skills acquisition programme had positively mpacted the lives of youth beneficiaries in Ondo state even though it was faced with some challenges as discovered during the interview session.

Keywords: youth, skills acquisition, youth empowerment.

I. Introduction

Youth, according to the population census of 2006, account for about 70 percent of Nigeria's population figure, which means that they are very important set of people that should not be taken for granted in the society. However, these young people face many challenges; such as high rate of poverty and unemployment, indiscipline, ignorance, inability to access vital information, and essential welfare services, which have made these young people lose hope in themselves. Some high levels of violence, crime and high risk of sexual behaviors of any age group are seen in the youth, leading many to label them as a source of the societal problem rather than its potentials (Skogan, 1986).

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According to Chigunta (2002), except factors, like unemployment, indiscipline, illiteracy, poverty, and others, are genuinely tackled by the government of nations, the problems confronting the contemporary African youth and the communities where they live will remain unresolved and possibly get worse. To develop and empower youth for community development and participation, the government and other stakeholders (e.g., NGO's and religious bodies) must be involved in the business of youth empowerment by organizing youth programmes that will help to place them (the youth) in a position where they can contribute meaningfully to the development of the society.

In Nigeria, youth unemployment has always been an issue of great concern to parents, communities, and governments at federal, state and local levels. Giving the devastating impact this has on youth and the economy at large; the government has been looking for ways to provide alternative sources of employment for the teeming youth since white collar jobs are almost unavailable. One of the programmes introduced thus far is the skills acquisition programme. This programme has been considered worthy by the Ondo State governments as it will help to develop, empower and engage the teeming jobless youth. The aims and objectives of the programme according to the Department of Youth Development are to

- Stimulate the interest of youth in the state in vocational trades through the provision of training at designated centers and the provision of Micro-Credit to successful graduands of these centers.
- Train unemployed youths in simple vocations to make them self-reliant.
- Encourage productive entrepreneurial and small business skills.
- Assist in the development of the downstream industries.
- Encourage the adaptation to local technology.
- Stem the rate of rural-urban migration; and
- Enhance social peace and stability.

The government after introducing the programme, had to establish 28 skills acquisition centers across the 18 local government areas in the State to help train youth beneficiaries in their chosen vocational trades. Also created was the Ministry of Adult,

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Technical and Vocational Education and that of the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports. These ministries were able to implement and coordinate the programme through their various departments.

Since the inception of the programme in 2008, the expectation of government and that of the society is to see, among others, a drastic reduction in the unemployment rate and youth engagement in social vices. However, recent happenings proved otherwise as these social vices have been on the increase in Nigeria in general and Ondo State in particular. It is on this premise that the present study was predicated, to assess and determine the extent of the contribution of skills acquisition programme on youth empowerment in Ondo State of Nigeria.

II. Literature Review

Conceptually, the word youth connotes being young. It is a relative term, defined by a given age range, and with its meaning varying across cultures, groups, and countries. According to the definition given in the African Youth Charter (AYC) "youth means every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years". The National Policy on Youth Development (NPYD) also said anyone that falls within the age bracket of 18 to 35 years is a youth. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defined youth as young male and female between the age bracket of 15 and 24 years. In Nigeria, university graduates, aged 30 years and below, are recognized by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as eligible to serve the nation under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme (Ngwoke, 1992). Considering the definitions given by AYC, NPYD, and NYSC a youth in my own opinion is anyone who is young and who is between the ages of 18 and 30 years.

Youth are the future leaders of any country, Nigeria inclusive. To Aiyede (2009), the youth population in Nigeria constitute more than two-thirds of the country's population of 140 million. To him, they are the backbone of development as well as the future leaders of any country in the world. He said

> *"Indeed, if Nigeria is to be sustained as a viable entity, there must be a very good plan to tap the energy and resourcefulness of the youth population to prepare them for the position of leadership and to fast-track economic development".*

Similarly, Jega (2012), writing on the roles and importance of youth in the society, asserted that it is imperative for policy makers and parents to understand and appreciate that youth are the future of this country; therefore, their mindset and creativity should be of a great concern to the nation. There is need for the government to create an atmosphere favorable for the youth to achieve their desired objectives. The agonies of Boko Haram, militancy, armed robberies, scams, and other social deviance are the product of lack of guardianship and vision for national development. Jega concluded by saying that, investing in knowledge and skill is critical to youth development.

