

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMMES AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Youth unemployment remains one of Nigeria's most pressing developmental challenges, and its effects are especially acute in rural, resource-constrained districts such as the Southern Senatorial Zone of Taraba State. This study examined the influence of entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes on youth empowerment across five Local Government Areas in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State: Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari. Anchored in Human Capital Theory, the study adopted a descriptive survey design. Data were collected from 384 respondents drawn through proportionate stratified random sampling from programme beneficiaries. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary instrument, validated through expert review and pilot testing with a reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) of 0.81. Findings show that participation in vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes significantly improved youth self-employment rates (from 18.2% to 63.7%), household income, and personal confidence. Tailoring and fashion design and welding and fabrication were the most commonly acquired skills. Key barriers included inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, weak mentorship structures, and socio-cultural constraints. The study recommends sustained government investment, improved programme coordination, and the integration of mentorship into skill acquisition curricula to produce lasting empowerment outcomes.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial skills, skill acquisition, youth empowerment, Southern Senatorial District

Introduction

Youth unemployment is one of the most serious developmental crises confronting the global society and sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, 53.4% of young people aged 15 to 24 were unemployed as of 2020, with the rate among those aged 25 to 34 standing at 37.2% (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021). These figures, though subsequently revised following a methodological change, are widely regarded by development practitioners as more representative of ground realities than the revised 6.5% figure (Mbachu, 2025; Virk et al., 2023). Taraba State records one of the highest poverty headcount ratios in Nigeria at 87.8% (NBS, 2019), with an unemployment rate of 39.4% translating to approximately 532,520 unemployed youth out of a labour force of 1,351,313 (Isa & Inuwa, 2024). Within the Southern Senatorial District, encompassing Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari Local Government Areas, youth unemployment exceeds 40%, driven by the acute scarcity of formal employment opportunities (NBS, 2020).

The Nigerian government and non-governmental actors have responded through a series of entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes. Among the most notable are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Vocational Skills Development Programme, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN), and state-level initiatives such as the School-to-Work Training Scheme (STW).

These programmes seek to equip young people with vocational and technical competencies that translate into self-employment and economic independence (Akinola et al., 2023; Ndamu, 2017; NDE, 2019).

Despite this policy attention, empirical evidence on the impact of these programmes at the local level remains limited. The Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State presents an important but understudied context: it is geographically remote, culturally diverse, and characterised by weak formal sector employment, yet it hosts a growing population of economically active youth. This study addresses the empirical gap by assessing the influence of entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes on youth empowerment in the district, examining participation patterns, economic and social outcomes, and barriers youth face in accessing and benefiting from available programmes.

Central to this discourse is the concept of innovation. Entrepreneurship is not merely about self-employment or income generation; at its core, it requires the capacity to think creatively, adapt to changing economic conditions, and introduce new solutions to existing problems. In contexts such as the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, where the formal economy offers limited absorptive capacity, innovation becomes a survival imperative. Young people who acquire vocational and entrepreneurial skills are not passive recipients of training; they are potential innovators who can generate novel products, services, and processes that transform local economies (Schumpeter, 1934; Drucker, 1985; Njoku, 2023). The integration of innovation into skill acquisition curricula is therefore not optional but essential for producing graduates capable of creating employment rather than merely seeking it. This study examines entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes through this lens, asking not only whether youth participated and what economic outcomes they achieved, but whether the programmes adequately equipped them with the innovative mindset required for sustainable empowerment. The study specifically sought to:

1. Determine, the extent of youth participation in entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes in the Southern Senatorial Zone of Taraba State;
2. Examine the impact of skill acquisition, on the economic empowerment of youth;
3. Investigate the impact of skill acquisition, on social and personal development outcome of youth.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship, derived from the French “entreprendre” (to undertake), denotes the process of identifying opportunities, marshalling resources, and generating value through innovative ventures (Adekunle, 2025; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020). It is widely regarded as a driver of economic growth, job creation, and innovation (Njoku, 2023; Onyeaghala et al., 2023). Schumpeter (1934) described the entrepreneur as an agent of creative destruction who disrupts existing economic arrangements by introducing new combinations of resources, and this foundational insight remains central to contemporary understanding of entrepreneurship as an innovation-driven process. In the Nigerian context, entrepreneurship encompasses not only business ownership but the broader capacity to generate self-sustaining livelihoods through creative application of acquired skills and market knowledge.

