



## INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF SKILL ACQUISITION ON YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Unemployment has become a major challenge in the entire world. It is worse and more challenging in Africa and other under-developed countries with low gross domestic product (GDP) and pervasive poverty. The restraint effects of unemployment on every economy are enormous especially on the youths who are deprived of contributing to the socio-economic development of their countries. To address this, successive governments in Nigeria have introduced several programmes and made skill acquisition compulsory in all educational institutions. The expectation from the training is for the beneficiaries to take advantage of these skill acquisition schemes and establish their own businesses. These expectations are borne out of the thinking that increased self-efficacy will enhance the translation of skills acquired to entrepreneurship. Despite the various skill acquisition centres, unemployment seems not to have abated hence a need to examine the effect of skill acquisition on youth entrepreneurial self-efficacy. The research design employed for the study was the Cross-sectional survey method. Questionnaire were distributed to 382 but 355 respondents returned their questionnaire which represents approximate 93% of the sample size and analysed. The method of data analysis applied was descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequencies, percentages and regression analysis. Findings from the study revealed a significant positive relationship between skill acquisitions and youth's entrepreneurial self-efficacy. It was recommended that the designers of skill acquisition training programmes should pay attention to the suite of activities and the time and resources allocated to them.*

**Keywords:** Unemployment, skill acquisition, Self-efficacy, educational institutions and Nigeria.

### Introduction

Job creation has become one of the most critical economic challenges facing the world today. This is as a result of a paradigm shift in the labour market with new emphasis on information technology (IT) skills which has led to diminishing job prospects in both the private and public sectors. The future of any country is always predicated on its present youth productive force. A society with an unproductive and unreliable youth force is unlikely to be able to boost its

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productive capacity or save itself from imminent economic collapse. Among the challenges facing Nigerian youths today, unemployment happens to be at a higher scale because of the chain effects on the country's economy such as, insecurity, inflation and high levels of poverty. Consequently, the ability of the youths to be involved in the nation's socio-economic activities will be extremely deprived (Akwara et al., 2013). Youth unemployment in the urban and rural areas has been on the increase in recent time. A survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) show that unemployment rate in Q3 2023 among persons with post-secondary certificate and persons aged 15-24 were 7.8% and 8.6% respectively.

UNESCO (2017) countries vary substantially in their definition of youth. Nigerian National Youth Development Policy classified all individuals ages 18-35 years who are Nigerians as youths. According to the submission of Adebowale (2012), 'Youths constitute the greatest significant portion of the world population. They can be creative and productive in every arena of life but the irony is that a huge percentage of them all over the place in the world are unemployed. With their creative gifts and labour power, a society makes great improvements in economic growth and socio-political developments. Thus, Benjamin Disraeli once remarked, and quite aptly too, that youths are the trustees of any nation. In Indonesia, they are described as "the hope of the future" in Libya as "future partners" and in Nigeria, as "leaders of tomorrow". Hence, this study was carried out using a cross-section of undergraduate and postgraduate students in a Nigerian university.

Since political independence in 1960, successive Nigerian governments have introduced several initiative programmes and established many agencies to promote youth's economic empowerment. Such programmes are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Enterprises Promotion Policy (EPP), Industrial Development Policies (IDPs), Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs), National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Entrepreneurship Development Interventions (EDIs) (Ihugba et al., 2013; Raimi et al., 2014; and Ekong & Ekong, 2016). Others are the Youths Entrepreneurship Support (YES) project, National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), Youth With Innovation (YOUWIN) and more. In addition, students are made to undergo compulsory skill acquisition in all educational institutions in Nigeria as a way of making them less dependent on the government and their families for sustenance. The dearth of technical and vocational skills has exacerbated this challenge as most new job openings are now technology driven. Thus, with successive governments coming to power, the leadership has been experimenting on various job creation and skill acquisition programmes to mitigate the impact of youth unemployment on the society.

Skill acquisition involves the mastery of practical skills and knowledge in any vocational and technical field of study. Skill acquisition in the Nigerian educational system could be through technical and vocational education and is done through teaching, training, retraining, practical experience and on-the-job training (Uzoka & Bayode, 2010). Skill acquisition entails focusing on what should be done to bridge the gap between the school and labour market, to be independent in society (Mbanefo & Ebokab, 2017). The expectation from the training is that advantage should be taken from the training to establish businesses. These expectations are borne out of the thinking that increased self-efficacy will enhance the translation of skills acquired to entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) is a concept that measures confidence in the ability to accomplish several skill requirements needed to pursue a new business prospect. As stated by De Noble et al. (1999), Self-efficacy has some practical and theoretical effects on

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realising entrepreneurial achievement since starting a new business needs distinctive skills and mindsets. (Bandura, 2001) asserts that sources of self-efficacy can be obtained from mastery experience, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. It has been observed that skill acquisition which involves business structures can help youths gain practical talent in many of entrepreneurial tasks.

