



Rural Youth Capacity Building and Skills Development Programmes in Rivers State.

Graham Nsiegebe, PhD
Department of Political Science
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Abstract

This study examined the influence of skill acquisition programmes in enhancing youth capacity development in rural communities of Rivers State, Nigeria, between 2012 and 2025. The study was motivated by the persistent challenges of youth unemployment and the growing need for sustainable empowerment strategies in rural areas. Anchored on Human Capital Theory, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, utilizing interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from key stakeholders, including youth participants, community leaders, and programme facilitators. The findings revealed that while skill acquisition programmes contributed to the development of vocational, entrepreneurial, and soft skills among rural youths, their overall influence was limited. This limitation was primarily due to poor alignment between training content and local economic opportunities, especially within the oil and gas sector. Additionally, structural challenges such as inadequate funding, irregular programme delivery, weak institutional coordination, and lack of post-training support significantly constrained programme outcomes. Political interference and limited access to resources further hindered youth participation and success. The study concluded that although skill acquisition programmes have the potential to drive youth empowerment and rural development, their impact remains marginal without strategic reforms. To enhance effectiveness, the study recommends amongs others, aligning training programmes with market demands, strengthening institutional frameworks, increasing funding, and providing post-training support such as mentorship and access to finance.

Keywords: Skill Acquisition, Youth Empowerment, Rural Development, Capacity Building, Rivers State

Received 12 Apr., 2026; Revised 22 Apr., 2026; Accepted 25 Apr., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

Youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent challenges in many rural communities across Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State. Despite various educational initiatives, a significant gap exists between the skills acquired through formal education and the practical abilities required to secure employment or engage in productive economic activities (Nwachukwu & Adebayo, 2020; Adedeji & Ogunlola, 2021). In response to this challenge, skill acquisition programmes have emerged as crucial interventions designed to equip rural youth with practical, marketable, and entrepreneurial skills. These programmes aim to provide young people with the knowledge and tools necessary to generate income, establish small businesses, and participate actively in the socio-economic development of their communities (Ali & Nwachukwu, 2021). By fostering self-reliance, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing employability, skill acquisition initiatives are positioned as pivotal instruments for reducing poverty, empowering youth, and strengthening rural economies (Omotayo & Olanrewaju, 2022).

The importance of skill acquisition programmes lies not only in their potential to provide immediate economic benefits but also in their broader contributions to human development. Training in vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial skills enhances the capabilities of rural youth to respond to local economic opportunities, adapt to changing market demands, and develop sustainable livelihoods (Agwu & Ekpo, 2022). The theoretical foundations of such programmes, including Human Capital Theory and the Capability Approach, emphasize the value of investing in skills and expanding individuals' freedoms to achieve economic independence and personal fulfillment (Sen, 1999; Coleman, 1988). Social learning principles further underscore the significance of practical, hands-on engagement, mentorship, and collaborative learning, which are essential for ensuring that skills acquired are directly applicable to the realities of rural life (Adger, 2003).

Empirical evidence indicates that skill acquisition programmes can significantly improve employment opportunities, income generation, and entrepreneurial capacity among rural youth. Initiatives in Nigeria, such as those facilitated by the National Directorate of Employment, Youth Empowerment Scheme, and YouWin programme, demonstrate that practical training in areas like agriculture, ICT, agro-processing, and craftsmanship can lead to self-employment, the establishment of small-scale enterprises, and participation in local markets (Nwachukwu & Adebayo, 2020; Adedeji & Ogunlola, 2021; Ali & Nwachukwu, 2021). Beyond economic outcomes, these programmes also foster psychosocial development, including confidence, problem-solving abilities, and community engagement, which collectively empower youth to take on active roles in shaping their social and economic environments (Coleman, 1988; Adger, 2003). However, the successful implementation of skill acquisition programmes in rural communities is often tempered by various mitigating factors. Infrastructural deficits, inadequate funding, limited access to qualified trainers, socio-cultural barriers, policy inconsistencies, and market constraints can undermine the potential of these initiatives (Akinyele & Adebola, 2019; Okafor & Eze, 2020). Additionally, challenges such as insecurity, environmental degradation, and technological limitations further restrict youth participation and reduce the effectiveness of training (Amadi, 2019; Broadband Commission, 2020). Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive and context-specific strategies that consider the socio-economic realities of rural communities, integrate mentorship and post-training support, and align programmes with market needs to ensure sustainable outcomes (Karlan & Morduch, 2018; FAO, 2017).

