

**SKILL ACQUISITION AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYABILITY OF YOUTHS IN ETCHE  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVERS STATE**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined skill acquisition and education in Nigeria and its implications on employability of youths in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study was guided by one purpose of the study and one corresponding research question. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The sample of the study comprised 118 youths (68 male and 50 female) who were purposively selected at an orientation programme organized for entrepreneurship trainees by Uche Ken Foundations on 9th October, 2019 at Chokocho Etche. Data for the study were obtained through the use of questionnaire based on a 16-item skill choice table. The instrument was validated by two experts from School of Foundation Studies, Rivers State School of Health and Management Technology, Port Harcourt. Every respondent was asked to indicate five skills of their choices. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected on the spot at the end of the training programme. Thereafter, the responses were tabulated and analyzed using percentages. The results showed that the female respondents had 48% for “catering”, while “pipeline welding” and “vehicle maintenance” were the highest among the male respondents (23.55%) each. “Footwear production” had 0% among the males, but 4% among the female respondents. No respondent chose “roofing”. The paper recommended that stipends should be provided by government, companies and non-governmental organisations for trainees in areas such as footwear production, vulcanizing, tilling, roofing, among others in order to attract youths.*

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**Keywords:** Skill acquisition, education, implications, employability, youths.

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## **Introduction**

Education plays a key role in the advancement of a nation; it is the instrument which nations all over the world, especially the developed countries harness to generate the skills and technologies which they need for economic growth. Education is also used to address social problems such as kidnapping, rape, youth restiveness, drug abuse, injustices and social imbalances. Even, the enthronement of democratic culture in society largely depends on education. To state the obvious, there is a relationship between advancement of a nation and her system of education. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2019), education transforms a nation; hence it is empowered by the United Nations to lead the Global Education 2030 Agenda through Sustainable Development Goal 4. UNESCO believes that through the instrumentality of education, nations can build peace, reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. This shows that the outputs of an educational system have a value-chain effect on the society.

Scholars who agree with UNESCO on the goal of education are numerous. For example, Ozturk (2008) avers that education plays an important role in the economy of nations. According to the author, education boosts productivity and creativity of individuals by promoting their entrepreneurship and technological thrusts. For Nwafor and Nwogu (2014), education enhances individuals' intellectual power and capability to function effectively in society so that in any given circumstance they can respond to the challenges of life. According to Ornstein and Levine (2003), it is the responsibility of education to help individuals to acquire relevant skills needed for their advancement in society. The importance of education in the advancement of any nation cannot be over emphasized. As nations pass through different seasons of social challenges, they adjust their educational systems to address their peculiar problems.

The economic importance of skills in building a virile nation is obvious. As part of the measures to cushion the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on employment, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Ministry of Labour launched the Special Public Works programme to engage 774,000 youths temporarily (Agbakwuru, 2020). The tenacity of this plan cannot be equated to empowering the youths with skills which would boost small and medium scaled enterprises (SMEs). According to Oyebode (2020), providing young people with better skills will move them from underemployment to employment. According to Obisike, Nweke and Nwala (2018), most undergraduates in Nigeria were sure of employment on graduation by government or private firms after her independence and those who decided to

work in non-government establishments did so as a matter of choice and convenience, not as the last resort. Obisike et al. averred that the idea of employment of graduates as the primary responsibility of government was linked to the history of the country between 1960 – 1966, when government needed manpower to fill surplus vacancies in the civil service. The current reality is that government cannot contain the ever growing population of graduates who are turned into the labour market every year. Unfortunately, most graduates fail to prepare for this reality by paying less attention to skill acquisition while in school. According to National Poverty Eradication Programme (cited in Adekola, Allen, Olawole-Isaac, Akanbi and Adewumi, 2016), an average of 120,000 graduates are produced by tertiary institutions in Nigeria every year without hope of being employed. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) reported that unemployment rate in Nigeria stood at 27.1%, an indication that 21.7 million Nigerians are unemployed.

This is a measurement of the number of persons who are actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force. The increase in unemployment is one of the impacts of COVID-19 on the global economy. And more devastating is the fact that any increase in unemployment rate is a harbinger of upsurge in crimes such as kidnapping, yahoo yahoo popularly known as ‘G Boys’, cultism, ritual killing for money, vandalism, robbery, rape, thuggery, drug abuse, among others. Some youths engage in criminal activities due to laziness and the quest to make quick money without stress or long time suffering of acquiring some skills or learning a trade in order to survive and meet their daily needs and wants and that of their families. It is against this backdrop that the study therefore sought to determine the choice of skills acquisition among youths and its implications on employability of the youths in Etche Local Government Area.

