Skills Acquisition Programme and the Poverty Alleviation of Women in Anambra State, Nigeria

Ego Kate Okeke; and Aloysius Tochukwu Aduma, PhD

Department of Public Administration
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

There has been an alarming and depressing incidence of the poverty in Nigeria. Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2020) puts the poverty level in Nigeria at 43% or 83 million people as at 2020. Government of Nigeria is not folding its arms to the ugly situation. Both federal and state governments are doing their best with various approaches to arrest the situation. Government of Anambra State established skills acquisition centers in the state to equip women-a group with the largest population in the state- with skills that can make them self-reliant and help them exit the poverty. This paper investigated the influence of this skills acquisition programme on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State. Population of the study was the beneficiaries of the programme totaling 767,663. Sample size was however 400. Three hypotheses guided the study. Chi-square statistical test was used to test the hypotheses and arrive at some findings. It was found out that there are numerous skills acquisition programmes available in the centers and that they have had positive influences on the participating women in positioning them to economic independence and financial freedom. The paper recommended that to strengthen the scheme, government needs to engage more monitoring and evaluation workers and give them adequate training to adequately capture the data and details of the programme with a view to improving it. Government should also make funds more readily available for grandaunts of the scheme.

Keywords: Skills Acquisition Programme; Poverty Alleviation; Women; Anambra State

1. Introduction

Poverty is a global threat plaguing both developed and developing nations. It has a devastating effect on developing nations generally but Sub-Saharan Africa in particular (Addae-Korankye, 2014). The poverty situation in Nigeria is galloping (Oshewole, 2011). Available statistics reveal that the poverty incidence in Nigeria has been on the increase since the 1980s. As reported by the UNDP (2010) between 1980 and 1996, the percentage of the core poor rose from 6.2 per cent to 29.3 per cent and declined to 22.0 per cent in 2004. Based on the recent official survey data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 39.1 per cent of Nigerians lived below the international poverty line of $1.90 per person per day in 2018/2019. The National Bureau of Statistics (2019) released a report on poverty in Nigeria and highlights that 40 per cent of the total population, or almost 83 million people, live below the country's poverty line of 137, 430 Naira ($381.75) per year. Anambra State in Nigeria is inclusive with its poverty rate of 14.8% and 3.2% of the poverty gap index (NBS, 2019).

Nigeria has struggled to invigorate the broad-based growth needed to tackle poverty but has failed to give adequate and holistic attention to the role of women in the alleviation of poverty in society. Women are disproportionately affected by poverty. Women often end up in insecure, low-wage jobs; have limited access to educational resources, lack the skill and financial tools they need to succeed. The development of any country, state or nation is related to the development of women. Ofoma (2018) cited the United Nations Development Programme (1996) which stated that as long as there is underutilization of the resources and skills of women, there can be no development.

Empowering women has become a frequently cited goal of development interventions (Rahman, 2013). Empowerment of women is essentially the process of uplifting the economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones in the society (Dutta, Bhakta& Bengal, 2017). Women empowerment is the development of mental and physical capacity, power and skill in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourable level of social recognition and subsequently enhancing their economic status (Rahman, 2013).

The national government in Nigeria has evolved initiatives and programs to empower women socially, politically, educationally and economically. Examples of such strategies and programs were: National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Better Life Programme, the National The poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), etc. In Anambra State, there are also some initiatives and skills acquisition programmes aimed at alleviating poverty amongst women. This paper seeks to examine the influence of these skills acquisition programmes on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study
The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of skills acquisition programmes on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State between 2010-2020. Specifically, however, the study aims to:

I. Identify the skills acquisition programmes available in Anambra State.

II. Ascertain the effect these skills acquisition programmes have had on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State.

III. Identify the problems that militate against the full realization of the aims of skills acquisition programmes in Anambra State.

Statement of Hypotheses
1. Skills acquisition programmmes are not available in Anambra State.

2. Skills acquisition programmes have had no significant effect on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State.