Given the growing emphasis on youth empowerment and rural development, it is essential to examine the relevance and effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes in enhancing youth capacity in rural Rivers State. Understanding the factors that contribute to success, as well as the challenges that hinder programme impact, provides critical insights for policymakers, development agencies, and community stakeholders seeking to design and implement initiatives that are responsive, inclusive, and sustainable (Haque, 2001; UNDP, 2015). By equipping rural youth with practical skills, fostering entrepreneurial mindsets, and promoting socio-economic participation, skill acquisition programmes hold the potential to transform not only individual lives but also the broader fabric of rural communities. In light of this situation; how relevant and effective are the skill acquisition programmes for the youths of the rural communities in Rivers State? and what factors mitigate against youth capacity development through skill acquisition programmes in Rivers State?

Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, developed by economists Gary Becker and Theodore W. Schultz, is one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the relationship between education, skills development, and economic outcomes, particularly in addressing issues such as unemployment and poverty. The theory posits that individuals' knowledge, abilities, competencies, and experiences constitute a form of capital that can be enhanced through education, training, and skill acquisition, thereby increasing productivity and improving economic well-being (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). According to this perspective, investment in human capital—through formal education, vocational training, and experiential learning—plays a crucial role in enhancing individuals' capacity to contribute meaningfully to economic development and social progress.

In his seminal book *Human Capital*, Becker (1964) argued that investment in human capital functions similarly to investment in physical capital such as machinery or infrastructure. Just as organizations invest in equipment to increase production efficiency, individuals invest in education and training to improve their productivity, employability, and earnings potential. Education and skill acquisition therefore serve as essential drivers of economic growth, social mobility, and labour market competitiveness (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1974). Through mechanisms such as vocational training, apprenticeships, and workplace learning, individuals are able to acquire skills that improve their chances of securing stable employment and earning higher incomes. The background of Human Capital Theory revolves around the recognition that people are the most valuable assets within any economy. Early conceptualizations of the theory emphasized formal education as the primary means of developing human capital. However, later scholarship expanded the concept to include technical training, entrepreneurial development, professional experience, and continuous learning as important components of human capital formation (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993). The theory has significantly influenced policy formulation in areas such as education planning, labour economics, workforce development, and poverty reduction strategies.

The principles of Human Capital Theory emphasize that individuals who invest in higher levels of education or vocational training are likely to receive greater returns in the form of higher wages, improved job prospects, and enhanced career stability. The theory highlights the concept of returns on investment, which suggests that spending resources on education and training yields long-term economic benefits for both individuals and societies (Becker, 1964; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). Skilled workers are more productive and innovative, thereby contributing to increased economic output and national development. Within the context of this study on skill acquisition programmes in Rivers State, Human Capital Theory provides an important

analytical lens for understanding the role of education and training in addressing youth unemployment. Youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, particularly in rural communities where access to quality education and vocational training opportunities is limited (Adebayo, 2013). The theory suggests that unemployment problems can be mitigated through sustained investment in human capital by equipping young people with relevant skills that match labour market demands. Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, possesses abundant oil and gas resources that create significant employment opportunities in sectors such as exploration, production, maintenance, and logistics. However, despite the presence of multinational oil companies and the economic wealth generated by petroleum resources, many young people in rural communities lack the technical and vocational skills required to access employment within the industry. This mismatch between available jobs and the skills possessed by local youth contributes to persistent unemployment and underemployment in the region (World Bank, 2020).

Human Capital Theory suggests that targeted investment in skill development programmes aligned with the needs of key industries can help address this problem. In the case of Rivers State, training programmes focused on oil and gas operations, mechanical maintenance, welding, fabrication, pipeline monitoring, and logistics management could significantly enhance the employability of youth in host communities. By acquiring these relevant competencies, young people would be better positioned to participate in the labour market and contribute to economic development in their communities. The theory is also relevant in assessing the role of government institutions and multinational corporations in promoting human capital development. Governments and private sector organizations, particularly those operating within the oil and gas sector, have the capacity to invest in educational and vocational training programmes that equip young people with industry-relevant skills. Such investments can reduce unemployment, improve productivity, and enhance the socio-economic development of host communities (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

Another key aspect of Human Capital Theory is the concept of long-term returns on human capital investment. When governments, corporations, and individuals invest in training and education, the outcome is often a more skilled and productive workforce capable of driving economic growth. For example, when youth in Rivers State are provided with relevant technical training aligned with the needs of the petroleum industry, they are more likely to secure employment opportunities and contribute to the expansion of the regional economy. Furthermore, Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and lifelong skills development. In modern economies characterized by rapid technological changes, individuals must continually upgrade their skills to remain competitive in the labour market. For youth in Rivers State, this implies that skill acquisition programmes should extend beyond initial training and provide opportunities for ongoing professional development. Continuous learning enables workers to adapt to technological innovations and evolving industry demands.

The Human Capital Theory therefore provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how investment in education and skills development can reduce youth unemployment and enhance economic productivity. By applying the principles of this theory to the study of skill acquisition programmes in Rivers State, it becomes evident that targeted and relevant training programmes—particularly those aligned with the demands of the oil and gas industry—can significantly improve the employability of young people. The theory also underscores the critical role of government policies and corporate social responsibility initiatives in developing a skilled workforce capable of supporting sustainable economic growth and reducing unemployment in rural communities.