While the government braces up to these challenges through various programmes and entrepreneurial initiatives, a key solution is the training of youths with the required entrepreneurial skills for their self-efficacy. Despite the various skill acquisition centres, unemployment seems not to have abated. Previous studies on youth unemployment and possible remedies, for example, Ehiorobo and Adebisi, 2021; Emmanuel, Dazala and Daniel, 2012; Ekpo and Edet, 2011; Ume, 2018, agreed that the challenge of youth unemployment remains endemic with successive governments paying only lip service to tackling the problem. As previous measures have proved ineffective in finding lasting solutions to the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria this study intends to investigate the concept from a different perspective hence the need to examine the effect of skill acquisition on youth entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This is stated in a null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): skill acquisition does not play a major role in youth's entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

### **Research Objective**

The objective of this study is to examine the effect of skill acquisition on entrepreneurial self-efficacy among Nigerian youths.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Concept of Skill Acquisition**

All over the world, before 1960, research was mostly in motor skills because it was mainly applied in nature. Emphasis was on discerning the best technique for training motor skills, and the focus was on the methods that enabled the fastest learning and translation to diverse situations and tasks. Various research types on Skill acquisition were devoid of direction, theory or results (Adams, 1987). One of the targets of early research in skill acquisition was to determine whether training on parts of a task and then combining these parts could be more efficient than training on the whole task (Speelman and Kirsner, 2005). Whichever type of training (Part or whole) will be determined by the purpose and nature of the task.

Generally, skill acquisition involves practical training of individuals or groups of individuals that can lead to gaining knowledge for personal sustenance (Idoko, 2014). Uzoka and Bayode (2010) also stated that skill acquisition in the Nigerian educational system is done through training, retraining and on-the-job training through practical and career education. Entrepreneurial skills are business skills, which an individual acquires personally to function effectively in business as an entrepreneur and be self-reliant (Umunadi, 2014; & Nwafor, 2009). Entrepreneurial skills development refers to the acquisition of knowledge on certain talents or abilities which make an individual industrious, creative, and fully engaged in productive activities and as a member of the labour force (Akwara A. F.: Onyeaghala & Okorie, 2018).

The purpose of skill acquisition programme as a means of youth empowerment according to Ogundowolo (1988) is to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in future. Ogundowolo maintained that ideal skill acquisition is capable of ensuring value re-orientation among the youths and transforming them into creators of wealth

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and employment instead of seekers. The creation of wealth and employment will lead to poverty reduction and an increase in the welfare status of individuals in the country. In a nutshell, skill acquisition involves the act of understanding and mastering technical skills in any career and practical field of study.

However, skill acquisition is not without its challenges. Undiyaundeye and Ekpungu (2022) stated the challenges as poor entrepreneurial culture, lack of funds, poor knowledge-based economy, low spirit of competition and lack of entrepreneurial teachers, materials and equipment. Odia and Odia (2013) opined that the challenges of skill acquisition as poor societal attitude to technical and vocational education development, inadequate facilities and modern equipment for teaching and learning, poor planning and execution of processes of action and insensitivity of government to enterprise creation and expansion strategy. In the same vein, Dasmani (2011) stated the challenges as isolated or pockets of futile programmes and management in competencies, breakdown of family values and indiscipline, political manipulation of youth organisations, students' low interest in the skills and competencies, inadequately trained personnel to teach the skills and competencies plus too many students admitted into one class and lack of maintenance poor maintenance culture, lack of electricity and dishonest students and leaders.

### **Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a cognitive construct that describes a person's confidence in their ability to perform tasks. Self-efficacy has been shown to influence a broad range of individual's cognition and behaviour. It is associated with increased expectations and goals (Bandura, 2001). This study focuses on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which relates to the confidence an individual has in their ability to accomplish tasks in the domain of entrepreneurship and venturing. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) is a construct that measures a person's belief in their abilities to perform on the various skill requirements necessary to pursue a new venture opportunity (De Noble et al., 1999). In a similar vein, Drnovšek et al. (2010) stated that entrepreneurial self-efficacy involves individuals' beliefs regarding their capabilities to attain goals and control positive and negative cognitions that an entrepreneur has while of starting up a business.

