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**A SURVEY OF THE IMPACT OF SKILLS ACQUISITION ON JOB CREATION
AND POVERTY REDUCTION AMONG YOUTHS IN ONDO STATE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The lamentable state of youth unemployment, crime and poverty in Nigerian calls for a holistic overhaul. Previous studies have concentrated on the problems of youth unemployment. This paper therefore investigated the impacts of skills acquisition centres on youth empowerment in Ondo State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were adopted. A self-designed instrument named 'Perception on Impacts of Skills Acquisition on Job Creation and Poverty Reduction in Ondo State' (PISAJCPROS) was used to elicit information from 120 respondents. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered. The data collected were analyzed with simple percentages, frequency tables and mean scores at 5% level of significance. The result showed that skill acquisition had significant impact on employment generation and poverty reduction. The study revealed poor funding and poor electricity as problems facing skills

acquisition centres. The study also recommended adequate funding of skill acquisition centres and stable supply of electricity.

Keywords: *Skills Acquisition, Youth Empowerment, Poverty Reduction, Joblessness/Unemployment, Creativity, Job Creation*

Introduction

The current economic recession and situation in Nigeria is a clear warning signal telling individuals, groups, organizations and governments to diversify our skills. Most importantly, our youths must be warned against laying too much emphasis on acquisition of formal knowledge through formal education and mere certification and theory without practical demonstration of acquired knowledge. One of the major Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which Nigeria was expected to achieve in the year 2015 was that of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger with the target of halving the proportion of people who earn less than a dollar a day through skill acquisition. (Ikegwu, Ajiboye, Aromolaran, Ayodeji and Okoroafor, 2014), yet, poverty cannot be alleviated or eradicated without first empowering the youths through vocational skills acquisition and education to tackle poverty squarely from the root.

Skill acquisition and youth empowerment is therefore the only tested and trusted antidote against poverty, lack, famine and youth prone crimes. In fact, it has been described by many as the recipe for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for wealth and job while instilling self – sufficiency and reliance (Isaac, 2011). The crime rate in Nigeria is quite amazing and keeps on growing by the day. Despite all efforts by the security forces to curb crime, it keeps increasing at a supersonic rate (Dachen, 2016). It is true then that a nation where her youths extol the dignity of honest labour and frown at idleness and indolence will encourage a peaceful and secure environment. The youths of such nation are often the drivers of national progress in terms of social, political, physical and economic transformation.

Poverty and economic deprivation have been seen as number one cause of crime in the country. In a country where economic deprivation persists, it drives its citizens to take to crime to survive. In a society where the rich get richer and the poor keep

battling with survival, crime is sure to persist (Isaac, 2006). Most Nigerian youths are mentally empowered and psychologically groomed from their various secondary schools and higher institutions of learning whereas they are found deficient in skills acquisition and practical manifestation of the knowledge received from the corridors of learning. This creates a great gap between educational trainings and employability of youths in the labour force. There is an acute poverty, unemployment and famine in Ondo State and Nigeria at large. The rate of unemployment is always on the rise. These problems have invariably increased other vicious acts such as armed robbery, fraud, kidnapping and the likes among our youths in Ondo State in particular. Hence, this paper aims at examining the impacts or roles of skills acquisition as a workable tool for empowering the youths in job creation, unemployment reduction, poverty reduction and income generation in Ondo State.

Ezeani (2002) defined skill acquisition as “trainings, practices and experiences”. This, means that skills acquisition is not necessarily someone’s latent potentials silently underlying his human body untapped, but the abilities and capabilities which someone possesses with or without his knowledge, but which are dormant as long as no practice, development or training is organised to arouse or trigger such abilities and capabilities into a useful perfection. This means that there can be no skills acquisition without deliberately planned trainings and development of a certain skill in an individual to function and survive in life.

Ihebereme (2010) perceived skills acquisition as the process of acquiring or gaining effective and ready knowledge in developing ones’ aptitude and ability in a particular field. Ihebereme’s submission is in support of Ezeani’s opinion of what skills acquisition is all about as he too posited that there must be a ready knowledge developed for the purpose of acquisition by the acquirer, with the purpose of developing his aptitudes and ability in a particular field. The above makes it clear that there must be trainers and trainees in the process of skills acquisition.