An entrepreneur, in this study, refers to an individual who takes the initiative to organise productive resources, bears the associated risks, and pursues new economic opportunities, often in the absence of formal employment alternatives (Drucker, 1985; Onyeaghala et al., 2023).

The entrepreneur is distinguished from the ordinary worker by the orientation toward opportunity recognition, value creation, and innovation rather than routine task execution. Among youth in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, the aspiration to become an entrepreneur is often the primary motivating factor for participation in skill acquisition programmes.

Skill acquisition, as defined by Idoko (2024), refers to the process of training individuals or groups to master task-specific competencies through structured education, apprenticeship, or experience. It is the systematic process by which a person develops the technical ability, knowledge base, and attitudinal disposition needed to perform a defined set of productive activities. Oyerinde and Falade (2016) frame skill acquisition as the manifestation of knowledge through training that instils entrepreneurial values in youth for meaningful development. In the context of this study, skill acquisition encompasses formal vocational training programmes as well as non-formal apprenticeship arrangements that equip youth with marketable trades such as tailoring, welding, carpentry, plumbing, and ICT.

Vocational training refers to structured educational activities designed to provide learners with practical, occupation-specific competencies that prepare them for direct entry into a trade, craft, or technical occupation (UNESCO, 2015; NDE, 2019). Unlike general academic education, vocational training is deliberately oriented toward labour market outcomes, equipping participants with hands-on skills that translate directly into productive activity. In Nigeria, vocational training is delivered through NDE-coordinated schemes, state technical colleges, NGO-operated centres, and informal master-apprentice arrangements that continue to serve as the dominant pathway into skilled trades.

Youth empowerment, in the context of this study, refers to the process through which young people gain the capacity, resources, and authority to make productive choices and bring about change in their own lives and communities (Umezulike, 2020; Afolabi et al., 2020). It is not limited to economic gains; it encompasses the development of self-confidence, social agency, critical thinking, and the ability to participate meaningfully in civic and economic life. Empowerment occurs across multiple dimensions: psychological (self-efficacy, confidence), economic (income, self-employment, financial independence), social (community participation, reduced marginalisation), and political (voice and representation). For youth in marginalised regions such as the Southern Senatorial Zone of Taraba State, empowerment through skill acquisition represents a primary pathway out of structural poverty and social exclusion.

Unemployment, in the context of this study, refers to the condition in which individuals of working age who are willing and able to work cannot find paid employment within the formal or informal economy (NBS, 2021; Virk et al., 2023). Youth unemployment is a particularly acute manifestation of this condition, characterised by the inability of young people aged 15 to 35 to secure gainful employment commensurate with their education, skills, or aspirations. In Nigeria, youth unemployment is shaped by structural factors including a mismatch between educational outputs and labour market demands, weak private sector growth, rural-urban migration pressures, and the inadequacy of vocational and entrepreneurial training provision. In Taraba State, where poverty rates reach 87.8% (NBS, 2019), unemployment is not merely an economic condition but a critical social crisis that drives vulnerability, social instability, and disillusionment among the youth population.

