

Research article

# ALLEVIATING POVERTY THROUGH THE USE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILL ACQUISITION IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This study assessed the impact of entrepreneurship skill acquisition on poverty in Kogi State of Nigeria. The study made use of primary data collected with the aid of a well structured questionnaire which were administered by well trained enumerator to beneficiaries of entrepreneurship acquisition skills randomly sampled from six Local Government Area of the state. The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages. The result shows that 65% of the respondents accepted that lack of entrepreneurship skills among youth is responsible for the high rate of poverty in Nigeria. The result also revealed that at least 60% of the people that benefitted from the skill acquisition programme can now afford the basic necessity of life. The study therefore recommended that since most of the people that benefitted from the programme could afford the basic necessity of life, the government should begin to think of the way of developing the programme to the status of poverty eradication programme. **Copyright © [www.acascipub.com](http://www.acascipub.com), all rights reserved.**

**Key words:** Entrepreneur, Vocation, Skill Acquisition, Poverty, Alleviation, Optimum.

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## Introduction

One of the major challenges facing developing and underdeveloped countries of the world is poverty. It has been so endemic as a result of the high rate of unemployment that has become the major characteristic of the developing and underdeveloped countries of the world. Although the level and magnitude of poverty and unemployment has been observed to be different within and across nations, it still remains the major obstacle to the success of the struggle for the optimum utilization of human resources for both social and economic development of nations. Africa entered

the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the poorest, the most technologically backward, the most debt distressed and most marginalized region of the world, Economic Commission for Africa, (2001). With the position Nigeria occupy in Africa in terms of the share of population, one cannot but imaging the percentage of Nigerians that are affected by this debilitating monster called poverty and hence making the war against poverty one of the cardinal policy of government in Nigeria.

As Ajegi, (2002) rightly observed, the poverty situation in Nigeria has indeed assumed a crisis dimension. Records from the Bureau of statistics show that about 67% of Nigerians live below the poverty line. The data further reveal that only 50% of the population has access to safe drinking water, while 38% cannot avail themselves of primary health care. It is estimated that about 70% of Nigerians consume less than 1/3 of the minimum protein and vitamin intake due to low purchasing power. This statistics shows the very depth of poverty in Nigeria. It is dehumanizing and can be rated as a killer disease which has assumed an epidemic state. Any responsibly government will not go to sleep with such a terrible situation. The government of Nigeria through most of her policies and programmes has made tremendous effort towards changing the scenario in the country. Despite the effort of government in this direction, the “poverty virus” is getting more entrenched and spreading wider among the populace. This incidence is higher among the youth who falls within the age bracket of 15-35. The untrained and unskilled youth grows into an unemployable man who cannot be employed because of his lack of marketable skills to be engaged in a job that can adequately support his family. This makes it impossible for him to provide for his children in terms of education both at the formal and informal level to guarantee his wards self sufficiency. Thus, the cycle continues with the generation after generation propagating this vicious cycle of poverty.

Economic growth is seen as a sinquanon for sustained progress in poverty and unemployment reduction. As Sachs, (2005) opined, that poverty cannot be reduced except there is economic growth. To him, it is fact that has been proved by both historical and comparative studies. Empirical facts also exist to show that countries that have reduced poverty are the ones that have grown the fastest. On the other hand, poverty has grown in the countries that have been stagnant economically. Ajegi, (2002) observed that since poverty is a situation in which the victim is subjected to economic, political, social and environmental depreciation, it carries with it the potential for all forms of resentment and quite often, such resentment could be violent and destabilizing. This view can be used to explain the rising cases of violence in Nigeria as it is evidenced in the insurgency called ‘Boko Haram’, kidnapping and militancy across the country. In the words of Adam Smith, (1776),” no society can be flourishing and happy, of which by far the greater part of the members are poor, unemployed and miserable”. These views have created a growing awareness and an unprecedented global consensus that poverty the greatest threat to peace, stability and the entire human race. The 1995 world economic summit offered a resounding expression of this with the identification of poverty eradication as a political, economic, social and moral imperative for social development.