Ojikutu (1998) also asserted that youth empowerment is very crucial in the attainment of development because the transitional period from childhood to adulthood is unquestionably a challenge for many youth and for them to contribute their quota to national development, government must help their transformation in this regard. Ifenkwe (2012) also stated that the youths in Nigeria need to be nurtured and catered for. Youth characters are influenced by both genetic inheritance and learning. Genetically inherited features are fixed and are difficult to change, while learned behavioral patterns can be modified with desirable results. The popular saying "as a tree is inclined, so shall it fall' aptly underscores the need to appropriately handle the conflicting personality, motivational and developmental factors associated with youth, and the transition from youth to adulthood.

The scriptures (Proverb 22:6) admonishes us to "train up a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The youth can be likened to a flood. "When there is no control system for a flood, a terrible disaster to all and sundry is usually the uninvited consequence. Several authors like Ejiogu (2001); Onochie (2008) have described the failure to show interest in youth empowerment and development as a grave and dangerous omission. Hence, the need to empower and cater for them.

Ozohu-Suleiman (2006) noted that Nigerian youth are trapped by unemployment. According to him, Unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which exists among them in all developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Zakaria (2006) believes that "the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agents' provocateurs." These include desperate politicians and religious demagogues. Zakaria strongly believes that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences. Therefore, government and other groups in the society such as NGOs, to put a stop to social vices have to initiate youth empowerment programmes, such as the skill acquisition programme, entrepreneurial programmes, etc. to provide an alternative source of livelihood for youth in the absence of white collar jobs.

Skill acquisition according to Chudi-oji (2013) can be said to mean a well-designed procedure of acquiring new ways and methods of carrying out specialized functions. The policy focus of government in Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth republic has been on how people, especially the youth, can acquire vocational trainings in order to engage them in gainful activities. Hence, between 1986 and 2013, successive

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administrations in Nigeria had introduced various initiatives such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986, the People's Bank in 1989, the Community Bank in 1990, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001, among others to promote entrepreneurship spirit through the creation of gainful self-employment opportunities, access to loans by youth who wants to engage in business without demanding for unavailable collateral from them and to reduce the level of poverty in the country have been profound. Since Nigeria gained her independence, the formal education system laid too much emphasis on ability to "read, write and communicate in English" at the expense of skills and vocational trainings. Having recognized the importance of vocational training to a country's development, a new policy on education was introduced in 1977, including vocational subjects in the curriculum of schools as well as setting up of technical colleges where students can acquire skills of different types (Chinedum, 2006). Henceforth, the skills acquisition programme has been one of the most fundamental programmes introduced by the government in Nigeria to empower, develop and engage youth in gainful activities.

III. Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted the systems theory. It is an approach that sees an organization or society as a dynamic open system or as an entity consisting of a set of elements in interaction with one another which maintains itself in a state of relatively stable equilibrium by experiencing a dynamic and constant interchange of energy and information with its environment (Makinde, 2011). Systems theory views social organizations as a complex set of dynamically intertwined and interconnected elements. Every system includes inputs, processes, outputs, feedback and the environment in which it operates and with which it continuously interacts.

The study of youth empowerment and skills acquisition programme in Ondo State should be studied with the systems approach. The Systems theory offers a fruitful approach to this study because of its input-output conversion mode. Input in the form of demands and support are received from the environment and output in the form of programmes, policies, and laws which intends to bring about changes in the environment are injected into the society (system) after that. This theory will help us in understanding how the youth empowerment programmes are made and implemented through the input, processes and output analysis of the systems theory as the theory is used in analyzing policy processes in public administration and social sciences in general.