Innovation, in the context of entrepreneurial skill acquisition, refers to the capacity to generate and apply new ideas, methods, products, or approaches that create value in economic or social life (Schumpeter, 1934; Drucker, 1985). It is the quality that distinguishes an entrepreneur from a mere technician: where the technician replicates an established process, the innovator reconfigures resources and knowledge to produce something new or to serve a need in a better way. Drucker (1985) described innovation as the specific tool of entrepreneurship, arguing that entrepreneurs use change as an opportunity to start a different business or a different service. In this study, innovation is treated as both an outcome of effective skill acquisition and a criterion for evaluating programme quality. Programmes that produce only technical replication without fostering creative thinking, market responsiveness, and problem-solving capacity fall short of genuine entrepreneurial development. For youth in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, the acquisition of an innovative mindset is as critical as the acquisition of any specific trade skill, because it determines whether those skills are deployed as a static livelihood strategy or as a platform for sustainable enterprise growth and community economic transformation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory, propounded by Schultz (1961) and later extended by Becker (1964). Schultz (1961) argued that expenditure on human capacities, through schooling, training, and health, functions not as consumption but as an investment that raises the productive capacity of individuals and, by extension, national economies. Becker (1964) subsequently formalised this proposition by distinguishing general from firm-specific human capital and demonstrating that skills acquired through training generate private returns to the individual alongside social returns to the wider economy. Applied to this study, Human Capital Theory frames entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes as deliberate investments in the productive capacity of youth in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. Under this framework, participation in vocational and entrepreneurial training is expected to translate into measurable economic returns, including higher self-employment rates, increased household income, and improved capacity for enterprise creation. The theory further explains observed variation in outcomes according to training intensity: respondents who completed multiple training cycles or received post-training support are expected to report proportionally greater productive and economic capacity than first-time or unsupported participants, consistent with the human capital proposition that returns to training scale with the depth and continuity of investment.

Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition and Youth Empowerment: Empirical Evidence Studies

Onyeaghala et al. (2023) conducted a descriptive survey in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State and found that entrepreneurial skills acquisition significantly improved the employability and income levels of youth who participated in NDE-organised vocational training, with participants reporting stronger transition rates into self-employment than non-participants. Similarly, Obisanya et al. (2022) demonstrated, using a sample of skill acquisition beneficiaries drawn from federal and state programmes, that such interventions reduce youth unemployment and function as instruments of economic empowerment, particularly when accompanied by post-training support such as seed capital and structured mentorship;

beneficiaries lacking this follow-on support showed considerably weaker business survival rates. Ogunro et al. (2024) found, in a study of youth graduates in Owo Local Government Area, Ondo State, that skill acquisition had a statistically significant positive impact on self-employment and income outcomes, and identified training duration as a significant moderating variable, with graduates of longer programmes reporting higher earnings than those of short-cycle interventions. Directly within the present study area, Bashir (2025) surveyed 384 respondents across Donga, Takum, and Wukari Local Government Areas in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State and found that entrepreneurship training significantly enhanced youth capacity for income generation, business ownership, and financial independence, with respondents also reporting improved decision-making confidence following programme participation.

Adeyemi and Olabosinde (2022) argued, based on a review of skill acquisition outcomes among Nigerian youth cohorts, that entrepreneurial skill functions as a platform enabling young people to develop the mindset and practical know-how required for viable career creation, rather than simply equipping them with a single marketable trade. Yetunde and Oyebanjo (2025) found that graduates of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme in Nigeria reported improved business start-up rates, though challenges related to access to capital and market linkages persisted as the most frequently cited constraints on converting acquired skills into sustained enterprise. Fatoki (2019), in an empirical study of the Skills Acquisition Programme in Ondo State, reported that over 90 percent of surveyed beneficiaries agreed the programme had reduced youth unemployment, with more than 5,500 youths engaged over the review period, though a majority also indicated the intervention had done little to improve their confidence in government institutions more broadly. Qiang et al. (2022) demonstrated a positive effect of skill acquisition on entrepreneurship development among students in China, noting that practical, hands-on training environments were more effective than classroom-only instruction in consolidating entrepreneurial competencies, a finding consistent with the vocational, apprenticeship-based delivery model used in Taraba State.