3. Lack of monitoring and evaluation management, lack of commitment by beneficiaries, inadequate credit facilities among others are not factors that militate against the full realization of the aims of skills acquisition programmes in Anambra State.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Skill Acquisition
Skill acquisition in the views of Oladeji (2019) can be said to mean a well-designed procedure of acquiring new ways and methods of carrying out specialized functions. It is defined as the form of training by individuals or a group of individuals that can lead to the acquisition of knowledge for self-sustenance. It involves the training of people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainers and the trainees for a certain duration and under certain conditions. Similarly, Okeke (2014) is of the view that skill acquisition is the manifestation of idea and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals, the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful development. The author stressed that if individuals are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills needed for self-sustenance in the economy, it will promote their charisma in any work environment. He further maintains that skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people. Accordingly, Edem (2018) posited that skill acquisition requires the accumulation of different skills that enhance task performance through the integration of both theoretical and practical forms of knowledge:

I. Provision of training that gives the trainees the opportunities to acquire skills that are appropriate for preparation.

II. Provision of definite skills that relate to each trade that makes one a professional in one field instead.

III. That training has to be done by competent, experienced and qualified instructors

IV. Skills acquisition requires much practice, patience, interest, ability, aptitude and personality traits.

V. Skills acquisition require a conducive environment.

VI. Training requires constructive human relationships, business skills, imitation and constructive ideas (Edem, 2018).

From the above scenario, it can be stated that skills acquisition requires a holistic approach in the realization of creative ideas. It helps in the transformation of knowledge and skills into a creative venture.

Poverty
Poverty is a global threat plaguing both developed and developing nations. It has a devastating effect on developing nations generally but Sub-Saharan Africa in particular (Addae-Korankye, 2014). The fact that poverty affects many aspects of human conditions, including physical and moral aspects and psychological thinking means that poverty has been conceptualized from different perspectives by different scholars. This makes it impossible to have a concise and acceptable definition that will be universally accepted. The World Bank (2013), Addae-Korankye (2014) define poverty as pronounced deprivation in well-being such that an individual does not have access to basic resources required for him or her, and it consists of several dimensions, including low income and the inability to possess basic goods and services required for survival with self-esteem. Additionally, it also encompasses lack of adequate education, the poor state of health, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, loss of physical security, lack of voice, insufficient capacity and lack of opportunity to better one's own life. Daniel, Moses &Bankole (2009), Okoro&Kigho (2013) attribute the poverty in Nigeria to overpopulation which is the situation where a large population chases few resources, scarcity of resources, corruption in the polity, etc. All these are detrimental and bring about poverty and deprivation.

Poverty Indicators
Poverty indicators were described by United Nations Development Programme (2019) as a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services. Overall, the poverty

indicators take various forms, including lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environment. It is also characterized by the lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life (UNDP, 2019). It occurs in different ramifications in all countries as mass poverty in many developing countries, pockets of poverty amid wealth in developed countries, loss of livelihoods as a result of economic recession, sudden poverty as a result of disaster or conflict, poverty of low-wage workers, and the utter destitution of people who fall outside family support systems, social institutions and safety nets (UNDP, 2019).

Poverty Alleviation
Poverty alleviation is a process whereby policy statements and efforts are made to improve the conditions of living of the individuals classified as poor (Onah, 2003). Poverty alleviation is also the effort made by the government and other well-meaning individuals in the society to alleviate the poverty of the indigenes of a nation to its minimal state (Ofoma, 2018). Accordingly, Ofoma(2018) states that some of the tools that can be used for poverty eradication include the policy process for the identification of the poor, creating job opportunities for the poor, payment of the unemployment allowances, among others. The poverty alleviation programme according to Dash (2003) arises from the challenges facing all governments of Africa and other developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. The poverty alleviation programmes were initiated to address the challenges which are geared towards reduction of poverty, minimizing income disparity, reducing the wide gap between rich and the poor and men and women.