### **Literature Review**

Unemployment has been defined as the economic condition of persons without work for pay or profit, who are seeking and available to start working for pay or profit in a given period (International Labour Organisation, 2018). The unemployed people comprised those persons who are without work and immediately available to start work during the same period and who had actively looked for a job at some time during the preceding four weeks. People neither employed nor unemployed are considered inactive and are excluded from the labour force (Brandolini, Cipollone & Viviano, 2004). The industrial sector has failed to respond adequately to the population of unemployed persons in the third world countries (Jhingan, 2011). Consequently, the small and medium scaled enterprises (SMEs) accommodate most of Nigeria’s

employment, accounting for 96% of businesses and 84% of jobs, and contribute to half of Nigeria's GDP (Shittu, 2020). Skill acquisition, according to Idoko (2014), is a form of training which enables individuals to acquire knowledge of different fields of trade for their sustenance under terms of agreement. Ochiagha in Idoko (2014) opined that skill acquisition is as the ability to do or carry out an activity that expresses a rewarding exercise, work or job.

The foregoing discuss situates the importance of skills acquisition in an economy. It is also important to know that some skills have lost their employability status because of new technologies. Therefore, it is important to guide young persons in the selection of skills. This is one of the functions of education – selective function. Musgrave (1999: 348) used the term, “the pool of capability” to explain the selective function of education. According to Musgrave, the educational system is a “sorting mechanism” that places and equips individuals with skills that are not only helpful for their individual lives but also most suited for the development of the society at a given period. Britain explored the selective function of education in the 1960s to provide her economic survival by using schools to ensure availability of needed technicians and technologists. This paper aligns itself to this fact and Nigeria should use education to ensure her economic survival by providing young persons with skills needed for the development of the country.

The utilitarian value of a skill is what gives credence to its employability in society. This fact initiated the idea of Entrepreneurship Education (EE). It is one compulsory course in tertiary institutions in Nigeria for acquisition of skills that will enable students find a place in the labour market on graduation. According to Okebukola (2011), entrepreneurship education trains students to acquire skills for setting up of SMEs. In the same vein, Olawolu and Kaegon (cited in Undiyaundeye and Otu, 2015), posited that EE prepares students to be reliable individuals who become entrepreneurial thinkers by exposing them to real life-learning experiences where they will be required to think, take risks, manage challenges of life. EE was introduced in 2005 (Okebukola, 2011). Since then the unemployment curve in Nigeria has not flattened. One of the reasons for this fact (according to National Bureau of Statistics, 2018) is that persons (students, housewives, among others) who were not part of the labour force have joined and are looking for jobs. Consequently, Oreva (2017) noted that educational systems have failed to give priority to the development of talents and skills according to the needs of the society, noting that in the absence of white-collar jobs, as it is at present, the utilization of personal skills would make it possible for one to survive with ease, and that it is important to note that the acquisition of

vocational skills is not limited to the unemployed. This means that employed persons should also acquire more skills in order to have multiple sources of income.

Many studies have shown spread of choice of skills among youths. Anene and Imam (2011), in a survey of ranking of skills among 500 students of University of Abuja, found out that operating a salon was ranked 1st among 66 different skills, followed by interior decoration, landscaping 3rd position, electric wiring was 4th, electrical/installation 5th, fashion designing 6th, business centre 8th, graphic designing had the 9th position. In another study, Ogar (2017) using on-line method engaged over 300 students for the purposes of establishing choice of skills in Nigeria. The results showed that food services, computer support services, hair styling and beauty services, digital marketing and manufacturing were the top five skills. Also, Obisike et al. (2018) did a survey on rating of skills in Rivers State College of Health Science and Management Technology, Port Harcourt using 318 students found out that catering, make-up beauty salon, decoration of event venue, fashion/designing and ICT were the five most preferred skills for employment.