Keying into this expression, the Nigeria government have introduced and established various programmes and agencies saddled with the responsibility of alleviating poverty in the country. However, despite this policy stance very little seems to be achieved in terms of real impact of the plight of the poor. Evidence exit as to the partial stimulation of growth in some sectors of the economy as a result of some of the programmes of government aimed at alleviating poverty, the anticipated dysfunctional impacts were so marketed that the overall poverty and unemployment situation has continued to deteriorate. In the view of Osunde, (2003) and Nwagwu, (2005), a better approach to the eradication of poverty should be to break the generational chain of poverty by empowering the youth to be self reliant through vocational skill acquisition programme targeted at the youths. The scenario in Kogi State of Nigeria (an agrarian society) is not different in the issue of poverty from the scenario in the larger Nigeria presented earlier. Data from the Bureau of statistics shows that unemployment to be high and the attendant social problems associated with unemployment also at the high rate.

A revolution in vocational skill development has been observed among youths in Kogi State, Nigeria. This skill acquisition spread across many vocations like tailoring, shoe making, carpentry, furniture, and welding, automotive mechanic etc. The idea is that, if youths who are previously unskilled and unemployed develop themselves in any of the vocations mentioned above, one can forecast that in the nearest future, the local economy of Kogi State would be transformed with the youth empowered financially to contribute to economic growth and development of the state and the nation at large. In view of the turn of event discussed above and the bureaucratic bottle-neck associated with the institutional approach, this research attempt to investigate if the alternative provided through the vocational skill

acquisition in Kogi State is potent enough to alleviate poverty through the creation of employment opportunity to the teeming unemployed youth of Kogi State and Nigeria at large.

## Literature Review

Defining poverty is a herculean task because of the elusiveness and the controversy surrounding the concept. This problem arises out of the very nature, magnitude and causes of poverty which differ across regions and nations of the world. In this literature review, an attempt was made to expose us to the various views expressed by scholar in the effort at resolving the controversy surrounding the concept. The phenomenon called poverty has generated considerable interest among scholars all over the world in recent time. The very diversity of poverty across has made it difficult for a consensus on the concept. The problem is more because various attempt made at defining poverty ended up describing the concept. Poverty is a common sense word which is implicit to the user, thus leading to as many definitions as there are users. As O'Connor, (1991) opined, poverty can be conceptualized as a condition in which an individual or household is unable to meet the basic needs of life considered as minimum requirements to sustain livelihood in the given society; is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation; and consequently has limited chances of enhancing his/her capabilities.

Todaro, (1982) recognizes poverty in pure economic terms as the number of people living below an imaginary internationally specified minimum level of income, called the poverty line, which cuts across international boundaries. The view of Todaro and Smith (2003), approximate Oladunmi, (1999) opinion that poverty can be defined as a situation of insufficient income for securing basic necessities of life such as food, portable water, clothing and shelter. According to Haruna, (2002), poverty is more than lack of income. It is also insecurity and inequality, poor health and illiteracy. These are the various component of poverty which reflects in various viable attributes, multi-dimension and nature. In the opinion of CBN, (1999), attributes of poverty may be classified into structural, economic, social and cultural deprivation. These dimensions of poverty exhibit a vicious cycle and account for the recurring decimal of poverty.

As opined by Sachs, (2005), it is useful to distinguish between three degrees of poverty. Extreme (or absolute) poverty, moderate poverty, and relative poverty. Extreme poverty means that households cannot meet basic needs for survival. They are chronically hungry; unable to access healthcare, lack the amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children, and perhaps lacks rudimentary shelter and basic articles of clothing. He further expands that unlike moderate and relative poverty, extreme poverty occurs only in the developing world. Moderate poverty he defines as generally construed as a household income level below a given proportion of national income. The relatively poor, in high income countries, lack access to cultural goods, entertainment, and recreation and to quality healthcare, education and other prerequisites for upward social mobility. Thus, while an individual may have more than enough income to sustain life, if it is very low compared to the rest of the community, the individual may be viewed as being in poverty. As the society grows richer, so the income level defining poverty rises. One may see poverty from the angle of permanence and transience. This dimension differentiates poverty based on time duration on the one hand and distribution as to widespreadness or concentration on the other hand. In the opinion of Aliyu, (2003), several types of poverty may be distinguished depending on such factors as time or duration. If the poverty is widespread, the occurrence itself is of limited duration and distribution. If it involves relatively permanent insufficiency of means to secure basic needs, the condition may be so general as to describe the average level of life in the society or it may be concentrated in relatively large groups in an otherwise prosperous society.

