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CATERING SKILLS ACQUISITION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT REDUCTION
AMONG YOUTHS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined Catering skills acquisition and Unemployment Reduction among Youths in Cross River State, Nigeria. one hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. Literature was reviewed according to the sub-variables under study. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 983 youth. A sample of 544 respondents was drawn for the study. The sampling was done through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire “adapted from NDDC (203 youth between 2017 and 2019. Titled vocational skills acquisition and employability of youths (VSAEYQ).” Split-half reliability was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze data in the hypothesis. The hypothesis was subjected to testing at .05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was a significant influence catering skills acquisition on unemployment reduction among youths. It was recommended among others that caterers should be encouraged by government and other agencies in order to boost their productivity and decrease unemployment.

Keywords: Catering, Skills, Acquisition, Unemployment and Reduction.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is a significant socio-economic challenge confronting many developing nations, including Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stands at over 35%, with the situation particularly acute in states such as Cross River, where economic opportunities are limited and industrial activities are minimal. This rising unemployment rate has led to an increase in poverty, crime, drug abuse, and social unrest among young people, especially in urban and semi-urban centers.

In recent years, attention has shifted towards vocational and entrepreneurial skill development as a practical solution to curb unemployment. Omang, Ojong, Nandi and Osang (2023) assert that, this is because without functional adult education skill acquired cannot be utilize appropriately. Among the various vocational options, catering has emerged as a promising avenue due to its accessibility, relatively low startup capital, and high demand for food-related services. Catering is the business of providing food services at site such as a hotel, hospitals, aircrafts, cruising ships, parks, filming sites or studios, entertainment sites or event venues. Etim and Edet, (2018). Assert that, catering skill acquisition involves learning the necessary techniques and knowledge to prepare, present, and serve food professionally. Also involves the planning, preparation, and delivery of food and beverages for various events and clients. It is closely tied to the hospitality and tourism industries, both of which are central to the economy of Cross River State, a region known for events like the Calabar Carnival and its tourism-friendly environment.

According to Olawale and Garwe (2010). Equipping youths with catering skills can significantly enhance their employability and empower them to start their own businesses. Vocational training in catering provides young people not only with technical competencies but also with entrepreneurial knowledge, customer service skills, and financial management capacity. These competencies are essential for fostering self-reliance and economic independence among the youth.

In Cross River State, initiatives by governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private training institutions have aimed to bridge the skill gap among unemployed youths. Programs under the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Cross River State Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, and various local empowerment schemes have incorporated catering into their vocational offerings (NDE,

2021). However, despite these efforts, youth unemployment remains high, raising questions about the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of these programs.

The purpose of this study, therefore, seeks to assess catering skill acquisition on youth unemployment reduction in Cross River State, Nigeria. It aims to evaluate the extent to which training in catering has enabled young people to secure employment or establish businesses, identify the challenges faced in accessing and utilizing these skills, and propose strategies to enhance the effectiveness of vocational training programs. The findings from this research are expected to contribute to policy development, curriculum design, and youth empowerment strategies in the region.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Capital Theory by Shultz (1961)

This theory was propounded by Shultz in 1961 cited in Da (2008). The theory states that by investing in humans, people can enlarge the range of choices available to them and that training should not be viewed simply as a form of consumption, rather as a productive investment. It also argues that training does not only improve the individual choices available but that a trained population provides the type of labour necessary for individual development and economic growth. It maintains that the most distinctive features of our economic system are the growth in human capital without which there would be only hard, manual work and poverty.

The focus of the theory is that there is presumed economic return on investment in training skills or capacity building, such that investment provides returns for the individual learners in skills acquisition for economic benefit (Blaug, 1987). Training unemployed youths in vocational skills acquisition is a life time investment. Human capital is the stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, including creativity, embodied in the ability to perform labour so as to produce economic value, a collection of resources, all the knowledge, talent, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training judgement and wisdom

possess individually or collectively by individuals in a population. These resources are total capacity of the people that represents a form of wealth which can be redirected to accomplish goal of the nation or state or a portion thereof.