Barriers to programme effectiveness have been documented extensively in the Nigerian context. Akinola et al. (2023) identified insufficient funding and weak institutional support as primary constraints limiting the scale and continuity of youth entrepreneurship interventions nationally. Gunartin et al. (2023), reviewing the determinants of successful entrepreneurial competency development among small and medium enterprises, highlighted inadequate mentorship, infrastructure deficits, and socio-cultural barriers as recurring obstacles to translating training into viable enterprise. Isa and Inuwa (2024) pointed to the compounding effect of Taraba State's poverty profile, estimated at a headcount ratio of 87.8 percent, noting that youth from low-income households face substantially greater difficulty accessing and completing skill training than their better-resourced peers. Working specifically within the Southern Senatorial District, Aliyu and Ibrahim (2023) found that access to entrepreneurship programmes in the area is shaped as much by awareness, inclusivity, and socio-cultural alignment as by the mere availability of training slots, with financial constraints, poor programme visibility, and long travel distances identified as the dominant access barriers among beneficiaries in Donga, Takum, and Wukari. Virk et al. (2023) observed that Nigerian unemployment policy has largely focused on skill development and job creation, but measures remain ad hoc and detached from coherent, sustainable reform. Collectively, these studies

establish that while entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria consistently produce positive economic and psychosocial outcomes where completed, structural and contextual barriers, particularly funding, mentorship, and geographic access, continue to constrain their reach and effectiveness in poorer, more remote districts such as the Southern Senatorial Zone of Taraba State. These gaps form the empirical backdrop for the present study.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was employed, appropriate for assessing the characteristics, attitudes, and experiences of a defined population without manipulation of variables. This design enabled the collection of primary data from a large sample of programme beneficiaries across the five Local Government Areas.

The Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State comprises five LGAs: Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari. These LGAs are characterised by high poverty rates, low formal sector employment, and active NDE and NGO-administered vocational training programmes, making them an appropriate site for examining the relationship between skill acquisition and youth empowerment in a context with the highest poverty headcount in Nigeria at 87.8% (NBS, 2019).

The accessible population comprised registered beneficiaries of entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes (NDE, NAPEP, and state-level schemes) across the five LGAs, numbering approximately 4,350 youth based on programme records for 2022 to 2024. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample size determination, a sample of 384 respondents was drawn. Proportionate stratified random sampling was applied, with strata defined by LGA, to ensure adequate representation across the study area.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents by Local Government Area

S/N	Local Government Area	Population	Sample (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970)
1	Donga	820	72
2	Ibi	810	71
3	Takum	920	80
4	Ussa	850	75
5	Wukari	950	86
Total		4,350	384

Note. Sample determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Allocation proportionate to LGA population of registered programme beneficiaries (2022-2024).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections corresponding to the study objectives. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated through expert review by three sociologists familiar with the study context, and a pilot test was administered to 30 respondents outside the main sample. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.81, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency,

percentage, mean) and binary logistic regression to examine predictors of youth empowerment outcomes. A total of 371 questionnaires were returned, representing a 96.6% response rate.

Results and Discussion

Youth Participation in Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition Programmes

The demographic profile showed that 58.5% of respondents were male and 41.5% female, with the majority (74.1%) falling within the 18 to 30 age bracket. Most respondents (63.4%) had completed secondary school. The NDE Vocational Skills Development Programme was the most widely accessed programme (39.6%), followed by the School-to-Work Scheme (22.3%), NAPEP-linked initiatives (18.1%), and NGO-operated programmes (20.0%). Participation rates were highest in Takum and Donga, which also record the highest pre-programme unemployment rates (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 presents the youth unemployment rate across the five LGAs before programme intervention, based on respondents' self-reported pre-training employment status and validated against NBS (2020) baseline data.