Empirical Insights

Akinyele and Adebola (2018) investigated the role of community-based skill acquisition programmes in rural youth development in Nigeria. The aim of the study was to explore how community-based initiatives contributed to the empowerment and socio-economic development of rural youths. The research posed questions about the sustainability of these programmes and their long-term effects on youth development in rural communities. The hypotheses suggested that community-based skill acquisition programmes would significantly enhance youth development in rural Nigeria and that challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and poor community engagement hindered their success. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combined qualitative interviews with rural youths and local leaders, along with quantitative data on the participation and success rates of these programmes. The findings revealed that community-based programmes were critical in providing youths with marketable skills but faced significant barriers such as poor infrastructure and limited funding. The study concluded that these programmes had a positive impact on youth development but required greater investment and better community involvement. The recommendation was for the government and local communities to work together to improve infrastructure and increase funding to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.

Akinyele and Adebola (2019) Investigated the role of community-based skill acquisition programmes in rural youth development in Nigeria. The aim of the study was to explore how community-based initiatives contributed to the empowerment and socio-economic development of rural youths. The research posed questions about the sustainability of these programmes and their long-term effects on youth development in rural communities. The hypotheses suggested that community-based skill acquisition programmes would significantly enhance youth development in rural Nigeria and that challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and poor community engagement hindered their success. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combined qualitative interviews with rural youths and local leaders, along with quantitative data on the participation and success rates of these programmes. The findings revealed that community-based programmes were critical in providing youths with marketable skills but faced significant barriers such as poor infrastructure and limited funding. The study concluded that these programmes had a positive impact on youth development but required greater investment and better community involvement. The recommendation was for the government and local communities to work together to improve infrastructure and increase funding to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.

Omotayo and Olanrewaju (2020) Examined the impact of entrepreneurship training programmes on youth empowerment in southwestern Nigeria. The study aimed to assess how entrepreneurship programmes contributed to the development of self-employment and small business growth among youths. The research asked how effective entrepreneurship training programmes were in empowering youths and fostering entrepreneurial skills. The hypotheses proposed that entrepreneurship training programmes would have a significant positive impact on youth empowerment and that factors such as access to finance and business mentorship were crucial for programme success. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the study used a survey design with questionnaires distributed to youths who had participated in entrepreneurship training. The findings revealed that the programmes were highly effective in fostering entrepreneurial skills and enhancing self-employment opportunities. However, the study also found that lack of access to capital and limited mentorship opportunities were major challenges. The study concluded that while entrepreneurship training programmes were successful, they needed to be complemented with better access to funding and mentorship. The recommendation was for the government to establish financial support schemes and mentorship networks to aid youths in transitioning from training to successful business ownership.

Okafor and Eze (2020) Conducted a study on the effectiveness of vocational education and skill acquisition programmes in reducing youth unemployment in Anambra State, Nigeria. The aim was to evaluate how vocational education contributed to youth employability and unemployment reduction. The study posed questions about the relationship between vocational training and youth employment opportunities. It was hypothesised that vocational education and skill acquisition programmes would significantly reduce youth unemployment rates in Anambra State. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analysed both statistical data on unemployment rates and qualitative responses from participants of vocational training programmes. The findings showed that vocational education significantly reduced unemployment by equipping youths with practical skills needed in the labour market. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and lack of governmental support for scaling up these programmes. The study concluded that vocational education was effective in reducing unemployment, but it needed more support from both public and private sectors to reach a larger number of youths. The recommendation was for stronger government involvement in funding and scaling up vocational education programmes.

Eze and Chukwu (2020) Examined the effect of online skill acquisition programmes on youth empowerment in Nigeria. The aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of online-based vocational training programmes in empowering youths and providing them with employment opportunities. The research posed questions about the accessibility and impact of online skill acquisition programmes on Nigerian youths. The hypotheses suggested that online programmes would significantly improve the employability of youths and that challenges such as limited internet access and digital literacy would hinder their effectiveness. Using a survey design, the study collected data from youths who participated in online skill acquisition programmes. The findings revealed that online programmes provided an effective way to acquire skills, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the study identified significant challenges, including poor internet connectivity and limited access to digital devices, particularly in rural areas. The study concluded that while online programmes were beneficial, addressing the digital divide was crucial for their success. The recommendation was for increased investment in digital infrastructure and digital literacy programmes to enhance the accessibility and impact of online skill acquisition initiatives.