### **Skill Acquisition, Youth and Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy**

Studies carried out by Onyeaghala and Okorie (2018) on the high rate of unemployment among Nigerian university graduates question the efficacy of entrepreneurial skills development programmes organized in Nigerian Universities; and Usman et al. (2018) on students' participation in entrepreneurship skills acquisition programmes. These studies have been able to establish a link between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and youth empowerment. Just as Ekpe and Razak (2016) study on the effect of skill acquisition on enterprise creation among Malaysian youths also found that skill acquisition has a positive effect on enterprise creation and that self-motivation moderates between skill acquisition and enterprise creation among Malaysian youths. Again, it is observed that some students only go to universities to acquire academic degrees but their mind-sets are difficult to change. As such, they are not mentally prepared for enterprise creation. An indication that there is a need to work on their self-efficacy with the appropriate skills.

Krecar and Coric (2013) findings on study changes in entrepreneurial self-efficacy since the completion of entrepreneurial studies concluded that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a dynamic construct that changes along with entrepreneurial status. Self-appraisal of concrete

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entrepreneurial knowledge and skills is more resistant to change than general entrepreneurial self-efficacy level. This study confirmed that the more entrepreneurial skills acquired, the better the individual capability. Moreover, an assessment of entrepreneurial self-efficacy of Obafemi Awolowo University science and technology students by Binuyo et al. (2015) discovered that the inability of Nigerian students to translate entrepreneurial knowledge learnt in school has no link to a low level of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This calls for further investigation which this study tends to carry out.

Although the studies of skill acquisition and youth empowerment in Nigeria Idoko (2014); skills acquisition and unemployment reduction in Nigeria Ekong and Ekong (2016) and skill acquisition as an entrepreneurial factor in jewellery making Musa et al. (2015) tried to reveal the impact of skill acquisition on empowerment. Emphasis has not been on the influence of skill acquisition on youth's entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Hence the objective is to investigate the link between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Based on this background the researchers postulated the following hypothesis in null form.  $H_0$ : skill acquisitions do not play a major role in the youth's entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

### **Theoretical Background**

The theory that supported this study is the Social Cognitive Theory. Albert Bandura propounded Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). It started as the Social Learning Theory (SLT) in the 1960s and developed into the SCT in 1986. It posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour. The unique feature of SCT is the emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. SCT considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behaviour, while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behaviour. The theory takes into account a person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioural action will occur. These past experiences influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all of which shape whether a person will engage in a specific behaviour and the reasons why a person engages in that behaviour. SCT stresses the importance aspect of learning by observation, imitation and modelling.

Some basic assumptions of social-cognitive theory are: (i) Observing Others - People can learn by watching others, (ii) Learning might lead to a behaviour - or it might not. Learning might happen later or not at all, (iii) Goal Setting - People set goals for themselves and work to achieve those goals, (iv) Self-Regulated Learning - eventually, people will regulate their learning and (v) Reinforcement and Punishment - People have expectations on outcomes of behaviour.

Tougas et al. (2015) used the theory in a systematic review exploring the social cognitive self-regulation theory as a framework for chronic health condition interventions. Theorizing social context: rethinking behavioural theory by Burke et al. (2009) used social cognitive theory in their analysis the importance of social context to understanding health behaviour and decision-making has been increasingly recognized in public health research.

The theory supported this study because skill acquisition is a process that involves observation, imitation and demonstrating (modelling). This shows that skill acquisition is a process whereby the trainee (youth) observes the trainer, repeats what he or she has seen (imitation) and demonstrates it as he becomes an expert in it. The theory integrates a continuous interaction between behaviours, personal factors - including cognition - and the environment referred to as the reciprocal causation model. At the end of the process, the youths will be empowered. The

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social-cognitive theory is a theoretical perspective in which learning by observing others is the focus of study and this is what entails in skill acquisition.

### Methodology

This study adopted the use of cross-sectional survey. Data for the study were collected through the use of questionnaires which were distributed to the target audience. The study focused on both undergraduate and postgraduate students of Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria with a student population of 8266. The sample size of 382 students was determined using the Taro Yamane 1967 formula. The questionnaires were distributed using Stratified Random Sampling (SRS) techniques to ensure that various colleges of the university were adequately represented. Data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The study utilised both descriptive and inferential statistics to draw its conclusion on the study.