In recognition of the dehumanizing nature of poverty and all the attendant social problems associated with it, many successive government has introduce one or more programme aimed at alleviating the scourge of poverty among the people of Nigeria. According to Okpoko and Ezeadichie, (2003), poverty alleviation refers to sustained improvements in the living conditions of a particular group of people. They posit that poverty alleviation as a concept is closely related to development, which they described as chance process characterized by increased productivity, equalization in the distribution of social products and emergence of indigenous institutions whose relations with the outside world are characterized by equity rather than by dependence or subordination. Poverty

alleviation can be referred to as sustained development. Since development is not seen as a cluster of benefits, which a needy country simply acquires, but as an indigenous process that should rely primarily on the strength and resources of the society concerned, (Thirlwall, 1999). The aim of any poverty alleviation of any government is to achieve lasting improvements in the quality of life and not just short-term improvement that disappear at the end of the project cycle. Poverty alleviation is therefore aimed at maintaining the natural resource base through a process that adapts properly to the natural environment by making appropriate improvement in the social values of the people, (Paul, 2007).

According to Ogundele, Akingbade and Akinlabi, (2012), the contribution of entrepreneurship training and education on poverty reduction through youth empowerment and social welfare service improvement will be much significant if entrepreneurship is encouraged at all the level in the state especially at local and community level. This position approximate Ohize and Muhammed, (2009), who opined that non government organization, can play a vital role in poverty alleviation. This is evident from the success story of project YES as the findings revealed that the scheme has contributed to the economic upliftment of the youths by providing them with vocational skill acquisition and counseling services aimed at reorienting their attitudes towards self and societal development. Akpama, Esang, Asor and Osang, (2011), observed that acquisition of vocational skills lead to a significant reduction of poverty among young adults, and participant's age on skill acquisition programmes significantly influenced poverty reduction. Entrepreneurial studies are inter-disciplinary training that focuses on the tools needed to start a new business or vocation. Because Nigeria is fast becoming a predominantly youthful society with high rate of unemployment requires training the youth in entrepreneurship skills in technical vocational education and training to tackle the unemployment which has reached alarming proportions. Amadi and Abdullah, (2012), reported from their study that a greater percentage of the sampled youth reported high and moderate levels of their capacity building – implying that the vocational skills development was a successful scheme. They however recommended that the constraints that impedes the success of the scheme be addressed by policy makers to make the outcome of the skills training more successful.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area**

The study was carried out in Kogi State, one of the 36 states of Nigeria. The State is located in the north central zone of Nigeria with 21 Local Government Area, 3 Senatorial zone and 3 major ethnic group, namely Igala, Igbira and Yoruba. It is located on between Latitude 7°30' North and Longitude 6°42' East and occupies an area of 29,833 square kilometers. The population of the state is put at 3,595,789 million according to the 2006 population census. About 75% of the population lives in rural areas. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. The state produces cash crops like coffee, cocoa, and food crop like peanuts, maize, cassava, yam, rice and sorghum. The state is blessed with a lot of mineral resources like coal, iron ore, limestone, petroleum and tin. The state is home to the largest steel industry in Africa, the Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited as well as one of the largest cement factories in Africa, the Obajana Cement Company, a subsidiary of Dangote Group of Companies.