The Ondo State government stands as the system while the State which comprises of the youth, ministries, departments and others stands as the environment. The problem posed by youth unemployment, crime and the desire to provide jobs for the youth stands as an input or demands from the environment on the political system and after the demands passed through the political system, the skills acquisition programme which stands as an output was introduced in the environment as a programme of government to empower youth in the State. After implementing the programme, feedback was also generated and that in turn serve as another form of demands on the government which might form the basis for the institution of another youth empowerment programme later in the future.

IV. Methodology

The population under study comprised of the youth beneficiaries that benefitted from the skills acquisition programme, the trainers at the skills acquisition centers and coordinating members of staff from the department of youth development and the department of vocational education. A total number of 5,566 youth had benefitted from the programme between 2008 and 2015; the skills acquisition centers have a total number of 84 trainers. The department of youth development has a staff strength of 11 while the department of vocational education has a total number of 15 staff.

Five hundred and eighty-five (585) copies of questionnaire were administered: 27 copies were administered on the trainers at the skill acquisition centers, while 557 copies were administered on the beneficiaries of the skills acquisition programme in Ondo State. Also, thirteen members of the coordinating departments were selected for an in-depth interview. This figure represents 50 percent of the total number of staff in the two Departments who are in charge of the skills acquisition programme in Ondo State. Relevant textbooks, journals, internet materials were consulted. Also, data was sourced from the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports as well as the Ministry of Adult Technical and Vocational Education. The data collected through primary data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics while secondary data were analyzed using content analysis.

V. Results

This section of the study assesses the impact of the skills acquisition programme on youth empowerment in Ondo State. It attempt to assess the level of impact the skills acquisition programme has on youth empowerment. To achieve this, data obtained through questionnaire administration were analyzed and complemented with facts collected through the conduct of interviews.

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Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with six assertions made by the researcher on the contribution of the skills acquisition programme on youth empowerment in Ondo state. Table 1.1 below reveals the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents on the impact of the skills acquisition programme on youth empowerment and its values/responses are organized using Likert scale of measurements, such as: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Only 49 (9.8%) of the respondents disagreed, while an overwhelming 448 (90.1%) of the respondents agreed to the statement that skills acquisition programme has been able to reduce the rate of youth unemployment in Ondo State. Bearing in mind that majority of the respondents to this study are the beneficiaries, this finding is an empirical confirmation that the skills acquisition programme has a significant impact on the reduction of youth unemployment rate in Ondo state. Also, there is 12.6% difference between respondents who agreed 280 (56.3%) and respondents who disagreed 217 (43.7%) on the assertion that the programme has reduced the level of youth involvement in a crime. The interpretation of this distribution could be expressed in two-fold: while, little above average of the respondents acknowledged that the programme had reduced the level of youth involvement in crime rate in the state; and, similarly, a little below average differed from the statement. This indicates that the programme has, but not to a large extent, reduced the level of youth involvement in crime in the State.

Table 1.1: Assessment of the Impact of the Skills Acquisition Programme on Youth in Ondo State

Assertions	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Skills acquisition programme has been able to reduce the rate of youth unemployment in Ondo state	Strongly Agree	17	3.4	3.4
	Agree	431	86.7	90.1
	Disagree	21	4.2	94.4
	Strongly Disagree	28	5.6	100.0
	Total	497	100.0	
The programme has reduced the level of youth involvement in crime	Strongly Agree	28	5.6	5.6
	Agree	252	50.7	56.3
	Disagree	7	1.4	57.7
	Strongly Disagree	210	42.3	100.0
	Total	497	100.0	
Skills acquisition programme has increased the involvement of youth in governance	Strongly Agree	4	.8	.8
	Agree	205	41.2	42.1
	Disagree	28	5.6	47.7
	Strongly Disagree	260	52.3	100.0
	Total	497	100.0	
It has improved the level of confidence the youth have in government	Strongly Agree	7	1.4	1.4
	Agree	178	35.9	37.3
	Disagree	34	6.8	44.1
	Strongly Disagree	278	55.9	100.0
	Total	497	100.0	
The programme has increased the standard of living of youth in Ondo state	Strongly Agree	422	84.9	84.9
	Agree	21	4.2	89.1
	Disagree	54	10.9	-
	Strongly Disagree	-	-	100.0
	Total	497	100.0	
It has helped to reduce poverty in general	Strongly Agree Agree	- 344	- 69.2	- 69.2
	Disagree	8	1.6	70.8
	Strongly Disagree	145	29.2	100.0
	Total	497	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2015