**Fig1: Distribution of the copies of questionnaire**

| CU Colleges  | Current registered number of students | Number of questionnaire Administered |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| CBSS         | 1877                                  | 87                                   |
| CLDS         | 635                                   | 29                                   |
| COE          | 3033                                  | 140                                  |
| CST          | 2106                                  | 97                                   |
| PGS(MSC/MBA) | 615                                   | 29                                   |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>8266</b>                           | <b>382</b>                           |

The copies of questionnaire were administered based on the numerical strength of each college.

### Reliability of the Research Instrument

Cronbach's Alpha was used for the internal reliability test, the closer the coefficient value to 1(one) the more internally reliable the value. In the Opinion of Oyeniyi et al. (2016), a value greater than 7 is acceptable.

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics**

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------|
| .790             | .766                                         | 19         |

The reliability coefficient value as indicated in the table is 0.79 which confirms the reliability of the research instrument used.

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## Findings

**Table 2: Characteristics of the Respondents**

| Items                             |                   | Frequency  | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Sex                               | Male              | 178        | 50.1       |
|                                   | Female            | 177        | 49.9       |
|                                   | Total             | 198        | 100        |
| Age                               | 15-20years        | 67         | 18.8       |
|                                   | 21-25years        | 253        | 71.3       |
|                                   | 26years and above | 35         | 9.9        |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>      | <b>355</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Level of Education                | Undergraduate     | 326        | 91.8       |
|                                   | Postgraduate      | 29         | 8.2        |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>      | <b>355</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Marital status                    | Single            | 342        | 96.1       |
|                                   | Married           | 14         | 3.9        |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>      | <b>355</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Did you offer EDS in Your School? | Yes               | 292        | 82.3       |
|                                   | No                | 63         | 17.7       |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>      | <b>355</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Percentages and Frequencies of the various dependent and independent variables**

**Table 3: Skill Acquisition and Youth Entrepreneurial self-efficacy**

| Variables                                                    | SA    | A     | D    | SD   | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Acquisition of skills helps me to start a business           | 176   | 157   | 16   | 6    | 355   |
|                                                              | 49.6% | 44.2% | 4.5% | 1.7% | 100   |
| I can discover new ways to improve existing products.        | 185   | 163   | 7    | -    | 355   |
|                                                              | 52.1% | 45.9% | 2%   | -    | 100   |
| I can identify new areas for potential growth                | 182   | 156   | 17   | -    | 355   |
|                                                              | 51.3% | 43.9% | 4.8% | -    | 100   |
| I can design products that solve current problems            | 164   | 171   | 20   | -    | 355   |
|                                                              | 46.2% | 48.2% | 5.6% | -    | 100   |
| I am confident that I can succeed if I start my own firm     | 182   | 139   | 34   | -    | 355   |
|                                                              | 51.3% | 39.2% | 9.6% | -    | 100   |
| Training on skill helps me to enhance productivity           | 195   | 144   | 13   | 3    | 355   |
|                                                              | 54.9% | 40.6% | 3.7% | .8%  | 100   |
| I can formulate a set of actions in pursuit of opportunities | 190   | 152   | 13   | -    | 355   |
|                                                              | 53.5% | 42.8% | 3.7% | -    | 100   |

Source: Field survey by researchers

## Test of Hypothesis

In testing the hypothesis, regression analysis was used. The strength of the relationship between variables is defined by the magnitude of the value of the correlation coefficient (r). The value of r must fall between -1.00 and 1.00. Pullant (2011) as cited in Oyeniyi et al. (2016), interpreted

correlation values as  $r = 0$  meaning no or zero relationships, when  $r = 1$  perfect positive correlation,  $r = -1$  perfect negative correlation, when  $r$  is between 0.10 to 0.29 there is a small correlation, but when  $r$  is 0.30 to 0.49 medium correlation and  $r$  value that is between 0.50 to 1.00 connotes large correlation.

**$H_0$  = Skill acquisition does not play a major role in the youth entrepreneurial self-efficacy.**

**Table 4 Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .781 <sup>a</sup> | .610     | .609              | .29022                     |

**Predictors: SKILL ACQUISITION**

In the Model Summary, the correlation between the variables is 0.781 (78%) which in this case indicates a large correlation between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. while  $R^2$  is 0.610, the proportion of skill acquisition in self-efficacy, which is equivalent to 61%.