Ibrahim and Amadi (2021) Explored the challenges and opportunities in youth empowerment through skill acquisition programmes in northern Nigeria. The study aimed to identify the key challenges that hindered the success of skill acquisition programmes in northern Nigeria and to examine the opportunities for enhancing youth empowerment. The research posed questions about the specific barriers to youth empowerment in northern Nigeria and how these programmes could be improved. The hypotheses suggested that challenges such as cultural resistance and lack of educational infrastructure hindered the success of these programmes. The study used a qualitative approach with focus group discussions and interviews with programme participants and local leaders. The findings revealed that while skill acquisition programmes had the potential to empower youths, they faced significant challenges such as cultural resistance to non-traditional skills, limited access to educational resources, and inadequate government support. The study concluded that addressing these challenges was crucial for improving the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes. The recommendation was for culturally sensitive approaches and increased governmental and non-governmental support to overcome these barriers.

Adedeji and Ogunlola (2021) Examined the impact of government policies on skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria's education sector. The study aimed to assess how government policies influenced the success of skill acquisition programmes, particularly in relation to youth employment. The research asked how government policies affected the implementation and outcomes of skill acquisition programmes for youths. The hypotheses suggested that government policies significantly influenced the success of skill acquisition programmes and that gaps in policy implementation negatively impacted programme outcomes. Grounded in the Policy Implementation Theory, the study used a descriptive survey design, collecting data from both government officials and programme participants. The findings revealed that government policies played a crucial role in shaping the success of skill acquisition programmes. However, issues such as poor implementation, inconsistent funding, and lack of coordination between government agencies were identified as significant challenges. The study concluded that while policies were generally supportive, their effectiveness was undermined by poor implementation. The recommendation was for improved policy coordination, better funding mechanisms, and more rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure the success of skill acquisition programmes.

Ali and Nwachukwu (2021) Evaluated the role of private sector partnerships in enhancing skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria. The study aimed to explore how collaborations between the government and private sector could improve the outcomes of skill acquisition programmes. The research asked how private sector involvement contributed to the effectiveness of these programmes and the challenges faced in fostering such partnerships. The hypotheses suggested that private sector partnerships would significantly enhance the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes by providing additional resources and expertise. Using a case study approach, the study focused on several successful public-private partnerships in skill acquisition programmes across Nigeria. The findings showed that private sector involvement brought expertise, funding, and job placement opportunities to skill acquisition programmes, improving their effectiveness. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as misalignment between the needs of the private sector and the skills provided by these programmes. The study concluded that private sector partnerships were essential for enhancing the outcomes of skill acquisition programmes but needed to be better coordinated with the needs of youths. The recommendation was for clearer frameworks for private sector engagement and better alignment with youth development goals.

Chidi and Wogu (2021) Examined the role of skill acquisition programmes in fostering social cohesion among Nigerian youths. The study aimed to explore how skill acquisition programmes contributed to reducing youth restiveness and promoting social cohesion. The research posed questions about how skill acquisition programmes could foster social integration and reduce social unrest among youths in Nigeria. The hypotheses suggested that skill acquisition programmes would significantly contribute to youth social cohesion and reduce tensions caused by unemployment and lack of opportunities. Using a qualitative research design, the study gathered data from youths who had participated in skill acquisition programmes and community leaders. The findings showed that skill acquisition programmes helped to foster social cohesion by providing youths with economic opportunities, which in turn reduced social unrest. The study concluded that skill acquisition programmes were effective tools for promoting social integration and peaceful coexistence among youths. The recommendation was for the government to prioritise skill acquisition programmes as part of its broader strategy for promoting social cohesion and reducing youth violence.

II. Method

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to examine skill acquisition programmes and youth capacity development in selected rural communities of Rivers State from 2012 to 2025. The study area covered rural communities across the three senatorial districts of Rivers State, a region characterized by oil dependency, rural underdevelopment, youth unemployment, and environmental challenges. The population comprised approximately 1,728,000 residents drawn from selected rural communities in Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers South-East Senatorial Districts. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select information-rich participants with direct experience of the programmes. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving youth participants, community leaders, local government officials, and programme facilitators, while secondary data were obtained from journals, reports, and official documents. Content and face validity were ensured through alignment of instruments with research objectives, expert review by supervisors, and pilot testing in a rural community outside the study area. Reliability was strengthened through the use of standardized interview guides, consistent administration of instruments, audio recording, verbatim transcription, and detailed field notes. Data were analyzed using thematic and qualitative content analysis, with coding, categorization, and triangulation of multiple data sources to ensure credibility and depth of findings.

Data Presentation

The descriptive qualitative data for this paper were obtained through in-depth interviews conducted with a total of thirty (30) purposively selected respondents drawn from oil-producing and host communities in Rivers State. The respondents comprised community leaders, vocational trainers, youth coordinators, empowerment officers, and development specialists with practical knowledge of community assets and oil and gas operations. Also, participants were selected from Etche, Obio/Akpor, Ahoada West, Rumuokwursi, and Akuku-Toru Local Government Areas. Both male and female respondents were represented, ensuring a balanced range of perspectives. The respondents were actively involved in the management and utilisation of community facilities such as skill centres, youth hubs, business incubators, and development institutes. Their communities host major oil and gas assets, including facilities operating under OML 17 and OML 54. This broad demographic and occupational distribution enhanced the credibility and depth of the qualitative data. Consequently, the interview responses provided rich, context-specific insights aligned with the purpose of the paper.