However, there is a misgiving or misconception associated with acquisition of skills in Nigeria because most Nigerians believed that acquisition of technical skills is for the uneducated or less brilliant students. The reason for this position is the fact that majority of skilled artisans are non-graduates. Therefore, efforts are to be made by stakeholders in the society and managers of tertiary institutions to change the narrative to make students in their higher level of education take advantage and acquire skills. Collaboratively, Verhaest and Omey (2013), studying the relationship between education and skill acquisition, noted that higher educated workers are more likely to acquire additional skills, and that undereducated workers have lower overall skill acquisition probabilities than higher educated workers in similar occupation. In a nutshell, graduates should be encouraged to acquire technical skills in diverse areas of development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was introduced to mark a change in the narrative of doing psychology which had focused on learning through the consequences of one's behaviour (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005). SCT was introduced by Albert Bandura to demonstrate that individuals can generate new ideas, new competencies; become creative from what they have heard and seen. SCT is motivational because it imbues in individuals high expectations of reward due to their actions, leading to perceived self-efficacy which is one

of the constructs that affect behaviour. Other constructs include outcome expectancies, goals, perceived impediments and opportunity structures. These constructs interplay through the process of behavioural change (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005).

At the centre of SCT is the fact that human motivation and action are regulated by forethought. The theory explains why people who believe that they can drive events lead more active and self-determined lives. Such individuals set and pursue their goals. SCT has been applied to different areas of life, including school achievement and career choice (Middleton, Hall & Raeside, 2018). This theory (SCT) better explained the underlying constructs that boost career choice (skill acquisition). If opportunity structures, for example, are put in place to attract the acquisition of certain skills in a given environment, youths in that community will be motivated to acquire the skills because of the expected outcomes.

#### **Purpose of the Study:**

1. To determine the spread of choice of skills acquisition among youths in Etche Local Government Area.

#### **Research Question:**

1. What is the spread of choice of skills acquisition among youths in Etche Local Government Area?

#### **Methodology**

The study adopted the survey design. The sample of the study comprised 118 youths (68 male and 50 female) who were purposively selected at an orientation programme organized for entrepreneurship trainees by Uche Ken Foundations on 9th October, 2019 at Chokocho Etche. Data for the study were obtained through the use of questionnaire based on a 16-item skill choice table. The instrument was validated by two experts from School of Foundation Studies, Rivers State School of Health and Management Technology, Port Harcourt. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected on the spot at the end of the training programme and every respondent was asked to indicate five skills of their choices. Thereafter, the responses were tabulated and analyzed using frequency and percentages.

#### **Results**

**Research question:** What is the spread of choice of skills among youths in Etche Local Government Area?

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage rating of choice of skills acquisition among youths in Etche Local Government Area**

Choice of skills acquisition among Etche youths				
S/N	Skill	Responses		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Catering	2 (2.94%)	24 (48%)	26 (22.03%)
2	Pipeline welding	16 (23.53%)	0 (0%)	16 (13.56%)
3	Vehicle maintenance (Mechanical/Electrical)	16 (23.53%)	0 (0%)	16 (13.56%)
4	Sewing	2 (2.94%)	10 (20%)	12 (10.17%)
5	Barbing/braiding	2 (2.94%)	6 (12%)	8 (6.78%)
6	Fish /snail farming	4 (5.88%)	2 (4%)	6 (5.08%)
7	Cosmetics production	2 (2.94%)	4 (8%)	6 (5.08%)
8	Printing/Arts	4 (5.88%)	2 (4%)	6 (5.08%)
9	Furniture making	4 (5.88%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.39%)
10	Mobile phone maintenance	4 (5.88%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.39%)
11	Plumbing	4 (5.88%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.39%)
12	Painting	4 (5.88%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.39%)
13	Footwear production	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	2 (1.69%)
14	Vulcanizing	2 (2.94%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.69%)
15	Tiling	2 (2.94%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.69%)
16	Roofing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
		68	50	118 (100%)
				Rounded

*Source: Researchers' survey, 2019*

The table 1 showed that “catering” had the highest frequency of 26 (22.03%). Out of this number, 24 were female and only 2 were male attendees. Following were “pipeline welding” and “vehicle maintenance” with 16 responses (13.56%) each by the males with zero interest by the females. The table further indicates that more female attendees chose “sewing” (10 persons, 20%) and “barbing/braiding” (6 persons, 12%) as against their male counterparts that indicated 2.94% for both “sewing” and “barbing/braiding”. “Fish/snail farming” got more interest of the males with 4(5.88%) as against the females with 2(4%). The female attendees showed more interest in “cosmetics production” with 4(8%) than the male youths who recorded

2(2.94%). However, “printing/arts” attracted more males 4(5.88%) than females 2(4%). The table again shows that no female chose any of the following skills: furniture making, mobile phone maintenance, plumbing, painting, pipeline, vulcanizing and tiling. In the same vein, no male chose “footwear production” which had 4% from the female respondents. No respondent chose “roofing”.