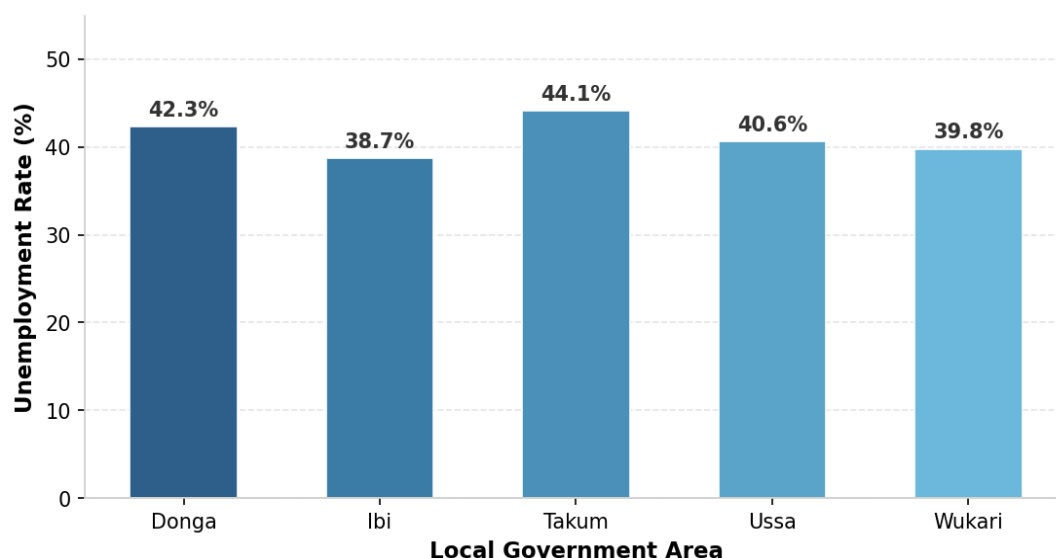


Figure 1. Youth Unemployment Rate Across Southern Senatorial Zone LGAs (Pre-Intervention). Based on field survey data and NBS (2020).

Respondents who had participated in at least two training cycles reported significantly higher satisfaction with skill outcomes (Mean = 3.87, SD = 0.62) than first-time participants (Mean = 2.91, SD = 0.74). This is consistent with Onyeaghala et al. (2023), who found in Jalingo LGA that extended programme exposure improves competency depth. Binary logistic regression analysis revealed that educational attainment was a significant positive predictor of programme participation ($B = 0.82$, $SE = 0.21$, $Wald = 15.24$, $p < .05$, $OR = 2.27$), suggesting that prior education mediates access to formal training. Youth participation patterns also varied by gender, with male respondents (68.3%) outnumbering female respondents (31.7%) among those completing full training cycles, signalling the gender access barriers documented by Virk et al. (2023) and Akinola et al. (2023).

Economic Empowerment Outcomes

Figure 2 presents the distribution of skills acquired by respondents. Tailoring and fashion design (28%) was the most commonly acquired trade, reflecting its accessibility and low capital requirements, followed by welding and metal fabrication (22%), carpentry (18%), plumbing and tiling (14%), ICT and digital skills (10%), and other trades including food processing and soap making (8%).

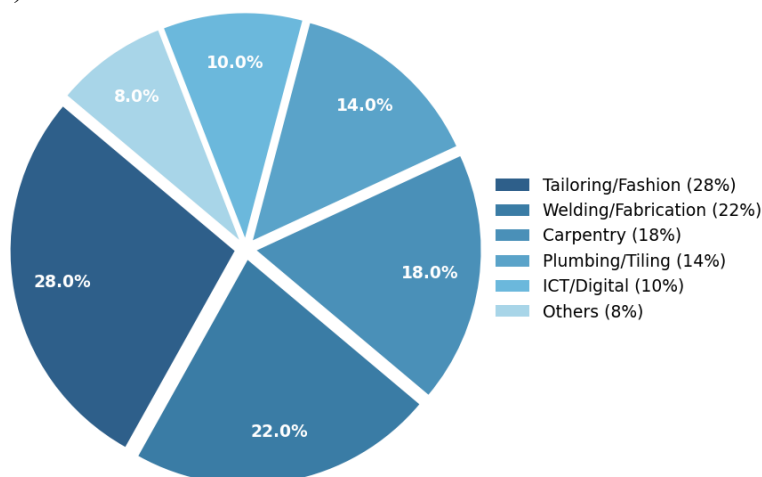


Figure 2. Distribution of Skills Acquired by Respondents. Data from field survey (2025).