Table 1: Occupational Composition of FGD Participants

| Category | Occupational Groups Represented |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Self-employed artisans | Tailors, hairdressers, welders, electricians, phone repairers |
| Agro-based entrepreneurs | Fish farmers, poultry farmers, cassava processors, vegetable growers |
| ICT and creative practitioners | Computer operators, graphic designers, photographers |
| Unemployed/underemployed youths | Youths who had completed at least one skill acquisition programme |
| Community representatives | Community youth leaders and programme facilitators (as discussants) |

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

In addition to this, data was generated through Focus Group Discussions conducted in selected rural communities in Rivers State for the paper, and this was organised in line with the purpose of the paper. Four focus group discussion sessions were conducted across four selected rural communities in Rivers State. Each group comprised between eight and ten participants. In total, thirty-six participants took part in the FGDs. The composition of the FGDs reflected gender balance, age variation and occupational diversity in order to capture broad youth experiences of skill acquisition programmes. Overall, the participants consisted of 20 males and 16 females. Participants were between 18 and 35 years of age, which corresponds with the nationally recognised youth category in Nigeria. In terms of occupational background, participants included:

- i. Self-employed artisans (tailors, hairdressers, welders, electricians and phone repairers);
- ii. Agro-based entrepreneurs (fish farmers, poultry farmers, cassava processors and vegetable growers);
- iii. ICT and creative practitioners (computer operators, graphic designers and photographers);
- iv. Unemployed and underemployed youths who had completed at least one skill acquisition programme;
- v. Community youth leaders and programme facilitators who participated as discussants.

Each focus group included both programme beneficiaries and non-beneficiary youths in order to ensure balanced perspectives on programme design, access and outcomes. Efforts were made to ensure that at least two female participants and one agro-based trainee were represented in each group.

III. Data Analysis/ Discussion of Findings

1. What is the relevance and effectiveness of the skill acquisition programmes for the youths of rural communities in Rivers State between 2012 and 2025?

Interview instrument revealed the level of relevance and effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes in youth development in rural communities in Rivers State. Following this, an interviewee, a business mentor at Abua revealed that:

Between 2012 and 2025, skill acquisition programmes in Abua were moderately effective but mostly detached from local community assets, such as the Abua Business Development Hub and OML 60 Flow Station. Youth leaders reported that the majority of programmes focused on general business, vocational, and ICT skills, which did not fully correspond with local economic opportunities or oil and gas operations. Participants benefited from mentorship, leadership training, and practical exercises, yet the lack of integration with community assets limited their ability to apply skills sustainably. Partial alignment was observed in a few business and entrepreneurial modules, allowing some youths to create small-scale enterprises, but this was not widespread (H. Opara, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

Reacting to the above revelation, Okafor and Eze (2020), opined that the lack of acquisition of vocational skills on the part of individuals has been considered the bane of the economy of many African societies, particularly Nigeria. This is so because, in Nigeria for instance, the educational system operated at post-independence placed emphasis on academic excellence rather than acquisition of vocational skills which prepare the individual for a more useful and fulfilling life within the society. Another interviewee revealed that:

We observed that most programmes delivered training in general vocational skills, ICT, and entrepreneurship without considering local economic realities or oil and gas operations. While participants gained leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, they struggled to apply these skills to community resources effectively. A few ICT and business modules offered partial alignment, allowing limited opportunities for enterprise creation or service provision to oil and gas operations, but these were exceptions. Mentorship and practical exercises improved confidence and social competencies, but irregular delivery and minimal follow-up reduced overall programme impact. Overall, skill acquisition programmes contributed moderately to personal and social development, but their misalignment with community assets reduced relevance and long-term effectiveness (P. Inyang, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

In line with this argument, another interviewee, an officer in women empowerment noted that:

Most programmes focused on generic vocational, business, and ICT skills, which were not fully aligned with local economic opportunities or oil and gas-related enterprises. Participants gained confidence, social skills, and leadership competencies, yet few could utilise their training to engage with local resources or create sustainable economic ventures. Occasional alignment existed in some business or ICT modules, allowing limited youth participation in small enterprises or community services connected to oil and gas, but this was inconsistent. Mentorship and practical sessions enhanced teamwork and problem-solving. Overall, while the programmes contributed moderately to personal development and employability, they were largely detached from Abua's community assets, limiting their relevance and impact on sustainable youth empowerment (E. Emeka, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