Theoretical Framework

This paper anchors its theory on Human Capital Theory (HCT). The human capital theory was popularized by Becker and Mincer (2014) and emphasizes the creation of higher economic productivity gained through a collaboration of economic resources such as skills, technical know-how, ingenuity, among others. These resources are the total capacity of the people that represents a form of wealth that can be directed to accomplish the goals of the nation or state or a portion thereof. Central to Human Capital Theory (HCT) is the fact that any investment in the development of the human person in the advancement of his skills translates to the increase in the desired workforce needed to advance the goals and objectives of an organization. Goldin & George (2014) define human capital as the skills the labour force possesses and is regarded as a resource or asset. Of prime importance is the idea that there are investments in people in terms of education, skill, training, etc., which desirably results in an increase in the individuals' output. Higher productivity is the major factor underlying the HCT and it is thought to be motivated only when workers and people see the need to raise their knowledge base by acquiring more technical knowledge and skills they may require to advance and increase their capital (financial) base. In their argument, Goldin &George (2014) noted that although the entrepreneur may have identified the opportunities for new business, his ability or acquired skills needed to provide the required services is all he needs to realize the opportunities. Becker and Mincer (2014) opined that the investment made in the acquisition of skills was central to the development and advancement of societies.

This theory advances the fact that there is an influence of skill acquisition through human capital investment on the poverty alleviation and self-sustainability of citizens. Skills acquisition gives people a sense of independence to act on their own, stand for their rights, advance and increase capital base, make decisions and acquire more skills which is a catalyst for the transformation of self and nation.

3. Methodology

Participants and Area of Study
The research was carried out in three Senatorial districts of Anambra State. Participants in this study consisted of all the grandaunts from Skill Acquisition Centers in Anambra State totalling 767,663 as provided to us by the supervising ministry which is the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. Because of the large population, however, the participants were reduced to a researchable size through the Yamane formula thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{767,663}{1 + 767,663\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{767,663}{1 + 767,663\,(0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{767,663}{1920.16}$$

= 399.8   Approximately 400

Participants for this study, therefore, were 400 grandaunts selected through simple random sampling. However, 386 questionnaires were filled appropriately and used for analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Empirical evidence for this study was obtained through the use of a questionnaire. Likert scale was used to generate data from the questionnaire. The information was put in a weighted scale with numerical values attached to them in the questionnaire as follows: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree = 1. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics involved the computation of means and standard deviations from the responses of the respondents to the questionnaire items. The decision rule was to accept any item that has a mean score of 2.50 and above. The hypotheses were tested using a chi-square statistical test.

Results Presentation

Hypotheses Testing
This section details the analysis of the hypotheses and presentations of the results.

Hypothesis 1
Skills acquisition programmes are not available in Anambra State.

Table 4.1 Skills Acquisition Programmes are not Available in Anambra State.

	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
Observed Frequency	85	90	29	126	56	386
Expected frequency	77.2	77.2	77.2	77.2	77.2	386

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021

Using Chi-square statistical test formula: $X^2 = \Sigma(O-E)^2/E$

Where O = Observed frequency, E = Expected frequency, Σ = Summation, X^2 = Chi-square value, X^2 = 69.66. Degree of freedom = (Number of categories = 1) (5-1) = 4. Table of critical values of chi-square, the critical value using 4 (row) as degree of freedom and probability level is P<.05, then 5% at the column = 9.49.

From the above, the Chi-square value was larger than the critical value. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. In that regard, skills acquisition programmes are available in Anambra State.

Hypothesis Two
Skills acquisition programmes have had no significant effect on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State.

Table 4.2 Skills acquisition programmes have had no significant effect on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State.

	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
Observed Frequency	54	62	24	205	41	386
Expected frequency	77.2	77.2	77.2	77.2	77.2	386

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021

Using Chi-square statistical test formula: $X^2 = \Sigma(O-E)^2/E$, following the same step as above $X^2 = 275.16$.

a) Degree of freedom = (Number of categories -1) (5-1) = 4

b) Critical value using 4 (row) as degree of freedom and probability level is $P<.05$, then 5% at the column = 9.49.

Where O = Observed frequency, E = Expected frequency, Σ = Summation, X^2 = Chi-square value, $X^2 = 69.66$. Degree of freedom = (Number of categories = 1) (5-1) = 4. Table of critical values of chi-square, the critical value using 4 (row) as degree of freedom and probability level is $P<.05$, then 5% at the column = 9.49.