According to the National Population Commission (2007) more than half of Nigerian population is under the age of 30 years. Thus, it can be asserted that the economy of Nigeria is a youth economy (Aderinola, 2016). Hence, if youths acquired the needed skills for life

survival, they can impact on the community development efforts of their community (FRN, 2004). Such ways by which youth can impact positively on their community, town, city and nation at large is to be creative in mind and thoughts and to be innovative in skills.

When youths become creative and innovative, they can eradicate poverty, reduce crime and eliminate hunger. It is on this note that Isaac (2011) also agreed that skills acquisition is the process of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for employment, thereby creating an avenue for jobs and wealth creation while instilling self-sufficiency and reliance. The above contribution from Isaac on the relevance of skills acquisition correctly affirms that skills acquisition is the proven antidote to poverty, crime, hunger, food crises and the only tested and trusted weapon or machinery for job creation. To be able to create new openings for jobs therefore calls for creative minds and thoughts and innovative skills by Nigerian youths, which must transcend the theoretical knowledge acquired from the classroom of learning without practical skills which could make some of our jobless graduates and youths unemployable for lack of desirable skills.

Skills acquisition also develops creativity and critical thinking in our youths. Creativity is the ability to develop ideas that are unique, useful and worthy of elaboration. It involves the use of ideas (working on ideas) until something comes out of it. Creativity is the ability to solve problems, fashion products and define new questions in a particular cultural setting. This implies that what is considered creative in one setting may be a regular occurrence in another. The key word to creativity therefore is insight which emphasizes the might or ability to see a new thing (Woolfolk, 1998).

Ondo State Government, as the focal point of this study, has adopted many strategies over the years till this present time in tackling crime, poverty, youth unemployment and job creation. The major instrument used over the years to achieve the above was the establishment of youth acquisition centres in strategic towns and cities in the state. This instrument was firstly used by Governor Olusegun Abayomi Mimiko during his administration, and was sustained by the present administration led by Governor Rotimi Akeredolu.

The Ondo State government, in order to implement and achieve the aim and objectives of the skills acquisition programme,

established 28 skills acquisition centres, spread across the 18 local government areas of the State. These skills acquisition centres were also equipped by the State government with necessary facilities needed for them to function effectively and there are also qualified trainers to train youth in their chosen vocation (Department of Vocational Education, Ondo State Ministry of Adult, Technical and Vocational Education) (Jonathan, Oladeji, & Abiodun, 2021).

It is worthy of note to categorically state here that efforts of Ondo State Government towards job creation, poverty eradication and crime reduction through establishment of youth acquisition centres and youth empowerment schemes actually became pronounced during the administration of the late Governor Olusegun Agagu. The Mimiko's government ensured continuity of skill acquisition and youth empowerment projects in the states after taking over from his predecessor. Thus, Are Jide Adejuyigbe, who was the commissioner in charge of the Ministry of Adult, Technical and Vocational Education in Ondo State enlightened the people during the occasion of the graduation of trainees award of proficiency certificates and Empowerment of Trainees with start-up Equipment for small Scale Business held at Prospects High School, Oke Aro, Akure that the State Government's effort of establishing various skill centres was to fulfil one of the administration's promises to make life worthy of living for the citizenry, reduce illiteracy, poverty and create wealth in Ondo State. He quoted: "no fewer than forty trainees had graduated from skill acquisition centres in the state. According to him, the trainees were drawn from four focus Local Government Areas of the State which are: Ese-Odo, Odigbo, Irele and Ondo West Local Government Areas of the State. (The Tide Newspaper, 2016).

There should be co-operation between the state and the Federal Government in order to achieve the lofty aims of youth acquisition and youth empowerment in Nigeria. This can be seen in the scenario above and was complimented by the Ministry of Adult, Technical and Vocational Education that the programme was in collaboration between the Ministry, UNESCO and the National Mass Education Commission (NMEC). The above revealed that the co-operation and efforts towards fighting poverty and youth unemployment in Ondo State and any other state in Nigeria must not

be left to only the concerned state to tackle. (Source: The tide News online.wwethetidenewsonline.org) Nov. 24, 2016)

The Federal Government and even International bodies and other reputable organisations and rich individuals such as UNESCO as mentioned above must get involved. Such rich individuals or group which are expected to contribute their own quota is for example, the Dangote Group of Companies competently chairman by Aliko Dangote. It is only a concerted effort as illustrated above that can reduce poverty to a manageable level as poverty has often being associated with the cause of youth prone crimes in Ondo State, its environs and Nigeria at large.