The human capital theory is relevant to this study because it emphasizes investment on youths through training activities for skill acquisition which ultimately leads to human capacity building and skills utilization for self-employment and improved productivity. Youths can become a very useful human resource to boost the economy in the state rather than being a source of disruption or disturbance of the society.

Statement of the problem

One of the challenges facing Nigeria today is how to get the youths gainfully employed. Unemployment generates poverty, youth restiveness and violence. During the recent amnesty policy of the Federal Government, it was revealed that many of the youths do not have any skill required to engaged in employment because some dropped out of school while some did not attend at all. The challenges of fighting the rising state of unemployment in Nigeria are the major task of policy makers and economic managers.

Youth unemployment remains a critical challenge in Cross River State, contributing to rising poverty, crime, and social instability. Despite various government and private initiatives aimed at empowering youths through vocational training, a large number of young people still lack employable skills or access to sustainable income-generating opportunities. While catering presents a viable pathway to self-employment and entrepreneurship especially given the state's growing hospitality and tourism sectors many youths are either unaware of or unable to access proper training, startup support, or market linkages. Additionally, there is limited data on the actual impact of catering skills acquisition on employment outcomes in the region. This gap raises important questions about the

effectiveness, accessibility, and scalability of catering training as a tool for reducing youth unemployment in Cross River State.

Literature Review

Omang, Patrick, Obibessong and Ojong (2023) view skill acquisition as training that seeks to provide participants with knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage successful vocational training in a variety of settings. In fact, it provides a wide range of competencies, which include management and organizational skills. The Nigerian Government also should acknowledge the utility value of this type of education by putting in place some active labour policies to promote employment through subsidized placement, employment assistance and vocational trainings and even other measures to encourage self-employment, such as training and facilitating access to credit/grants and other business requirement. Nevertheless, reducing youth unemployment is a critical issue that requires a multi-faceted approach. Youth unemployment can result from various factors, including a mismatch between skills and job market demands, limited access to opportunities, and lack of professional experience. Addressing this challenge requires concerted efforts at the government, private sector, educational institutions, and community levels.

Unemployment rate in most developing nations including Nigeria is on the increase and threatening. Functional education goes beyond mere acquisition of knowledge in a formal setting. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2017), defined unemployed workers as those who are currently not working but are willing and able to work for pay, currently available to work and have actively searched for work.

Onyali and Akinfolarin (2017), education is an indispensable means of transmitting the skills and knowledge that are required by individuals to fully participate and contribute to the development of economic, social and political activities of any country. Functional education is more of applied and productive education aimed at acquiring the appropriate

knowledge and skills like catering needed to attend to the realities of the society. The National policy on education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) noted that for functional education to be relevant, practical acquisition of appropriate skills and development of competencies are required by individual to live and contribute to the development of their society. In effect, graduates need competencies to exercise their talents and transform their skills into wealth. This will result to drastic reduction in unemployment rate through job creation for self-reliance. Catering skills is the driver of economic growth and development in many developing economies. Since its inception, it has grown greatly due to many opportunities it presents to creative and business-oriented individuals. A greater percentage of jobs are created by entrepreneurs who started with small businesses.

Research attests that basic literacy in the context of arts, media, and digital skills is crucial for youth civic engagement (Rogers 2014, Marten & Hobbs 2015, Kim & Yang 2016). These literacies enable young people to express their identities, engage in social critique, and challenge socio-political injustices. These studies highlight how basic literacy in the twenty-first century has expanded beyond the traditional definition of learning which include reading, writing and calculations to include identification and comprehension. Individuals learning style suggests how they concentrate, absorb, internalize, and remember new challenging information or academic skills. (Bessong, Ewuru, Bessong, Omang, Olori, Patrick, Olofu & Olori 2024). According to Enu (2012), people in entrepreneurship especially in catering have more opportunity to exercise freedom, higher self-esteem and overall sense of control over their own lives. It is believed that nurturing a robust entrepreneurial culture will ignite individual, collective and social success on a local, national and global magnitude that leads to development. Omang, Ojong, Anthony and Kujoh (2021) opined that, Economic development also refers to the process by which the overall health, well-being, and academic level of the general population improves. During

this development, there is a population shift from agriculture to industry, and then to services. A longer average life expectancy, for example, is one of the results of economic development.