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Furthermore, this study put forth the assertion of whether the skills acquisition programme has increased the involvement of youth in governance. Responding to this, 288 (58%) of the respondents agreed, and 209 (42%) of the respondents disagreed with the assertion. Similarly, two forms of inference can be drawn from this result. While 42% of the respondents disagreed on the basis that the programme appears not to be a veritable instrument for engendering youth participation in government and governance processes. However, 58% of the respondents agreed on the premise that the programme provides a platform for youth to reap the dividends of democratic government, thereby enchanting them to engage in governance activities. This, therefore, indicates that skills acquisition programme has, though indirectly, established relationships with youth participation in governance.

Also, it was revealed that the skills acquisition programme has not, to a remarkable degree, improved the level of youth confidence in government as 312 (62.7%) respondents, fell in the disagreement category with this assertion. However, 185 representing 37.3% of the respondents averred that the programme had improved the level of confidence the youth have in government. This, therefore, implies that the programme has no remarkable degree of improvement on the level of youth confidence in government.

The youth beneficiaries and the trainers who are the respondents to this study as well as core players in the skills acquisitions programme excellently agreed that the programme has increased the standard of living of the youth in the State, as 89.1% of the respondents are in agreement with the assertion. This means that any youth in the state who participated in the programme since its inception seems to have recorded a laudable increase in his/her standard of living. While352 (70.8%) of the respondents also agreed that the skills acquisition programme could be commended for its efforts at reducing poverty in Ondo state.

VI. Testing of Hypothesis

The skills acquisition programme has no significant impact on youth empowerment in Ondo State.

From table 1.1, distribution of the respondents was shown on each assertion set out to assess the Impact of the Skills Acquisition Programme on Youth empowerment in Ondo State. The analysis averred that the skills acquisition programme has an impact on youth in the state. This study further subjected this claim to simple linear regression to quantify the level of impact which the skills acquisition programme has on youth using hypothesis for the inferential test guide.

To test the hypothesis, simple regression analysis was employed to assess the impact of the independent variable (skills acquisition programme) on dependent variable (youth empowerment). Table 1.2 indicates the model summary of the simple regression equation that predicted significant impact of the skills acquisition programme on youth empowerment in Ondo state since $R = .666 > 0$, $R^2 = .444$, $F(5, 49) = 78.354$; $\rho < .05$. The explanation of the values presented are given below.

The model summary table provides useful information about regression analysis most especially the 'simple R' column which is the correlation between the actual observed independent variable and the predicted dependent variable. It states the proportion (percentage) of the (sample) variable in the dependent variable that can be attributed to the independent variable(s). Thus, this study revealed that 66% of the variation in youth empowerment could be accounted for by the skills acquisition programme. This implies that the pearson regression analysis rejected the hypothesis 2 since $r > 0$ and $p < 0.05$. The outcome of this survey showed that the tested variables consider for this study show that the skills acquisition programme has significant impact on youth empowerment in Ondo state. However, the significance of this impact is not minor.