### **Discussion of findings**

The results of the study revealed that the trend of choices are catering, beauty salon, fashion designing and ICT among others as preferred skills among respondents which showed grossly unbalanced choices relevant for a growing society. The findings of this study is in agreement with the previous studies conducted by Anene and Imam (2011), Ogar (2017) and Obisike et al. (2018) which reported that the trend of choices skill acquisition were catering, beauty salon, fashion designing and ICT as preferred skills of the respondents. Going by this trend, it means that other areas of development where technicians are needed for job opportunities will become extinct in the nearest future if the educational system fails to bridge the gap. However, the spread of choice of skills as shown on the table is a clear indication of failure of the educational system to direct and persuade youths into skill acquisition. That the youths believe that certain skills are meant for the uneducated manifested in the attendees’ rejection of “roofing” skill and also in the number of persons that chose “footwear production”, “vulcanizing” and “tiling” skills. Unfortunately, these skills are currently needed in Etche Local Government Area for job opportunities. As noted by Verhaest and Omey (2013), education should be explored to encourage the youths to acquire additional skills. It is also noteworthy to align the implication of the skill choices of the respondents to Oreva (2017) who noted that educational systems have failed to give priority to the development of talents and skills according to the needs of the society.

In other words, Etche Local Government Area is one of the fast-growing LGAs in Rivers State and urbanization has crept into the area through her border towns in the Igbo Clan. An urban area is marked by heavy vehicular movements, rapid land development, migration of people, large markets, and increase in tenants among others. Consequently, Etche is a large market for all services, especially, the small and medium enterprises-SMEs. This means complementary services such as *footwear production*, *vulcanizing*, *tiling* and *roofing* should not be relegated to the background. These services must be provided in an urban area. The implication is that



strangers would take advantage of the gap created by the Etche youths in this regard and become the providers of these services.

### **Conclusion**

This paper avers that education plays a key role in the advancement of a nation; it is the instrument which nations all over the world, especially the developed countries, have explored to generate the skills and technologies which they need for economic growth. Considering the level of unemployment in Nigeria, there is the need to redesign the educational programmes in order to address the issue of acquisition of technical skills among the youths, which will in turn reduce the rate of crimes in the country. This understanding necessitated this study, with the view to determining the spread of skills among youths. The study has proved that there is an asymmetrical relation between needed skills and choice of skills by youths.

### **Implications on Employability of Youths**

Based on the findings of this study which showed that skill areas where self-employment opportunities abound had not attracted majority of the youths which is one of the reasons for rise in unemployment in a locality. This implied that youth's unemployment should be reduced when the youths acquire skills that are not attractive to majority of people so as to create the market and make those areas trend for people to seek for their services. Another obvious implication is that Nigeria as a nation has not explored the inherent potentials and value-chain impact of education. The study has also implicated gender disparity in skills acquisition as one of the challenges of Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 4) which education should address before 2030.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Non-governmental organizations, community leaders and youth organisations should carry out sensitization programmes on skill choices/employability opportunities.
2. Managers of education at all levels should vigorously pursue entrepreneurship education to make students have positive attitude towards skill acquisition in diverse areas.
3. Skills such as footwear production, vulcanizing, roofing, tiling and painting, among others should be introduced in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.

4. Stipends should be provided by government for trainees in areas such as footwear production, vulcanizing, tiling, roofing among others in order to attract youths.
5. A comprehensive skill acquisition centre should be built, equipped and managed on partnership basis by the government, non-governmental organization and individual philanthropists.
6. The existing technical schools and craft centres in the state should be reinvigorated by the Rivers State Ministry of Education to function optimally.
7. Market outlets should be provided by government at all levels to assess the products of entrepreneurship trainees.
8. Start-up soft loans should be provided by government and banks for outstanding graduates who have acquired entrepreneurship skills.

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