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ANALYZING THE INFLUENCE OF SKILLS ACQUISITION ON SELF RELIANCE AMONG YOUTH IN GUSAU METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the influence of skills acquisition on self-reliance and income generation among youths in Gusau metropolis. A descriptive survey research design was employed, and data were collected from 55 respondents using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that skills acquisition positively enhanced self-reliance by promoting financial independence and reducing dependence on others. However, the impact on income generation was moderate, as many youths earned only limited income from their acquired skills. The study concludes that while skills acquisition fosters self-reliance, its potential for income generation requires stronger institutional and financial support. Recommendations were made to improve training quality, market access, and access to start-up capital.

Keywords: Skills Acquisition, Self-Reliance, Gusau Metropolis

1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment remains one of the most critical socioeconomic challenges in Nigeria, particularly among the youth population. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), youth unemployment and underemployment rates in Nigeria stand at alarming levels, thereby threatening sustainable development. In response to this challenge, skills acquisition has been widely promoted as a strategy to empower young people with practical, market-oriented competencies that can foster job creation and reduce dependency on government employment (Ojo, 2021).

Skills acquisition refers to the process of equipping individuals with vocational, technical, entrepreneurial, or digital skills needed for self-employment or improved productivity in paid jobs (Itodo, Amosun, & Morohunmubo, 2023). When properly implemented, skills acquisition programs enhance creativity, innovation, and the capacity to establish sustainable livelihoods. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, such programs are considered vital tools for addressing youth unemployment and poverty reduction (Bello, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2025).

Self-reliance, on the other hand, refers to the ability of individuals to depend on their own initiatives and resources to meet their livelihood needs without excessive reliance on government, family, or external aid. For youths, self-reliance translates to financial independence, confidence in decision-making, and the capability to sustain economic activities (Okolie, 2020).

Skills acquisition is expected to positively influence self-reliance by equipping youths with the competencies to create jobs, generate income, and provide productive lives (Akinola & Ajibade, 2022). In Gusau metropolis, Zamfara State, youth empowerment through skills acquisition has gained in increasing attention, especially

with the interventions of organizations such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). Despite these initiatives, youth unemployment and dependency remain high, raising questions about the effectiveness of skills acquisition programs in translating into genuine self-reliance. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the influence of skills acquisition on self-reliance among youths in Gusau metropolis.

Unemployment and poverty remain critical challenges confronting youths in Nigeria, and Gusau metropolis is not exempted from this situation. Many young people lack sustainable sources of income and continue to depend on family members or government assistance for survival. In response, the national directorate of employment (NDE) aimed at equipping youths with practical skills for self-reliance and income generation. Despite these initiatives, there are still concerns regarding their effectiveness. While some youths have reportedly become self-reliant through the acquisition of entrepreneurial and vocational skills, others struggle to translate their training into sustainable income.

Limited access to start-up capital, inadequate market opportunities, and insufficient follow-up support have further reduced the impact of these programmes. Consequently, the question arises as to whether skills acquisition in Gusau metropolis significantly influences youths' ability to become self-reliant and whether it meaningfully enhances their capacity for income generation. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to analyze the influence of skills acquisition on self-reliance and income generation among youths in Gusau metropolis.

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

i. To examine the extent to which skills acquisition influences self-reliance among youths in Gusau metropolis.

ii. To determine the extent to which skills acquisition enhances income generation among youths in Gusau metropolis.

This study contributes to the understanding of how skills acquisition programmes influence self-reliance among youths in Gusau metropolis, highlights the economic value of such programmes in improving the livelihood of young people and the findings will be useful to government agencies, such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and non-governmental organizations in designing and implementing more effective youth empowerment programmes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Concept of Skills Acquisition

Skills acquisition refers to the process through which individuals acquire competencies, knowledge, and abilities that enable them to become employable or self-employed. It includes vocational, technical, entrepreneurial, and digital skills tailored to meet labor market demands (Itodo, Amosun, & Morohunmubo, 2023). According to Bello, Bashir, and Aliyu (2025), skills acquisition provides practical experience beyond theoretical knowledge, making youths better equipped to navigate the challenges of unemployment. Skills acquisition is critical in Nigeria, where the formal education system often emphasizes theory over practice, leaving many graduates unemployable (Ojo, 2021). Properly implemented skills programs provide alternative pathways to self-reliance and reduce youth dependency on government employment.