In another view, Omang, Patrick, Obibessong and Ojong (2023) assert that, Skill acquisition has been identified as a very significant factor in unemployment reduction and poverty alleviation. Skill acquisition seeks to provide participants with knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage successful vocational training in a variety of settings. In fact, it provides a wide range of competencies, which include management and organizational skills.

Jacobs, Ezeokafor and Ekwere (2021) carried out a study on Effect of Entrepreneurial Education on Unemployment Reduction among Students in Nigeria. The study examined the effect of entrepreneurial education on unemployment reduction among students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbaria. The problem of the study is as a result of increasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The study was anchored on Human Capital Theory and risk-taking theory. As a cross-sectional survey research design, a structured instrument developed by the researcher to reflect such options as strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree popularly referred to as five (5) points likert scale was used to obtain information from the respondents. The population of the study was limited to final year students of Business Administration and Entrepreneurship Studies Department in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. The total population was 195. Business administration was 128 while entrepreneurship was 67. The study used convenience sampling technique in selecting the sample size for the study based on convenience and easy accessibility to the respondents. Research hypotheses were tested using Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) which was carried out with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Findings from the study revealed that Skill acquisition

has significant effect on unemployment reduction, Entrepreneurship empowerment affects unemployment reduction, and Infrastructural development has significant effect on unemployment reduction in Anambra State. Also, in a study carried out by Adeyegu, (2012) on the use of skill acquisition training for improvement of rural communities in Oyo State. The sample consisted of 153 Villages selected from the four villages using convenience sampling technique. The data collected were analyzed using chi-square statistic. The result showed that skill acquisition training will bring a change in attitude and lifestyle of the people. From the knowledge acquired through skill training, people's attitude changes from exploitation and degrading of forest to a better way of sustaining the forest for the benefit of the soil. Acquisition of living from other trade outside forest products. This study supports the views of Oni (2006) that when people are grounded in vocational skills, they will achieve their field potentials in areas where they have acquired knowledge and technical skills and thus, they will be able to contribute not only to their personal development but that of their communities.

Furthermore, some empirical studies were reviewed on the indices of employability skill acquisition. Omar, Baker, and Rashid (2012) researched on employability skill acquisition among Malaysian community college students. The sample size was 325 students selected randomly. Employability skills were measured using an instrument developed by the secretary commission on achieving necessary skills (SCANS). Data were statistically analysed with mean and standard deviation and the result revealed that the employability skills of community college students was moderately high. They also tested whether employability skills among students differed as a function of gender and work experience using independents t-test. The result showed that there is no significant difference in employability skills by gender or work experience. Bruce, (2014). In this study on skills required by graduates. He tested the most important skills to develop in employees

to derive organizations growth. The rating scale showed leadership skills 62 percent, Management skill 62 percent, interpersonal skill 53 percent, innovation and creativity 45 percent resilience 43 percent, technical skill 40%, sale marketing skill 32 percent, client management 24 percent and other none of the above 4 percent. Uchendu, Osim and Odigwe, (2013) researched on managing entrepreneurship education for economy security in Universities in Cross River State. Two hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post fact to design was adopted for the study. The population was made up of all the care and general managers from the two universities, data were collected and analyzed with person's product moment correlation analysis and independent t-test statistical technique at 0.05 level of significance. Result revealed that management of entrepreneurship education has a significant relationship with economic security in Cross River State.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consists of all youth who are in their final level of skill trainee centres with NDE and NDDC in the study area with the population of nine hundred and eighty-three (983) participants NDE (778) trainees while NDDC (205) totalling 983 between 2017 – 2019. The stratified and simple random sampling techniques was employed to select the sample from the twenty-one centres within the study area. Respondents were randomly drawn from each of the centres in the study area to participate in the study. The hat and draw (balloting method) were used to select subjects for the study. Numbers was written on pieces of papers using the names of sampled centres. Each of the slips was folded into a paper ball and was mixed thoroughly into a container and blindly, the number of respondents was drawn. The sample of the study comprise five hundred and fifty-four (544) participants selected from the population. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled, vocational skills acquisition and employability of youths (VSAEYQ)” was used for