It is in this light that Nwachukwu and Adebayo (2020), opined that the Nigerian experience fell short of what was expected in skill acquisition. The problem then was over-production of persons with little or no relevant vocational ability. The education and training of people in the country remained lopsided. The adverse consequence was that the unemployment rate assumed an alarming proportion. Corroborating this claim, an interviewee noted that:

Skill acquisition programmes implemented were only partially relevant to community assets. Most programmes focused on general vocational, business, and ICT skills, with little consideration for local economic structures or oil and

gas operations. Participants gained technical and leadership skills, but opportunities to apply training to existing community assets were limited. Partial alignment existed in agricultural and entrepreneurial modules, allowing some youths to establish small farms or service enterprises connected to oil and gas support activities, yet these opportunities were not widespread. Mentorship and practical exercises enhanced teamwork, problem-solving, and confidence, but irregular programme delivery and insufficient post-training support reduced overall relevance. Overall, while skill acquisition initiatives contributed to personal development, the lack of integration with local community assets and economic resources limited their effectiveness and long-term impact on youth empowerment (G. Akpan, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

Youth skill acquisition scheme, according to IFAD (2012), was specifically designed to promote acquisition of vocational skills and facilitate the spirit of creativity, self-reliance and independence. It sought to inculcate in the beneficiaries the knowledge of vocational skills in order to promote gainful self-employment. To date vocational skills training and acquisition have continued to receive greater attention but irregular programme delivery and insufficient post-training support reduced overall relevance. In line with this position, another interviewee who spoke on the effectiveness of youth skill acquisition programmes noted that:

Participants gained leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, but opportunities to apply training to local community assets were limited. Partial alignment was observed in a few business and leadership modules, enabling limited youth engagement with small enterprises or ancillary services for oil and gas facilities, but this was inconsistent. Mentorship and hands-on exercises contributed to confidence-building and social skills, yet programme content largely ignored potential integration with community infrastructure. Irregular programme delivery and weak post-training support further reduced relevance. Overall, while skill acquisition programmes enhanced personal and professional competencies, their alignment with community assets was insufficient, limiting practical outcomes and sustainable youth empowerment (C. Eke, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

Affirming the above stated position, another interviewee noted that:

Mentorship and practical workshops enhanced confidence and social skills, yet the lack of strategic integration with community resources reduced relevance and long-term effectiveness. Overall, while programmes contributed moderately to personal development and employability, they were largely misaligned with the community's assets, limiting their impact on youth empowerment (I. Nwankwo, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

The analyses revealed that skill acquisition programmes implemented in Rivers State rural communities between 2012 and 2025 were only partially relevant to local community assets. The programmes which focused on generic vocational, ICT, and entrepreneurship training, did not correspond fully with local economic opportunities or oil and gas operations. It was revealed that Partial alignment existed in ICT and education-related modules, enabling some youths to develop small enterprises or services supporting oil and gas activities, but these instances were limited. In line with the above analyses, the fourth focus group examined the perceived relevance of the programmes to community needs and their effectiveness in improving employability and livelihoods. Participants included youths from agro-based, vocational and personal service sectors, as well as community youth leaders revealed as follow:

The programme has continued to gather momentum in view of the expressed desire and need to provide Nigerians with vocational skills that would make them self-reliant and able to cope with the technologically fast changing world. In spite of this, it is not quite certain whether the programme has adequately promoted the skills desired for the Nigerian populace. There are strong indications or evidence to suggest that the problem of appropriate skills acquisition by the Nigerian populace, particularly youth, has remained intractable (Participant 4, Focus Group 4, January 23, 2026)

The analyses indicate that although the programmes are perceived as relevant, relevance alone does not guarantee effectiveness. Programme effectiveness is constrained when market demand, community economic absorptive capacity and local livelihood dynamics are not adequately considered. This disconnect weakens the developmental impact of otherwise well-intentioned interventions.

2. What factors mitigate against youth capacity development through skill acquisition programmes in Rivers State between 2012 and 2025?

Interviewee responses revealed factors that militated against youth capacity development through skill acquisition programmes in Rivers State between 2012 – 2025. Reacting to the above, an interviewee, safety and security trainer in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA revealed that:

Youth capacity development was constrained by irregular programme delivery, insufficient funding, and poor integration. Mentorship and post-training support were minimal. These challenges limited the effectiveness of skill acquisition initiatives within the community (P. Essien, personal communication, January 26, 2026).

Similarly, another interviewee, a senior technical skill trainer, noted that:

The programmes were hindered by irregular programme scheduling, limited funding, and poor alignment. Post-training follow-up were weak, restricting participants' ability to apply technical and leadership skills practically. These factors collectively reduced the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes, limiting employability, entrepreneurial growth, and meaningful participation in community development (N. Uche, personal communication, January 26, 2026).