Self-Reliance

Self-reliance is the ability of individuals to depend on their own skills, resources, and initiatives to sustain their livelihoods without excessive reliance on external support. For youths, self-reliance manifests in financial independence, entrepreneurship, and the confidence to make critical economic decisions (Okolie, 2020). Akinola and Ajibade (2022) observe that self-reliance is not only about survival but also about creating wealth, contributing to community development, and fostering economic resilience. In this study, self-reliance is conceptualized as the outcome of effective skills acquisition, where trained youths are expected to translate acquired competencies into meaningful income generating activities.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between skills acquisition and youth self-reliance: Itodo, Amosun, & Morohunmubo (2023) conducted a study in Oyo State using survey data and regression analysis. They found that vocational skills training significantly improved youths' self-reliance, particularly in tailoring, carpentry, and ICT. Bello, Bashir, & Aliyu (2025) reviewed skills acquisition programs in Northern Nigeria. Their findings revealed that access to entrepreneurial skills enhanced youths' financial independence but highlighted poor funding and lack of follow-up as challenges.

Akinola & Ajibade (2022), using mixed-methods research, reported that skills acquisition improved self-

reliance among Nigerian graduates, though infrastructural challenges limited outcomes. Okolie (2020) studied self-reliance among entrepreneurial youths in Eastern Nigeria. The findings revealed that self-reliance was strongly linked to training relevance and availability of start-up resources.

Emeh & Nwanguma (2022), in their study across South-East Nigeria, showed that youths with vocational training were more innovative and financially independent compared to those with only formal education. Collectively, these studies suggest that while skills acquisition enhances youth self-reliance, contextual challenges such as inadequate capital, poor mentoring, and mismatch with labor market demands reduce its overall effectiveness.

Literature Integration: Digital Skills and Entrepreneurship Trends

Recent research underscores the growing importance of digital skills and entrepreneurship in empowering Nigerian youths and expanding economic opportunities. In Lagos State, studies have shown that digital entrepreneurship, particularly through ICT and e-commerce platforms, significantly contributes to job creation and commercial activity expansion among young entrepreneurs (Egunjobi, 2025). Similarly, research in Enugu State highlights that youth engagement with digital platforms such as social media and online collaboration tools not only facilitates self-employment but also expands networks and market access, contributing to empowerment outcomes (Apeh, Chikamso, Tikon, & Onyekuru, 2023).

Empirical work in Southeast Nigeria further emphasizes that bridging the digital skills gap can enhance economic sustainability by enabling youths to work remotely, create self-employment opportunities, and build local content businesses (Okegbe, 2025). Additionally, broader analyses suggest that digital literacy and skills development can empower youths to establish enterprises and solve societal challenges, thereby creating jobs and reducing unemployment (Bello, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2025). These studies collectively illustrate that digital competencies including online marketing, e-commerce engagement, and digital business creation are increasingly linked to both self-reliance and income generation among youths in urban Nigerian contexts. However, there remains limited localized evidence on how these emerging digital skills translate into measurable improvements in self-reliance and income generation specifically among youths in semi-urban settings such as Gusau Metropolis. By incorporating both quantitative (questionnaire and correlation analysis) and qualitative (interview) data, the current study addresses this gap in the literature.

Summary of Empirical Gaps

A review of the existing literature reveals several gaps that this study seeks to address. First, most research on skills acquisition and youth empowerment in Nigeria has focused on major urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, with limited attention to smaller cities like Gusau, creating a geographical gap. Second, previous studies often examine skills acquisition in relation to general empowerment or unemployment reduction, with insufficient focus on self-reliance and income generation as distinct outcomes, leaving a thematic gap. Third, while recent studies highlight the importance of digital skills and entrepreneurship in youth economic empowerment, there is a lack of quantitative evidence linking these emerging skills to measurable youth outcomes in semi-urban contexts. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes localized, quantitative, and correlational evidence on the influence of skills acquisition including digital competencies on self-reliance and income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis.

Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, popularized by Becker (1964), emphasizes that investment in education and training increases the productivity and economic value of individuals. Skills acquisition programs are seen as investments in human capital that improve employability and entrepreneurial capacity (Schultz, 1971). Recent studies confirm that vocational training significantly enhances youths' ability to secure jobs or create enterprises, thereby fostering self-reliance (Emeh & Nwanguma, 2022). Thus, this theory supports the present study by explaining how skills acquisition can translate into greater self-reliance among youths in Gusau metropolis.

Empowerment Theory Empowerment

Theory, developed by Rappaport (1987), focuses on enabling individuals and groups to gain control over their lives and resources. It emphasizes capacity building, participation, and self-determination. In the context of youth development, empowerment occurs when skills acquisition programs equip young people with the resources and confidence to be self-reliant (Zimmerman, 2000). Empirical findings show that when youths are empowered through skills development, they are more likely to start businesses, secure employment, and contribute positively to community development (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2021 Hence, the theory provides a framework for understanding the link between skills acquisition and youth self-reliance.

Gap of the Study

Despite extensive studies on skills acquisition and youth empowerment in Nigeria, significant gaps remain in the literature. Most existing studies focus on major urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, with limited empirical evidence from smaller cities like Gusau Metropolis, creating a geographical gap. Thematically, prior research has largely emphasized unemployment reduction, with insufficient attention to self-reliance and income generation as distinct outcomes of skills acquisition. Methodologically, many studies rely on broad assessments or qualitative approaches, with limited use of localized quantitative data and inferential analysis. In addition, recent literature highlights the growing importance of digital skills and youth entrepreneurship in enhancing economic opportunities, yet there is limited empirical evidence on how these emerging skills translate into self-reliance and income generation in semi-urban contexts such as Gusau. This study addresses these gaps by providing localized, quantitative, and correlational evidence on the influence of skills acquisition on youths' self-reliance and income generation in Gusau Metropolis.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enables the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of respondents in order to describe and examine the relationship between skills acquisition, self-reliance, and income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised youths in Gusau Metropolis who have participated in skills acquisition programmes organized by governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that every eligible youth had an equal chance of being selected. A total of 75 questionnaires were administered. After retrieval and screening for completeness, 65 questionnaires were found valid and used for the final analysis, representing an adequate response rate for social science research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The increase in sample size was done to enhance representativeness and strengthen the validity of the findings.

Instruments for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, in line with the reviewer's recommendation to diversify data sources.

The questionnaire was designed in line with the study objectives and consisted of two sections:

Section A: Items measuring the influence of skills acquisition on self-reliance
Section B: Items measuring the influence of skills acquisition on income generation
Each section contained two items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to obtain deeper insights into how skills acquisition affected their self-reliance and income-generating activities. The interview data complemented the questionnaire responses and reduced reliance on self-reported quantitative data alone.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' perceptions. Inferential analysis was conducted using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to test the strength and significance of the relationships between skills acquisition, self-reliance, and income generation at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the results of the study in line with the research objectives. The decision rule adopted was that a mean score of 3.00 and above indicates agreement (positive influence), while a mean score below 3.00 indicates disagreement.

Objective One: Skills Acquisition and Self-Reliance

To determine respondents' perception of self-reliance, two items were administered on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Skills Acquisition and Self-Reliance

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
The skills I acquired enable me to be financially independent	3.35	0.88	Agreement
Skills acquisition has reduced my dependence on others for survival	3.20	0.91	Agreement
Overall Mean/SD	3.28	0.90	Agreement

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The results indicate that respondents generally agreed that skills acquisition enhanced their financial independence (mean = 3.35) and reduced their dependence on others (mean = 3.20). The overall mean score of 3.28 suggests that skills acquisition has a positive influence on self-reliance among youths in Gusau Metropolis.

Objective Two: Skills Acquisition and Income Generation

To assess income generation, two items were also administered.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics of Skills Acquisition and Income Generation

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
The skills I acquired have helped me increase my personal income	3.05	0.95	Agreement
Skills acquisition has improved my ability to support my family financially	2.95	0.92	Moderate agreement
Overall Mean/SD	3.00	0.94	Agreement

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The findings reveal that respondents moderately agreed that skills acquisition contributed to income generation, with an overall mean score of 3.00. This indicates that while skills acquisition enables youths to earn income and provide some financial support, its effect on income generation is weaker compared to its influence on self-reliance.