### **Sample Selection**

This study made use of multi-stage random sampling procedure. The use of this procedure was informed by the fact that, multi-stage random sampling procedure allows for effective and equal representation of all the units within the study area. The sampling procedure is in stages, and the peculiarities of characteristics are taken into consideration at all the sampling stages for equal representation. The state is divided into three senatorial district, East, West and Central. This will form the basic stratification segments in stage 1.

In stage 2, the study chooses randomly two Local Government from each senatorial district. The lists of the Local Government selected are as follows:

<b>District</b>	<b>Local Government Area's Sampled</b>
East	Dekina and Ankpa
West	Kabba/Bunu and Ijumu
Central	Okene and Okehi

In stage 3, two major towns where entrepreneurial/vocational skills acquisitions are predominantly located were chosen randomly from each of the two Local Government Areas. In stage 4, twenty beneficiaries of entrepreneurial/vocational skills acquisition were chosen from each of the Local Government Areas giving a total of 120 sampled respondents. **Sources and Types of Data Collected**

This research work relies on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire, which were the beneficiaries of entrepreneurial/vocational skills acquisition chosen from each of the six Local Government Areas sampled for the study.

## Analytical Tools

The relationship between entrepreneurship skill acquisition and poverty was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive tools consist of the use of percentages and frequencies presented in a tabula form. A chi-square test ( $X^2$ ) was employed to test the validity or otherwise of the effect of entrepreneurship skill acquisition on poverty alleviation in Nigeria. This was captured using the formula:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - e)^2}{e}$$

Where;

$X^2$  = Chi-square

O = Observed frequency

e = Expected frequency

## Results and Discussion

The result interpreted is presented in table 1. The study revealed that out of the 120 sampled respondents, 65% of them were male while 35% of them were female. It shows those males are more involved in entrepreneurship skill acquisition than the female. This is not unconnected to the facts that male are the bread winners and in that consciousness will like to live up to expectation as the bread winner of their family. This is consistent with the findings of Adofu, Orebiyi and Otitolaiye, (2013), that men are the bread winners and as such are more likely to engage in income generating activities. 77.5% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 21 – 40. This implies that most of the sampled respondents are those within the age bracket that can perfectly fit into the entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme that this study undertook to evaluate. The study also revealed that 68.33% of the respondents were single while 18.33% were married. It therefore goes to explain that most of the sampled respondents are without responsibilities of wife and children and can easily concentrate on entrepreneurship skill acquisition. 63.34% of the sampled respondents had at least the basic primary education. It shows that majority of the respondents has the basic formal education skills that will help them in the entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme. It shows further that education play a role in the selection for entrepreneurship skill acquisition beneficiaries of government. The results of the study further revealed that 35% of the result of the respondents sees poverty as the inability of the individual to meet the basic needs of life and 20.83% see it as the inability to provide for the family. It shows that 55.83% has the proper view of the concept of poverty and can easily contribute meaningfully to the outcome of the research. 65% of the respondents revealed that lack of entrepreneurship skills among youth is responsible the high rate of poverty in Nigeria. This goes to justify the position advance by various scholars that entrepreneurship skill acquisition can actually alleviate the poverty situation in Nigeria (Abraham and Leigha, 2012, Ohize and Muhammed, 2009, Amadi and Abdullah, 2012). The study also revealed that 50.83% are of the view that entrepreneurship skill acquisition should be initiated by the government while 36.67% see it to be the responsibility of individuals. It shows that the role of government as initiator of poverty alleviation programme should be emphasized as the people look more onto them to perform that role in the society. There is also the need to encourage the individual to acquire entrepreneur skills in other to reduce the extent of poverty in the economy. In assessing the role of government in alleviating poverty through entrepreneurship skill acquisition, 64% of the respondent are of the view that the government has not done enough in that regard. Although 35.83% agrees that the government has made significant impact, the view of the majority is that the government needs to do more if the issue of poverty in the country will actually be alleviated through entrepreneurship skill acquisition. There is no doubt however that majority of the respondent are aware of the poverty alleviation programme of the government as 71.67% alluded to that fact. The study revealed that 55.83% of the beneficiaries of entrepreneurship skill acquisition