**Table 5 ANOVA**

| Model        | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig.              |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 46.464         | 1   | 46.464      | 551.631 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual     | 29.733         | 353 | .084        |         |                   |
| Total        | 76.197         | 354 |             |         |                   |

**a. Dependent Variable: SELFEFFICACY**

**b. Predictors: (Constant), SKILL ACQUISITION**

The ANOVA table is used to define whether a statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable and the combination of independent variables - that is, if the correlation between dependent and independent variables varies from zero (zero indicates no linear relationship).

Table 5 indicates a significance level of 0.0001 and is  $< 0.05$  a significant indication. Thus, there is a significant effect of skill acquisition on entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

**Table 6 Coefficients**

| Model             | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | T     | Sig. | Correlations |         |      |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|--------------|---------|------|
|                   | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      | Zero-order   | Partial | Part |
| 1 (Constant)      | .963                        | .107       |                           | 9.006 | .000 |              |         |      |
| Skill Acquisition | .716                        | .030       | .781                      | 23.47 | .000 | .781         | .781    | .781 |

**a. Dependent Variable: SELF-EFFICACY**

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In the coefficient table, the standardized coefficient value of the predictor is given as 0.781 at a significance level of 0.0001 which is  $< 0.05$ . This table collaborated what Model Summary and Anova tables.

### **Decision**

In both the ANOVA and coefficient tables, the significance levels of the variables are less than 0.05 which is 0.0001. Based on the above results, it is correct to say that the null hypothesis should be rejected while the alternate hypothesis should be accepted. This is an indication that skill acquisition has a positive significant influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study explored the nexus between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial self-efficacy as a means of curbing youth unemployment in Nigeria. A single tentative postulation was applied for the study in line with the research objective. The hypothesis  $H_0$ , examined if skill acquisition has any significant impact on entrepreneurial self-efficacy and the Simple Regression Analysis was applied.

From the results in Table 4, it can be seen that the R-Squared revealed that the independent variable which is skill acquisition explains a significant variation of 61 percent in the dependent variable self-efficacy, thus leaving 39 percent unexplained. The adjusted R-Squared is the coefficient of determination which shows that there is a good model fit. Similarly, the ANOVA in Table 5 shows  $F = 551.631$  at  $P = .000$  is an indication of a good model fit. Table 6 is the regression analysis which indicates a strong positive and statistically significant relationship at  $r = .781$ ;  $p = .000$  using the Standardized Beta Coefficient. With the foregoing, it can be deduced that skill acquisition can positively impact entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

### **Policy Implications**

The estimated model analysed in this study gives us the opportunity to deduce some policy implications. Both the correlation and regression analyses indicate a strong positive correlation between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial self-efficacy as well as very strong positive impact between both variables. Thus, efforts must be geared towards strengthening government and private sector-driven intervention programmes to accommodate a larger number of unemployed youths in various skill acquisition schemes. Efforts should be made at Federal, State and Local government levels to establish skill acquisition and business incubation centres in order to reduce the level of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

From the hypothesis tested, the findings revealed that skill acquisition enhances the youth's entrepreneurial self-efficacy. The implication is that learning and mastering a skill makes an individual gain experience that will reciprocate in interacting with the person, environment and behaviour. The results have proven the Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1986) because it has reinforced the individual both externally and internally, which determines the reason why a person will engage in a specific behaviour. This result is also in line with Ekpe and Razak (2016) that skill acquisition positively affects business creation. The result is also on track with Krecar and Coric (2013) study which stated that the more skills are acquired the better the individual capability but observed that self-appraisal of skills is more resistant to change than general entrepreneurial self-efficacy level. Although Binuyo et al (2015) query the link between

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entrepreneurial knowledge learnt in school and a low level of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, this study has been able to show that skill acquisition can boost youth entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

### Recommendations

The result of the study indicated a significant positive relationship between skill acquisition and youth's entrepreneurial self-efficacy. It is obvious from the foregoing that a suite of activities is needed to effectively empower youths through entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

- It is therefore recommended that designers of skill acquisition training programmes should pay attention to the suite of activities and the time and resources allocated to them.
- Federal, states and local government councils should establish skill acquisition centres and create sufficient enlightenment to encourage the youths to register at such centres.
- Skill acquisition programmes should be incorporated in various school curricular and made compulsory in every secondary and tertiary institution of learning in Nigeria.
- Some stipends should be given to trainees as a way of motivating them to learn.
- Graduates of skill acquisition programmes should be given soft loans to start their own businesses.

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