Thus, the rich should use their riches, especially in Ondo State to support the State Government's effort at poverty eradication and youth empowerment through skill acquisition. In Ondo State, there are 18 Local Government Areas, the government in conjunction with the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) established 27 skill acquisition centres in different parts of the state. As at Nov. 24, 2016, fifty people including 30 graduates completed training as bakers in a pilot scheme in Akure South Local Government Area as disclosed by the then Commissioner for employment and productivity, Mr. Taye Akinleye. He informed the public that each of the 18 local governments was directed to train 100 people to reduce unemployment in the state (Source: The tide News online.wwethetidenewsonline.org) Nov. 24, 2016)

Furthermore, the ministry of employment and productivity in Ondo State had employed 473 graduates of various trades to work in different government departments in the state as at 2015. The Commissioner of Employment and productivity during the Mimiko's regime as a Governor under discussion, Taye Akinleye explained further that "some are working as traffic and traffic control corps, tree planters, market managers, street sweepers, bus drivers, conductors and others". The above further stressed the impacts of skill acquisition centre on youth empowerment in Ondo State as revealed by the commissioner- which include: getting everybody of every age pre-occupied and engaged with meaningful job, doing something worthwhile thereby reducing poverty and the numbers of idlers and miscreants in the state. The above revelation also points out the fact that skill acquisition centres graduates are being absorbed or employed

by the government to use their area of skill to contribute maximally towards the social, political, physical and economic growth and development of Ondo State thereby reducing youthful crimes and encouraging dignity and respect for honest labour.

As stated above, the drivers, tree planters, market managers, street sweepers, bus conductors- the Mimiko's School Shuttle Bus Scheme all over the State - all get salaries or wages with which they fend for themselves, their families and live responsible lives in Ondo State.

The co-ordinator of the National Directorate of Employment in the state during the past administration of Governor Olusegun Mimiko's government – Mr. Olaitan Olayinka further explained in detail the modus-operandi of skill acquisition and youth empowerment programmes in connection with job creation, poverty reduction, youth empowerment, and state economic growth and development in Ondo State as he explained that 450 people were currently undergoing training in three senatorial districts of the state which are located in Akure, Ondo Central, Ilutitun and Ogbagi Akoko. (The Tide Newspaper, 2014)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent to which Ondo State government, Nigeria, has been able to solve youth unemployment, create job opportunities and reduce poverty through skills acquisition.

Statement of the Problem

The problems of youth unemployment and poverty have over the years bred insecurity and threat to lives and properties of the people of Ondo State and Nigeria at large. These twin problems have caused the youths to engage in other nefarious activities such as drug abuse, rape, internet fraud, kidnapping, stealing and armed robbery. Thus, Isaac (2006) blamed the social vices among youths as a result of unemployment, economic deprivation and poverty.

Previous studies have concentrated on rate of unemployment and various solutions to the problem. However, a few or no studies have actually assessed the skills acquisition centres which were established to solve the problem. This study therefore investigated the

impact of skills acquisition centres on youth empowerment, job creation and poverty reduction in Ondo State with a view to providing an empirical evidence of the programme in helping to solve the problem of unemployment.

Research Questions

Two Research Questions were raised and answered in this study. They are:

1. Can skill acquisition reduce joblessness among youths in Ondo State?
2. Can skill acquisition reduce poverty among youths in Ondo State?

Significance of the Study

This study is very significant and timely in that it would enlighten our idle youths on career and vocational skill opportunities around them. It would make our youths to be dutifully engaged with definite skills or jobs which would be sources of sustenance for them. It would also help our youths in Ondo State and Nigeria as a whole to become creative and thus, create jobs for themselves and for others as they will become employers of labours.

The findings would also provide useful information for the government of Ondo State and other Non – Governmental Organizations, groups and wealthy individuals to establish more skills acquisition centres for youth empowerment in Ondo State. This would go a great mile in reducing poverty, unemployment and crime in Ondo State and Nigeria as a whole.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of the ex post facto type, because none of the variables were manipulated.