In agreement with the interviewees, Kazi (2016), observed that technical and vocational skill programmes are very much still neglected in the aspect of adequate funding, personnel, modern facilities, staff motivation which consequently are robbing the country of the economic development to be contributed by graduates of technical vocational education. Another interviewee revealed that:

Youth skill development which is considered for employment was marred by poor integration of programmes with community assets, irregular delivery, and insufficient funding, minimal post-training support, limited opportunities for practical skill application and lack of start-up capital (N. Ike, personal communication, January 26, 2026).

Another interviewee noted that:

Weak institutional framework, inadequate finance, political interest, inexperience mentors/facilitators, poor programme content, and lacklustre attitude of community dwellers are some of the factors that militate against skill acquisition and youth development programmes in Rivers State (P. Ade, personal communication, January 26, 2026).

In addition to the aforementioned constraints, weak institutional coordination often results in poor programme delivery. Youths may encounter unqualified facilitators, outdated curricula, or lack of basic equipment and materials. These deficiencies limit learning outcomes and hinder the transfer of entrepreneurial skills into sustainable practice. In some cases, training is delivered as a one-time event with no post-training support, thereby reducing the likelihood of long-term impact (FOA, 2018). Focus Group (FG) was constituted to identify the major institutional, economic and governance-related factors that hinder youth capacity development. Participants stressed political influence and favouritism in beneficiary selection, weak institutional support, absence of mentoring systems. Focus Group participant therefore revealed that:

Skill development selection was marred by excessive political interest. Some people were chosen because of politics while others were selected on the grounds of personal relationship. Many serious youths were not selected. many young people remain unable to enroll in or complete available training due to financial limitations, lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, and social exclusion (Participant 5, Focus Group 5, January 23, 2026).

The findings reveal that governance and institutional weaknesses cut across gender and occupational categories. Nevertheless, the nature of constraints varies across groups. While financial and material limitations are more pronounced among female participants, governance and selection processes disproportionately affect younger youths. These variations point to the necessity for targeted and differentiated policy responses. Following the foregoing analyses, Furlong (2013), noted that a substantial number of beneficiaries reported limited benefits due to weak programme implementation, inadequate support, and difficulty in accessing resources such as start-up capital and mentorship. These challenges reduce the effectiveness of entrepreneurship initiatives and undermine their potential to address youth unemployment and underdevelopment.

IV. Findings

The study revealed that skill acquisition programmes in rural communities of Rivers State between 2012 and 2025 were moderately relevant but largely ineffective in achieving sustainable youth capacity development. While these programmes provided participants with basic vocational, entrepreneurial, and ICT skills, they were mostly generic and poorly aligned with local economic realities, particularly the oil and gas sector that dominates the region. As a result, many youths were unable to practically apply the skills acquired to existing community opportunities. The findings further showed that although participants gained soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, these did not translate into significant employment or enterprise development outcomes. Additionally, the study identified several structural and institutional challenges that limited programme effectiveness. These include irregular programme implementation, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, weak institutional coordination, and lack of qualified trainers. The absence of post-training support, such as mentorship and access to start-up capital, also hindered the transition from training to productive engagement. Political interference in participant selection and limited inclusiveness further reduced programme impact. Overall, while skill acquisition programmes contributed to personal development, their limited integration with community assets and economic opportunities significantly constrained their effectiveness in promoting sustainable youth empowerment.

V. Conclusion

The study concludes that skill acquisition programmes remain a critical tool for youth empowerment and rural development in Rivers State, but their current implementation falls short of achieving desired outcomes. Although these programmes have contributed to improving the knowledge base and soft skills of rural youths, their inability to align training content with local economic opportunities has limited their practical relevance and long-term impact. The persistence of unemployment and underemployment among trained youths underscores the disconnect between skill acquisition initiatives and labour market demands. Furthermore, systemic issues such as poor funding, weak policy implementation, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of institutional coordination continue to undermine programme effectiveness. The absence of structured mentorship, monitoring, and post-training support mechanisms has made it difficult for beneficiaries to translate acquired skills into sustainable livelihoods. The study also highlights the negative influence of political interference and inequitable selection processes, which reduce access for genuinely interested and capable youths.

In essence, while skill acquisition programmes have the potential to drive economic growth and reduce poverty in rural communities, their success depends on strategic alignment with local industries, improved governance, and sustained investment. Without addressing these critical gaps, the programmes will continue to yield only marginal benefits for youth capacity development.

VI. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that skill acquisition programmes in Rivers State should be restructured to align more closely with local economic realities, particularly the oil and gas sector and other viable rural industries such as agriculture and agro-processing. Training curricula should be demand-driven and tailored to equip youths with industry-relevant technical skills that enhance employability and entrepreneurship.

Government and stakeholders should increase funding for skill acquisition programmes to improve infrastructure, provide modern training equipment, and engage qualified trainers. There is also a need for strong institutional coordination among government agencies, private sector actors, and community organizations to ensure effective programme design and implementation. Public-private partnerships should be strengthened to facilitate access to expertise, funding, and job placement opportunities.