From the above, the Chi-square value was larger than the critical value. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. In that regard, skills acquisition programmes have had a significant effect on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 3
Lack of monitoring and evaluation management, lack of commitment by beneficiaries, inadequate credit facilities among others are not factors that militate against the full realization of the aims of skills acquisition programmes in Anambra State.

Table 4.3 Lack of monitoring and evaluation management, etc are not factors that militate against the full realization of the aims of skills acquisition programmes in Anambra State.

	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
Observed Frequency	24	86	41	140	95	386
Expected frequency	77.2	77.2	77.2	77.2	77.2	386

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021

Chi-square statistical formula: $X^2 = \Sigma(O-E)^2/E$, $X^2 = 109.82$.

Degree of freedom = (Number of categories -1) (5-1) = 4

Table of critical values of chi-square, using 4 (row) as degree of freedom and probability level is $P<.05$, then 5% at the column = 9.49.

From the above, the Chi-square value was larger than the critical value. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. In that regard, monitoring and evaluation management, etc, are factors that militate against the full realization of the aims of skills acquisition programmes in Anambra State.

Discussion

Nigeria is passing through an economic downturn characterized by a high incidence of unemployment and poverty. According to Bukola (2018), Nigeria has overtaken India as a country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians, or around half of the country population, thought to be living on less than $1.90 a day. The unemployment situation is equally alarming, as youths are not gainfully employed after graduation. UNDP (2021) put the figure of the unemployed in Nigeria in 2018 at 7.96% while Simona (2021) observed that in 2021, the unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated to reach 32.5 per cent. In a bid, to ameliorate

the situation and empower the vulnerable citizens especially the women, various tiers of government embarked on poverty intervention schemes. Anambra State government through the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD) established skill acquisition centres as a means of empowering women and reducing the incidence of unemployment and poverty in the state. They made available many skill acquisition programmes including Tailoring/Fashion and designing, photography, Food processing, Basic computer appreciation, Agricultural farming, Bakery and confectionaries, Hairdressing and cosmetology, Interior decoration, Bead and hat making, Domestic chemical production, etc (MWASD, 2020). These skills acquisition programmes have enabled illiterate women to acquire technical knowledge that has helped them face their future. It has helped reduce joblessness or unemployment in society and has generally reduced the incidence of absolute poverty. In other words, it has had a significant effect on the poverty alleviation of women in Anambra State.

These landmarks however have not come without some challenges. Due to financial constraints of the state government, some acquisition centres are not well equipped and there are not enough funds to go around as loans to new grandaunts. Furthermore, most centres are far away from the interior villages where we have the majority of beneficiaries of the scheme. Accessing these centres that are mostly located at local government areas' capitals are challenging. We have also the challenge of lack of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) management by the initiators of the programme. A program that does not adequately track data of the happenstances of the scheme usually runs into problems of planning and execution. Be that as it may, the skills acquisition programme of the Anambra State government has had a tremendous influence on the alleviation of the poverty of women in the state.

5. Recommendations

This paper puts up the following recommendations towards promoting a better and more efficient skills acquisition programme that will ensure more result-oriented empowerment and eradication of poverty amongst women in Anambra State, Nigeria.

1. Modern and adequate state of the art equipment is needed in the skills acquisition centres to enhance learning.

2. Awareness strategy should be intensified to capture more women for skills acquisition programme and also make available funds and equipment to grandaunts for easy take-off.

3. There should be better monitoring and evaluation management to ensure that the aims of the programmes are realized. This can be achieved by engaging more Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) officers and training them constantly on the need to track, record and manage data that will serve as a planning tool for the programme.

6. Conclusion

A nation's ailing economy can only be improved upon where individuals and other able-bodied people not reached through formal education or who got formal education but unfortunate to be unemployed are sufficiently skilled in various economic sectors. Skills acquisition endears individuals to self-reliance and boosts the socio-economic development of a nation. Skills acquisition were adequately utilized will enhance the promotion of entrepreneurship within the nation, the creation of employment opportunities and reduction of the poverty and anti-social vices in the society, improve the living standard of the people, etc. Women in Anambra State, Nigeria are targets of the skills acquisition programme of the government. This programme has proved to be a vital developmental programme that has helped alleviate poverty.

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