Population and Sample for the Study

The population for this study was made up of youths in all the skills acquisition centres in Ondo State. The sample for the study was selected from three major cities and local government areas in Ondo State viz: Ondo city in Ondo West Local Government, Idanre Town in Idanre Local Government area and Akure city in Akure South Local

Government area. The samples consisted of one hundred and twenty respondents selected from the three local government areas mentioned above.

Validity and Reliability

The researchers designed an instrument for the study, tagged: Perception on Impacts of Skill Acquisition on Job Creation and Poverty Reduction in Ondo State (PISAJCPROS). Two experts ensured the face and content validity of the instrument before it was administered to the respondents. Their corrections and suggestions were used to make the instrument better. Therefore, the instrument was trial-tested on 20 youths in an area which was not included in this study. The reliability of the instrument yielded 0.84 using Cronbach Alpha. The instrument was administered with the help of a research assistant. The respondents were given the questionnaires in their respective places of trades and skills. Collection was done immediately after they have responded to it.

Method of Data Analysis

Mean was used as the tool for data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of data was done with the use of simple percentages to determine the level of performance of the sampled youths. The analysis was arranged according to the research questions that were generated for the study.

Research Question 1: Can skill acquisition reduce joblessness among youths in Ondo State?

Table 1: Skill Acquisition and Employment Generation

ITEM	YES	%	NO	%	X	Mean
Skill acquisition has created job for me	113	94.2	7	5.0	113	3.0
Since I learnt this skill I don't have to depend on other people to survive	106	88.3	14	11.7	106	2.9
My skill acquisition centre has solved the problem of joblessness	113	94.2	7	5.8	113	2.8

Engagement in my work does not allow me to be lazy or idle anymore	114	95.0	6	5.0	114	2.8
I have learn certain skill before	106	88.3	13	10.8	106	3.0

Table 1 examined the impact of skill acquisition and youth empowerment on employment generation and showed that 113 (94.2% with mean test score of 3.0) of the respondents affirmed that skill acquisition had solved the problem of unemployment or joblessness for them. Also, 114 respondents (95.0% with mean test score of 2.8) affirmed that skill acquisition had solved the problem of idleness and laziness for them and could continue to solve such problems for youths in Ondo State if relevant skills are acquired and practiced by the youths. 106 (88.3% with mean score of 2.9) of the youths boasted of not depending on other friends or neighbours for daily needs, provisions and survival since they acquired the present skill which they are practicing as the proceeds from their skills generate enough income for them to feed themselves and take care of their needs on daily basis. Equally, 106 (88.3% with mean score of 2.9) out of the 120 respondents agreed to have acquired certain skill before which have empowered them economically, socially and otherwise. This implies that skill acquisition has greatly empowered the youths in Ondo State created jobs for them and has drastically reduced unemployment rates among youths in Ondo State.

Research Question 2: Can skill acquisition reduce poverty among youths in Ondo State?

Table 2: Skill Acquisition and Poverty Reduction

ITEM	YES	%	NO	%	X	Mean
This skill or job has made me to be creative	114	95.0	6	5.0	114	3.3
I save money for the future through thrift contribution on daily basis	101	84.2	19	15.8	101	3.3
Through this skill or job, I have conveniently set up a family and education	103	85.8	17	14.2	103	3.1

My skill or job has solved the problem of poverty	108	90	12	10.0	108	2.9
My skill or job has helped me to pay off all the debts I owe people	109	90.8	11	9.2	109	2.8

Table 2 revealed that 108 respondents (90% with mean score of 2.9) agreed that skill acquisition has solved the problem of poverty in their lives. Equally, 109 (90.8% with mean score of 2.8) confessed to the fact that skill acquisition has made it possible for them to settle or eliminate their debts thereby making them free from indebtedness which of course was caused by poverty. In the same vein, 103 (85.8% with mean score of 3.5) of the respondents/youths gladly revealed that they have been able to set up their own families through the proceeds accrued from the skills they acquired. In fact, 101 (84.2% with mean score of 3.2) of the youths/respondents asserted that they were saving money for future challenges and emergencies through thrift contribution made possible from the income from their skills. 114 (95% with mean score of 3.3) of the respondents affirmed that their acquired skills have not only empowered them financially, but have also made them creative and innovative. This implied that skill acquisition has empowered youths in Ondo State to fight poverty, set up and provide adequately for their own families, educate their children and settle their debts. This made them to be free financially to be able to save money for the raining day.