Inferential Statistics: Correlation Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between skills acquisition and the two outcome variables.

There was a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between skills acquisition and self-reliance *($r \geq 0.50$, $p < 0.05$)*.

There was also a strong and significant positive relationship between skills acquisition and income generation *($r \geq 0.50$, $p < 0.05$)*.
These results indicate that increased participation in skills acquisition programmes is strongly associated with higher levels of self-reliance and improved income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis.

The study reveals that skills acquisition has a stronger influence on self-reliance than on income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis. While respondents agreed that the skills acquired enhanced their financial independence and reduced dependence on others, the effect on income generation was only moderate. This suggests that although youths are able to earn income from acquired skills, the earnings may not be sufficient to significantly transform their economic status.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the influence of skills acquisition on self-reliance and income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis. Two research objectives guided the study:

Objective One: To examine the extent to which skills acquisition influences self-reliance among youths in Gusau Metropolis.

Findings revealed that skills acquisition positively influences self-reliance. Respondents agreed that the skills they acquired enabled them to be financially independent and reduced dependence on others. This suggests that skills acquisition is an effective tool for enhancing youth empowerment, as it equips youths with the knowledge, practical abilities, and confidence to sustain themselves without excessive reliance on family or government support. The integration of interview data further confirmed that participants valued both traditional vocational skills and emerging digital skills, such as basic IT literacy and digital entrepreneurship, as contributing to their independence. This finding aligns with Nnabuife (2015), who argued that self-reliance is enhanced when individuals acquire relevant vocational and entrepreneurial skills.

Objective Two: To determine the extent to which skills acquisition enhances income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis.

The results indicated that skills acquisition moderately enhanced income generation. While some respondents reported that skills training improved their personal income and ability to support their families, the overall mean response was moderate. Interview data highlighted that several youths faced challenges in transforming acquired skills into sustainable earnings due to limited start-up capital, market access, and institutional support, particularly for digital or entrepreneurial ventures. This finding supports Okoye and Okwelle (2017), who emphasized that income generation from skills acquisition is often constrained when institutional and market support are inadequate. Furthermore, recent studies on digital skills and entrepreneurship suggest that combining traditional vocational skills with digital competencies can create new income-generating opportunities and improve market reach (Egunjobi, 2025; Bello, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2025).

This study investigated the influence of skills acquisition on self-reliance and income generation among youths in Gusau Metropolis. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 65 respondents using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were used to analyze the data, while correlation analysis was employed to test the relationships between variables.

Findings revealed that:

i. Skills acquisition significantly enhances self-reliance among youths in Gusau Metropolis by promoting financial independence and reducing dependence on others.

ii. Skills acquisition moderately enhances income generation, though earnings from acquired skills may not always be sufficient to significantly improve financial status.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that skills acquisition plays a vital role in promoting self-reliance among youths in Gusau Metropolis. Youths who acquire practical, vocational, and digital skills become more capable of sustaining themselves and making independent economic decisions. However, the impact on income generation is less pronounced, as many youths face challenges such as limited access to start-up capital, markets, and institutional support. For skills acquisition programmes to achieve their full potential, emphasis must be placed on linking skill development with entrepreneurial opportunities, financial support, and market access.

Recommendations

i. Strengthening Skills Acquisition Programmes: Government and non-governmental organizations should enhance the quality, relevance, and coverage of skills acquisition programmes, incorporating both vocational and digital skills to better prepare youths for self-reliance.

ii. Provision of Start-Up Capital: Financial institutions and development agencies should provide loans, grants, or seed funding to trained youths to enable them to establish small-scale or digital enterprises, thereby enhancing income generation.

iii. Market Access and Linkages: Skills acquisition programmes should include strategies to connect trainees with local and online markets where they can sell products and services, leveraging digital platforms to expand reach.

iv. Continuous Training and Mentorship: Beyond initial training, periodic refresher courses, mentorship, and apprenticeship opportunities should be organized to enhance the practical application of skills and support digital entrepreneurship initiatives.

v. Policy Support: The government should formulate and implement policies that encourage youth entrepreneurship, including tax incentives, subsidies for small businesses, and support for digital start-ups, ensuring that skills acquisition translates into sustainable economic empowerment.

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