data collection. Copies of the questionnaire were face validated by research expert in University of Calabar. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a trial testing was done using sixty (60) respondents randomly selected from the study area but who were not part of the main study. The data generated was analysed using Split-half reliability to determine the reliability estimate of the instrument. Here, the researcher gave the instrument once to the respondents to complete. But at the time of scoring the test was then split into two equal halves. Each person in the group was then scored on each of the two halves of the test, thus resulting into two scores for each person (Odd and Even numbers). The scores from the two sets were correlated using Pearson Product Moment correlation (r_{xx}) and corrected with Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula (r_{tt}). This method gave the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained ranged from 0.86 to 0.97. The reliability estimate obtained here met conventional standard for ascertaining that the research instrument was reliable enough for use.

Result and Discussion

The hypothesis used for this study states that catering skills acquisition programmes does not significantly influence unemployment reduction among youths in Cross River State. The result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Summary of data and one-way ANOVA of the Influence of Catering Skills Acquisition Programme and Unemployment Reduction among Youths (N=544)

Variables	N	Mean	Std Dev
High	134	12.776	2.089
Moderate	165	11.411	2.854
Lo	245	10.509	2.712
Total	544	13.292	2.860

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between group	401.549	1	401.549	5.196*	.022 ^b
Within group	47748.451	542	71.787		
Total	49950.000	543			

*=significant at 0.05 level

The result in Table 1 showed that (F=5.196, p<.000). Since p (.022) is less than p (.05), this implies that catering skills acquisition programme significantly influence unemployment reduction among youths. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld. A post hoc analysis as carried out using Fishers Least Significant Differences and the result as presented in Table 2 showed that the acquisition of high skills in catering is better in reducing unemployment among the youths.

Table 2: Fishers Least Significant differences on the influence of catering skills acquisition programme on unemployment reduction among youth

Variables	High (n=134)	Moderate (n=13.19)	Low (n=12.08)
High	12.776 ^a	1.365 ^b	2.267
Moderate	3.441* ^c	11.411	0.902
Low	3.981*	2.241*	10.509

MS within = 71.787

a= Group means along the principal diagonal

b= Group means differences above the principal diagonal

.c= calculated t-values below the principal diagonal

*=significant at .05 level

Dependent variable is unemployment reduction, measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used and the result is presented in

Table 2. The result in Table 2 showed that ($F=5.196, p<.000$). Since $p(.022)$ is less than $p(.05)$, this implies that catering skills acquisition programme significantly influence unemployment reduction among youths. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld. A post hoc analysis as carried out using Fishers Least Significant Differences and the result as presented in Table 16 showed that the acquisition of high skills in catering is better in reducing unemployment among the youths

Discussion of the findings

The finding from hypothesis indicates that **Catering Skills acquisition and Unemployment Reduction Among** significantly influenced reduction of unemployment among **Youths in Cross River State, Nigeria**. The findings of the study were in line with that of Wilson, Murray and Black (2016) that carried out a study on Contract catering. The result of the study also agrees with Omang, Patrick, Obibessong and Ojong (2023) who assert that, Skill acquisition has been identified as a very significant factor in unemployment reduction and poverty alleviation. Skill acquisition seeks to provide participants with knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage successful vocational training in a variety of settings, and provides a wide range of competencies, which include management and organizational skills. The study aimed to bridge this knowledge gap by determining the essential competencies required by contract catering managers.

Conclusion

Catering skill acquisition significantly to curbing the problem of reduction of youth unemployment in Cross River State, Nigeria. through awareness creation and training in catering has enabled young people to secure employment or establish businesses, identify the challenges faced in accessing and utilizing these skills, and propose strategies to enhance the effectiveness of vocational training programs among the youths

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that

1. Government and other private firms should join hands to ensure that more youths are trained in different employment areas to ensure that youths acquire skills that will make them functional in the society, to boost their productivity and decrease unemployment.

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