Furthermore, post-training support mechanisms such as mentorship programmes, business incubation services, and access to start-up capital should be institutionalized to help beneficiaries transition into productive

ventures. Transparent and merit-based selection processes must be adopted to eliminate political interference and ensure inclusiveness.

Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented to assess programme performance and make necessary adjustments. These measures will enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and overall impact of skill acquisition programmes on youth capacity development.

References

- [1]. Adebayo, A. A. (2013). Youth unemployment and national development in Nigeria. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4(9), 148–153.
- [2]. Adedeji, A. O., & Ogunlola, S. O. (2021). The impact of government policies on skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria's education sector. *Journal of Education Policy Studies*, 69(5), 597–604.
- [3]. Adger, W. N. (2003). Social capital, collective action, and adaptation to climate change. *Economic Geography*, 79(4), 387–404.
- [4]. Akinyele, S. T., & Adebola, O. O. (2018). The role of community-based skill acquisition programmes in rural youth development in Nigeria. *Community Development Journal*, 17(5), 200–258.
- [5]. Akinyele, S. T., & Adebola, O. O. (2019). The role of community-based skill acquisition programmes in rural youth development in Nigeria. *Community Development Journal*, 17(5), 200–258.
- [6]. Ali, A. K., & Nwachukwu, C. E. (2021). The role of private sector partnerships in enhancing skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria. *African Development Review*, 17(5), 230–258.
- [7]. Amadi, S. (2019). Resource wealth and community development: Rethinking corporate social responsibility in the Niger Delta. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 25(2), 123–137.
- [8]. Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. University of Chicago Press.
- [9]. Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- [10]. Broadband Commission. (2020). *The state of broadband 2020: Tackling digital inequalities*. ITU & UNESCO.
- [11]. Chidi, E. S., & Wogu, E. O. (2021). The role of skill acquisition programmes in fostering social cohesion among Nigerian youths. *Journal of Youth Development Studies*, 15(2), 85–101.
- [12]. Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(Supplement), S95–S120.
- [13]. Eze, S. O., & Chukwu, N. O. (2020). The effect of online skill acquisition programmes on youth empowerment in Nigeria. *African Journal of Education and Development Studies*, 8(2), 55–71.
- [14]. Food and Agriculture Organization. (2017). *The future of food and agriculture: Trends and challenges*. FAO.
- [15]. Food and Agriculture Organization. (2018a). *The future of food and agriculture: Alternative pathways to 2050*. FAO.
- [16]. Food and Agriculture Organization. (2018b). *The state of food and agriculture 2018*. FAO.
- [17]. Furlong, A. (2013). *Youth studies: An introduction*. Routledge.
- [18]. Haque, M. S. (2001). The crisis of governance in developing countries: The role of institutions. *Public Administration and Development*, 21(2), 121–130.
- [19]. Ibrahim, M. S., & Amadi, S. O. (2021). Challenges and opportunities in youth empowerment through skill acquisition programmes in Northern Nigeria. *African Journal of Development Studies*, 13(2), 145–162.
- [20]. International Fund for Agricultural Development. (2012). *Rural poverty report 2011: New realities, new challenges—New opportunities for tomorrow's generation*. IFAD.
- [21]. Karlan, D., & Morduch, J. (2018). Access to finance and poverty reduction: Evidence from microfinance and digital finance. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 32(2), 53–77.
- [22]. Kazi, A. (2016). The role of vocational training in rural development. *Economic Review*, 22(3), 45–56.
- [23]. Nwachukwu, M. U., & Adebayo, T. O. (2020). Skill acquisition programmes and youth empowerment in Nigeria. *Journal of Development Studies*, 18(1), 34–50.
- [24]. Okafor, M. C., & Eze, S. O. (2020). The effectiveness of vocational education and skill acquisition programmes in reducing youth unemployment in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Journal of Vocational Education Studies*, 14(2), 66–82.
- [25]. Omotayo, I. T., & Olanrewaju, O. O. (2020). The impact of entrepreneurship training programmes on youth empowerment in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Development Studies*, 12(1), 45–63.
- [26]. Omotayo, I. T., & Olanrewaju, O. O. (2022). The impact of entrepreneurship training programmes on youth empowerment in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Development Studies*, 14(1), 67–86.
- [27]. Psacharopoulos, G., & Patrinos, H. A. (2018). Returns to investment in education: A decennial review of the global literature. *Education Economics*, 26(5), 445–458.
- [28]. Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *American Economic Review*, 51(1), 1–17.
- [29]. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- [30]. Todaro, M. P., & Smith, S. C. (2020). *Economic development* (13th ed.). Pearson.
- [31]. United Nations Development Programme. (2015). *The role of monitoring and evaluation in development programmes*. UNDP.
- [32]. 'World Bank. (2020). *World development report 2020: Trading for development in the age of global value chains*. World Bank.