programme sampled sponsor the programme individually. 30% of the respondents were sponsored by the government. This goes to show that the role of government in this regard is still very low and there need for improvement if the benefit of entrepreneurship skill acquisition as a poverty alleviation tool is to be fully harnessed. The study also shows that 71.17% of the entrepreneurship skill acquisition is through various apprenticeship programme. This reason for this may not be unconnected to the fact that since most of the programme are self-sponsored, the easily accessible means of entrepreneurship skill acquisition becomes the alternative. More also, the small and medium scale enterprises that offer the platform upon which this skill acquisition is offered favoured the apprenticeship method because of its wide spread and flexible engagement conditions. On whether the entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme can actually alleviate poverty, 60% of the respondents revealed that their standard of living after the entrepreneurship skill acquisition is at the average. What this means is that, at least 60% of the people that benefitted from the skill acquisition programme can now afford the basic necessity of life. Although, 40% of the beneficiaries still live below the average, the percentage that was affected positively is the majority and as such, entrepreneurship skill acquisition should be encouraged as it leaves the majority better-off. The study sought to find out the assistance that beneficiaries of entrepreneurship skill acquisition needs from the government and 45% of the respondents spoke in favour of capital and financial support from the government. This is in recognition of the fact that finance act as a conveyor through which innovations and technology can be translated into reality that affects people positively. 33.33% favoured training and re-training as the area that government assistance is required. Training and re-training will help improve the skills already acquired and expose them to new ones as knowledge is a dynamic phenomenon.

**Table 1:** Frequency distribution of Respondents according to Demographic Characteristic, Perception and Causes of Poverty, views and effect of Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programme

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	78	65.0
Female	42	35.0
Total	120	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
10 – 20	18	15.0
21 – 30	63	52.5
31 – 40	30	25.0
41 and Above	09	7.5
Total	120	100.0
<b>Family Status</b>		
Household Head	42	35.0
Family Members	78	65.0
Total	120	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	82	68.33
Married	22	18.33
Divorced	09	7.50
Widow/Widower	07	5.83
Total	120	100.00
<b>Education Status</b>		
No Formal Education	44	36.67
Primary Education	60	50.00
Secondary Education	08	6.67
Higher Education	08	6.67

Total	120		100.00	
<b>Perception of Poverty</b>				
Inability to meet basic needs of life		42		35.00
Inability to have a job		12		10.00
Inability to enjoy luxury	23		19.17	
Inability to provide for the family		25		20.83
All of the above	18		15.00	
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Perception of the Causes of Poverty</b>				
Absence of market for goods		23		19.17
Unavailability of land and farm input	07		5.83	
Lack of organized industrial concern		23		19.17
Lack of entrepreneurship skills		78		65.00
All of the above	09		7.50	
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Perception of Initiators of Poverty Alleviation Programme</b>				
Government		61		50.83
NGO	11		9.17	
Community		02		1.67
Individuals		44		36.67
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Perception of Role of Government in Poverty Alleviation</b>				
Yes	43		35.83	
No	77		64.17	
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Awareness of Poverty Alleviation Programme</b>				
Yes	86		71.67	
No	34		28.33	
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Beneficiaries of Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programme</b>				
Yes	120		100.00	
No	00		0.00	
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Sponsor of Programme Benefite</b>				
Individual		67		55.83
Government		36		30.00
NGO	17		14.17	
Community		00		0.00
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Method of Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition</b>				
Apprenticeship		86		71.17
Workshop/Seminar		22		18.33
Post Primary Training		09		7.50
Others	03		2.50	
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Standard of Living after Skill Acquisition</b>				
Very low		14		11.67
Below average		34		28.33

Average	70		58.33	
Above average		02		1.67
Very high		00		0.00
Total	120		100.00	
<b>Assistance from Government for Better Performance</b>				
Further training and retraining		40		33.33
Creating conducive atmosphere				
For marketing of product		22		18.33
Capital/financial support		54		45.00
Better access to raw material		04		3.30
Total	120		100.00	

Source: Computed from field survey data, 2013.