These findings are consistent with the thesis that vocational skills aligned with local economic needs generate the highest uptake (Idoko, 2024; NDE, 2019). The prevalence of tailoring and welding also reflects the types of trades promoted by the NDE National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) in the Southern Zone. Table 2 presents mean scores for selected economic empowerment indicators rated on a 5-point scale.

Table 2

Mean Scores for Economic Empowerment Indicators Post-Training

Empowerment Indicator	Mean	SD
Ability to start a business after training	3.74	0.81
Improved household income since training	3.61	0.79
Reduced dependence on family or government support	3.58	0.86
Employment of at least one other person	2.93	0.91
Access to credit or financial support post-training	2.47	1.02

Note. n = 371. Items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Mean above 3.00 indicates a positive assessment. Source: Field survey (2025).

The ability to start a business after training scored the highest mean (3.74), while access to post-training financial support scored lowest (2.47). These outcomes align with Adeyemi and Olabosinde (2022) and Obisanya et al. (2022), who reported comparable improvements in self-

employment and income generation following vocational training in Nigeria. However, the low score for financial support confirms what Yetunde and Oyebanjo (2025) and Gunartin et al. (2023) have documented: financial exclusion remains the most significant bottleneck in converting acquired skills into sustained enterprise activity.

Social and Personal Development Outcomes

Figure 3 compares self-reported empowerment outcomes before and after programme participation across five dimensions. Data were derived from respondents' retrospective assessments, with post-training values reflecting current status at time of survey.

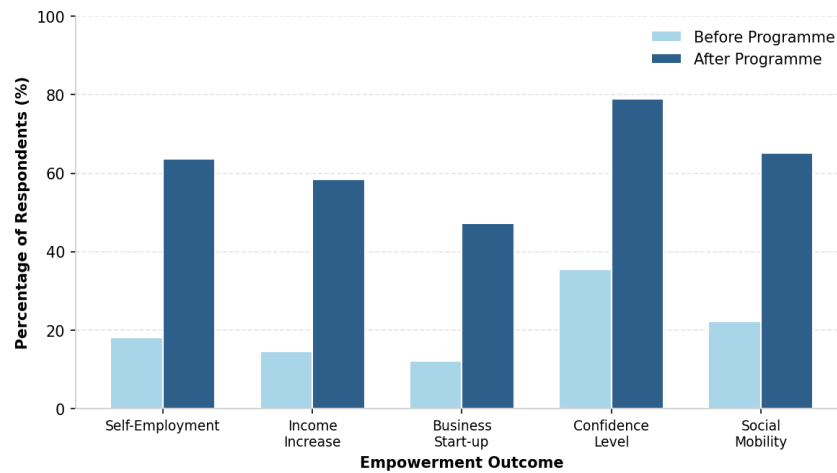


Figure 3. Comparison of Youth Empowerment Outcomes Before and After Programme Participation. Data from field survey (2025).

Confidence levels registered the most dramatic improvement, rising from 35.4% to 78.9%, while self-employment rates rose from 18.2% to 63.7%. Social mobility, measured by respondents' assessment of their community standing and participation in local economic activities, improved from 22.3% to 65.1%. These gains are consistent with Human Capital Theory, which predicts that sustained investment in training raises not only economic returns but also the confidence and social standing of programme beneficiaries. Table 3 presents mean scores for social development indicators.

Table 3

Mean Scores for Social and Personal Development Outcomes Post-Training

Social/Personal Outcome Indicator	Mean	SD
Increased self-confidence and self-efficacy	4.11	0.67
Improved participation in community decision-making	3.53	0.74
Reduction in engagement with social vices	3.49	0.82
Improved family relationships and social status	3.62	0.78

Increased aspiration for further training or education 3.88 0.71

Note. n = 371. Items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Mean above 3.00 indicates a positive outcome. (Source: Field survey, 2025).