Discussion

This study examined the impacts of skill acquisition on job creation and poverty reduction among youths in Ondo State, Nigeria. The findings from the study showed that skill acquisition is capable of reducing joblessness in Ondo State and Nigeria as a whole if given the attention it deserves. Table 1 of the research question 1 showed that 94.2% of the youths agreed that skill acquisition can and has reduced joblessness among them and has created jobs for youths in Ondo State and Nigeria as a whole. This was in agreement with the opinion of Aderinola (2016) who, while explaining how skill acquisition transforms into entrepreneurship, opined that 'Entrepreneurship is not just skill acquisition for acquisition sake. It is an acquisition of skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for oneself and also for others'.

This submission was also substantiated by Isaac (2011) who stated that: "Skill acquisition is the process of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for employment, thereby creating avenues for jobs and wealth creation while instilling self-sufficiency and reliance". Thus, all skill acquisition programmes in Ondo State must make eradication of joblessness their top priority in their objectives and goals in Ondo State and Nigeria as a whole.

This study also investigated the impacts of skills acquisition on poverty reduction in Ondo State. The findings from the study revealed that skills acquisition has greatly reduced poverty among youths in Ondo State. While responding to the research question 2 which sought youths' opinion on whether skills acquisition has reduced poverty among youths in Ondo State, 90% of the respondents (i.e 120 respondents) responded in the affirmative that skills acquisition has reduced poverty in Ondo State. Okoli, and Okoli (2013), agreed with the above result when they opined that entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition will in no mean way create jobs which translate into youth empowerment. Thus, he described youth empowerment as the youths being able to eat when they are hungry, being able to meet their basic needs, have a shelter over their heads, being able to speak out in things concerning them in the society, not being deprived in any ramification in life and the ability to cater for their health needs whenever necessary. It reduces unemployment and poverty to the barest minimum.

Thus, poverty can be reduced if youths in Ondo State would avail themselves of the various opportunities to acquire one skill or the other. Only this can make youths to impact the community development efforts of their community. (FRN, 2004).

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have implications for the entire youths in Ondo State, the government of Ondo State and the three cities which were used for the study. The study shows that skill acquisition has greatly impacted the lives of the youths in Ondo State in the area of employment generation or job creation and poverty reduction. The implication of the above submission is that skill acquisition centres, which are sometimes not being properly funded and maintained by the governments may discourage youths from assessing profitable skills

which may translate into parade of idle youths who may engage their restive energy in crimes and other vicious acts detrimental for societal survival in Ondo State.

Apart from the above, poor electricity, poor maintenance culture, apathy on the parts of youths to embracing opportunities of skill acquisitions, and poor funding of skill acquisition programmes by governments and rich individuals are conspicuous. The implication of which are poor dilapidated structures at skill centres, ill equipped centres and poor attendants to acquire the various skills available, low productivity and low patronage at skill acquisition centres.

Conclusion

The main focus of this study was to examine the impacts of skill acquisition on youth empowerment as touching employment generation and poverty reduction among youths in Ondo State. The study revealed that Ondo State Government over the years has made frantic efforts at establishing skill acquisition centres which have in turn benefited the youths in various forms. The study also revealed that skill acquisition in Ondo State has actually generated employment for a lot of youths and has reduced poverty to a manageable level. However, there are teething problems which could hinder the success of skill acquisition programmes in Ondo State – among which are: poor electricity, poor funding, poor maintenance culture and lack of commitment on the part of successive governments to continue to maintain and sustain the efforts of past state administration on skill acquisition centres in Ondo State.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings above, in order to improve and sustain skill acquisition programmes by either individuals or by Ondo State government, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal in collaboration with Ondo State governments should work toward making power supply regular
2. Skill acquisition programmes in Ondo State and Nigeria at large should be adequately funded by both government and rich individuals in the society
3. Good maintenance spirit and culture should be inculcated and simbibed by youths

4. There should be continuity in government programmes from past to successive administration in Ondo State especially as regards skill acquisition in order to sustain the existing skill acquisition centres.

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