The chi-square results presented in table 2 shows that the calculated chi-square is 54.43. The tabulated chi-square at 5% level of significance is 9.49. since the calculated chi-square is greater than the tabulated, then we accept the fact that entrepreneurship skill acquisition has helped in alleviating poverty in Kogi State, Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Chi-square Test of the Impact of Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition on Poverty Alleviation in Kogi State, Nigeria.

Observed	Expected	$o - e$	$(o - e)^2$	$\frac{(o - e)^2}{E}$
14	24	-10	100	4.17
34	24	10	100	4.17
70	24	46	2116	1.92
02	24	-22	484	20.17
00	24	-24	576	24
120	120			

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - e)^2}{e} = 54.43$$

## Conclusion

The effect of poverty on the society is greatly de-humanizing. Every effort on the part of the government and the society at large to alleviate or possible eliminate poverty is a welcome development. The research assessed one of such effort at alleviating poverty in Nigeria through entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme. The findings of the research suggest that, entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme proved to be veritable tool available to both the government individual in their fight against the deadly disease called poverty. Poverty is de-humanizing; it is the most perceived motivator of most social vices. When any society alleviates or eliminates poverty, then, the fight against most of the societal problems is almost won. Poverty which arises mostly due to unemployment can be alleviated through entrepreneurship skill acquisition as the result of the study suggest.

## Policy Implication and Recommendations

The fact that entrepreneurship skill acquisition can actually be used to alleviate poverty in Nigeria is the issue this study set out evaluate. The findings of this research has alluded that fact and the study hereby draw the following conclusion and also makes recommendations that assist the government and society achieve the desired result in applying entrepreneurship skill acquisition as a poverty alleviation tool.



1. Entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme targeted at alleviating poverty should be directed more at the male segmented of the society. The reason is because, as the finding of the research suggest, men are generally seen as the bread winner of the family, and this reason propelled the men to succeed most often in entrepreneurship skill acquisition than their female counterpart. This is not to say that the women should be ignored completely in any scheme directed at poverty, as there is an increasing awareness among the women folk, that there is need for them to help in providing for the family and hence the slogan ‘ what a man can do, a woman can do better.
2. The concentration of entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme among the single youth as observed by this study should be seen as welcome development and should greatly be encouraged. The youth are the fathers/mothers of tomorrow. Concentrating our energy towards ensuring that the can provide the basic needs for themselves and family in future will help break the vicious cycle of poverty and liberate the society from the deadly monster called poverty.
3. Entrepreneurship skill acquisition programme should be pursued with vigor, as the study revealed that lack of it is the most important cause of poverty in the society. A man/woman with an income yielding skill is capable of liberating he/herself and the family from the scourge of poverty.
4. The government should realize that society looks unto them to initiate skill acquisition programme. We the fact that skill acquisition programme can help alleviate poverty which is believed to be the major causes of most the social vices in the society, any effort aimed at alleviating poverty should be pursued with vigor by the government. Fighting the social vices is seen as attacking the symptoms while alleviating poverty through any means is seen as attacking the cause of the social vices.
5. There is the need for the government to key into the apprenticeship method of skill acquisition as this has been proved by the study to be most successful. The reason for the success is the wide spread of small and medium scale enterprises that has proved to be a convenient means of transmitting the skill to the generality of the public. In almost every corner in Nigeria, one can find either a tailor, carpenter, welder and cobbler that can help impact this skill to others.
6. As entrepreneurship skill acquisition has been seen to alleviate poverty, since the result of the study shows that it increased the standard of living of the people on average; meaning that most of the people that benefited from the programme could afford the basic necessity of life, the government should begin to think of the way of developing the programme to the status of poverty eradication programme. This can achieved through training and retraining of entrepreneurs and making credit facility easily accessible to them to invest in innovations and technology that help expand their business to a larger one.

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