Table 1.2: Model Summary of the Simple Regression for the Skill Acquisition Programme Created under the Youth Empowerment Programme in Ondo state

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
	.666[a]	.444	.438	.402		
ANOVA[b]						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	63.355	5	12.671	78.354	.000[a]
	Residual	79.402	491	.162		
	Total	142.757	496			
a. Predictors: (Constant), QD6, QD4, QD5, QD3, QD2						
b. Dependent Variable: QD1						

Source: Statistically generated from table 1.1

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To complement the data gathered through questionnaire administration, some key personalities, numbering 14, were interviewed. To the majority of them, the skills acquisition programme is a laudable programme in the State as many youths have benefitted from it since its inception in 2008. According to the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Adult Technical and Vocational Education, the present government had tagged the youth empowerment programmes as an ''investment in peace'' in the sense that, the programmes have helped to engage many of the jobless youths and consequently, it has reduced their involvement in crimes.

According to the Director of Vocational Education, youth are always on queue every year struggling to gain admission into the skills acquisition centers, and this is because the programme has improved the living standard of beneficiaries since the introduction of the programme in the State. According to him, the first three sets of beneficiaries who passed through the skills acquisition centers and who have been diligent in their businesses have in turn contributed to the empowerment of other youth in the state thereby creating a multiplier effect.

Also, the Director of youth Development acknowledged the fact that the skills acquisition programme impacted the lives of youth positively in Ondo State. He claimed that the youths who are physically challenged and those from a very poor background have been given special consideration in their distribution of vocational tools to beneficiaries. To him, these beneficiaries have been able to cater for the needs of their families through the skills acquired from the skills Acquisition centers in the State.

Again, one of the supervisors of the skills acquisition centers agreed with the fact that skills acquisition programme and other youth programmes in Ondo State have been able to reduce the rate of unemployment in the State. He said the worrisome state of youth unemployment necessitated the introduction of the various youth empowerment programmes to encourage youth to shift focus from white collar jobs to the acquisition of skills and through this means, he said jobs have been adequately provided except for those youths who are lazy to pick up a vocation.

On the issue of how the programme has been able to reduce poverty in the state, almost all the people interviewed agreed with the fact that poverty has been reduced to a reasonable level in the state. According to one of the senior staffs in the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports, The aim of the programme is to reduce the rate of poverty in Ondo State, and this has been the case in the sense that employment which is one of the ways of alleviating poverty has been provided to people. Furthermore, he said the kind of jobs provided are the ones that can easily create jobs for others not employed. To another interviewee, he said the money realized from practicing these vocations has enable the beneficiaries to cater for their need and that of their family. Through these results, one can conclude that the skills acquisition programme in Ondo State has a great positive impact on youth in Ondo State.

VII. Conclusion

The Skills acquisition programme of youth empowerment schemes was introduced in Nigeria in general and Ondo State, in particular to develop and empower youth. Before the establishment of this programme, youths in Ondo State were faced with numerous problems such as unemployment, underemployment, involvement in criminal activities, inability to participate in the activities of the political system etc.

The skills acquisition programme in Ondo State, based on the findings of this study has, to a reasonable extent, alleviated the problems confronting youth in the State. The programme has helped to improve the lives of youth participants in the sense that many of them are now engaged in gainful activities and, consequently, they can cater for their needs and even that of their families. Furthermore, it has increased their level of participation in governance. Thus, the skills acquisition programme of youth empowerment schemes is a veritable programme in Ondo State of Nigeria irrespective of its challenges. To make the programme more beneficial to youth in the State, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. More vocational skills centers should be built to accommodate more youth that are interested in acquiring one skill or the other and enough trainers specialized in various vocations should be recruited into the skills centers.
2. The coordinators of this programme should also mandate the trainers to be committed to the time frame given to each participant to master a skill.
3. Government should also encourage private bodies, non-governmental organizations and religious bodies to engage in the business of empowering youth to complement its effort.
4. The state government should make funds available to the coordinating ministries as at when due to be able to purchase necessary facilities needed for the smooth running of the programme.
5. For effective monitoring, the government of Ondo State should try and recruit more staff into the two ministries (The Ministry of Youth Development and Sports and Ministry of Adult, Technical and Vocational Education).

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