Self-confidence and self-efficacy recorded the highest mean score (4.11), corroborating Afolabi et al. (2020) and Umezulike (2020) that empowerment programmes produce strong psychological benefits alongside economic ones. The reduction in engagement with social vices (Mean = 3.49) is noteworthy given the documented link between youth unemployment and crime, drug involvement, and other social vices in Nigeria (Nelson, 2023; Virk et al., 2023). This finding is also consistent with the human capital proposition that expanding youths' productive capacity and legitimate economic opportunity reduces their exposure and vulnerability to risk-associated behaviours.

Challenges Facing Youth in Accessing and Benefiting from Programmes

Respondents identified several barriers to effective participation in entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes. Table 4 ranks these by frequency of mention.

Table 4

Ranked Challenges Facing Youth in Accessing Skill Acquisition Programmes

Rank	Challenge	Frequency	%
1	Inadequate funding and equipment for training centres	301	81.1
2	Lack of post-training financial support (credit/capital)	276	74.4
3	Poor mentorship and follow-up support	249	67.1
4	Inadequate power supply and infrastructure	231	62.3
5	Socio-cultural barriers (especially for female youth)	198	53.4
6	Long distance to training centres	164	44.2

Note. Multiple responses allowed; percentages computed from total respondents (n = 371). Source: Field survey (2025).

Inadequate funding (81.1%) and the absence of post-training financial support (74.4%) are the most pervasive challenges, consistent with Akinola et al. (2023) and Ndamu (2017), who document similar funding gaps in Taraba and Adamawa State empowerment programmes. Poor mentorship structures (67.1%) represent a structural weakness in programme design, echoed by Onyeaghala et al. (2023), who found in Jalingo LGA that the absence of structured follow-up support significantly dampened long-term training impact. Socio-cultural barriers, particularly restrictions on female participation in some communities (53.4%), were disproportionately reported by female respondents, confirming Virk et al. (2023) on gendered constraints to youth economic participation in northern Nigeria. Inadequate power supply

(62.3%) specifically affects trades requiring electricity such as welding and ICT, compounding the structural disadvantage faced by youth in the region.

Conclusion

This study set out to assess the influence of entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes on youth empowerment in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, a region where youth unemployment exceeds 40% and poverty levels rank among the highest in Nigeria at 87.8% (NBS, 2019). The introduction established that youth unemployment in the district is not merely a labour market problem but a developmental crisis driven by structural deficits in formal employment, weak vocational training infrastructure, and the near-total absence of innovation-oriented skill development. Against this backdrop, entrepreneurial skill acquisition was examined as a mechanism for transferring productive capacity and economic agency to otherwise marginalised young people.

Data from 371 respondents across five LGAs show that participation in vocational and entrepreneurial training produces meaningful improvements in self-employment (from 18.2% to 63.7%), income generation, personal confidence (from 35.4% to 78.9%), and social participation. Tailoring, welding, carpentry, and plumbing were the most widely acquired skills. These results are consistent with Human Capital Theory as propounded by Schultz (1961) and extended by Becker (1964), confirming that structured investment in youth competencies yields both individual and community-level returns. The study further established that the three objectives were met: youth participation patterns were documented, economic empowerment outcomes were assessed, and social and personal development gains were identified. The study also examined, as an additional focus, the barriers limiting youth access to and benefit from these programmes.

Critically, the study found that current programmes in the district fall short of the innovation orientation identified in the introduction as central to genuine entrepreneurial empowerment. Most programmes train youth in technical execution of established trades but do not adequately cultivate the capacity to think creatively, adapt skills to changing markets, or develop new products and services. The entrepreneur of the kind described by Schumpeter (1934) and Drucker (1985) does not merely replicate existing trades but generates new economic value. Programmes in the Southern Senatorial Zone must evolve toward this model if the gains in self-employment documented in this study are to translate into sustainable enterprise activity and community-level economic transformation.

Persistent structural barriers remain. Inadequate programme funding, the absence of post-training financial support, weak mentorship structures, poor infrastructure, and socio-cultural constraints collectively limit the ability of programmes to translate skill acquisition into sustained, scalable empowerment outcomes. These barriers mirror the structural conditions identified in the introduction as driving youth unemployment in the district. As long as programmes are underfunded, physically inaccessible, and devoid of follow-up support, the empowerment gains documented here will remain fragile and uneven, concentrated among youth who already possess social and educational advantages. The findings of this study call for purposeful, evidence-driven reform in the design, funding, and delivery of youth empowerment programmes across Taraba State.

Recommendations

The recommendations below correspond to the three core objectives of the study, together with the barriers to access and benefit examined as an additional focus. Each recommendation is grounded in the empirical findings and is directed at the institutional actors with the mandate and capacity to effect the change required.

Recommendation 1: Expanding and Sustaining Youth Participation in Skill Acquisition Programmes. The study found that participation rates were constrained by poor programme visibility, physical distance to training centres, and socio-cultural exclusion of female youth. The Taraba State Government, the NDE, and relevant non-governmental organisations should expand the spatial reach of skill acquisition programmes by establishing satellite training centres within the Southern Senatorial Zone, particularly in Ussa and Ibi LGAs, which recorded the lowest participation rates. Sustained community mobilisation campaigns should be conducted to raise programme awareness among eligible youth, with particular attention to rural settlements distant from existing training centres. Registration processes should be simplified, and transport subsidies considered for youth from remote communities. Targeted outreach to female youth, including community sensitisation and the piloting of female-only training cohorts in culturally restrictive communities, is necessary to correct the documented gender participation gap.

Recommendation 2: Strengthening Economic Empowerment Through Post-Training Financial Support. The most significant constraint on converting acquired skills into productive enterprise was the absence of post-training financial support, which scored the lowest mean among all economic empowerment indicators (Mean = 2.47). Dedicated micro-credit schemes, grant facilities, and cooperative loan pools should be established specifically for skill acquisition graduates in the Southern Senatorial Zone. The Taraba State Government should formalise partnerships with the Bank of Industry and state-level microfinance institutions to provide accessible start-up capital to programme graduates within six months of certification. Additionally, innovation in skill application should be encouraged through grants awarded to graduates who demonstrate the capacity to adapt or extend their training into novel products or services, thereby closing the gap between routine skill execution and genuine entrepreneurial activity.

Recommendation 3: Institutionalising Mentorship for Social and Personal Development. Self-confidence and self-efficacy recorded the highest mean scores among social development indicators (Mean = 4.11), confirming that programmes do produce meaningful personal growth. However, the benefits were more pronounced among those who received structured follow-up support. All skill acquisition programmes in the district should incorporate compulsory mentorship components, pairing graduates with experienced, practising entrepreneurs for a minimum of 12 months post-training. The NDE's Artisan Resettlement and Mentoring Scheme (ARMS) provides a useful model for scaling this approach. Mentorship programmes should address not only technical business guidance but the broader social competencies required for community participation, leadership, and civic engagement, in line with the multi-dimensional empowerment outcomes documented in this study. Curriculum

components on personal development, financial literacy, and communication should be embedded across all training tracks.

Recommendation 4: Addressing Structural Barriers to Programme Access and Effectiveness The study identified inadequate funding (81.1%), absence of post-training financial support (74.4%), poor mentorship (67.1%), inadequate power supply (62.3%), socio-cultural constraints (53.4%), and distance (44.2%) as the leading challenges limiting youth access to and benefit from skill acquisition programmes. To address these barriers systematically, the Taraba State Government should substantially increase budgetary allocations to training infrastructure in the Southern Senatorial Zone, ensuring that equipment, workshop facilities, and instructor capacity reflect current market and technological realities. Training centres offering electronics, welding, and ICT trades should be equipped with solar power systems to eliminate electricity-related disruptions. An inter-ministerial coordination mechanism should be established to align the activities of the NDE, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, NGO operators, and donor partners to prevent duplication, address funding gaps, and ensure coherent programme delivery across all five LGAs. Annual programme evaluations should be institutionalised to monitor participation rates, skill acquisition outcomes, and empowerment indicators, using the objectives of this study as a baseline evaluation framework.

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