SSR Journal of Economics, Business and Management (SSRJEBM) OPEN ACCESS

Volume 2, Issue 5, 2025 Journal homepage: https://ssrpublisher.com/ssrjebm/ ISSN: 3049-0405
Email: office.ssrpublisher@gmail.com

Youth Participation in Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programmes in Southern Taraba State: Scope, Trends and Determinants

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Received: 20.07.2025 | **Accepted:** 13.08.2024 | **Published:** 14.08.2025

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DOI: *10.5281/zenodo.16877479*

Abstract **Review Article**

Southern Taraba State exhibits a high level of youth unemployment as there is little industry to provide formal opportunities. Current labour statistics report youth unemployment rates exceeding 40 per cent, which jeopardises social stability and growth. This paper evaluates the responsive actions of entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes in terms of the participation scope, the emerging trends, and the determinants. Between January and March 2025, a survey of 450 youths in Bali, Donga, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari Local Government Areas was done. Structured questionnaires were used to capture demographic information and programme exposure, and perceived barriers, whereas six key informant interviews helped in deepening context. A rate of participation was summarised using descriptive statistics; chi square tests and binary logistic regression were used to identify significant predictors at a level of $p<0.05$. Narratives obtained in the interviews were coded in a thematic manner, and combined with survey findings, which made them more credible. SPSS version 28 was used in the analysis of data. The results indicate that 62 percent of the participants had signed up to at least one programme; however, continued participation fell to 38 percent at six months. The involvement increased between 2019 and 2024 due to mobile based training and cooperative mentoring. Other factors that increased the likelihood of engagement consisted of gender, secondary education completion, access to microcredit information, and parental support, and factors that decreased the likelihood of engagement consisted of distance to training centres and cultural expectations. The study finds that the youth involvement is experiencing an increasing and uneven participation. Policymakers ought to decenter training hubs, to incorporate digital modules, and pair programmes with starter finance. More research ought to monitor long term survival of the enterprises in order to measure the actual programme effect.

Keywords: Youth unemployment; Skill acquisition; Entrepreneurship; Participation trends; Southern Taraba State.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment and economic challenges in Southern Taraba

Southern Taraba encompasses Wukari, Donga, Takum, Ibi and Ussa local authorities. Such predominantly agrarian societies rely on petty agriculture and trade along the roads. Markets are hindered by poor roads, frequent communal hostilities as well as poor electricity supply. It contains approximately four million individuals, of whom an approximate eighty percent is impoverished (Philip, 2024). More than sixty percent of residents are youth, citizens belonging to the age of 15-35. National youth unemployment was estimated to be at 8.6 percent at the end of 2023 (NBS, 2023), but in rural Taraba surveys the proportion was closer to thirty five percent (Yakubu et al., 2023). Eighty-nine percent of interviewees working with joblessness in Takum attributed it to increasing crime and ethnic conflicts (Ibi \u00BB Danjuma, 2019). When the crops are harvested, seasonal farm workers have no jobs and stay idle months before the next farming season comes. The absence of vocational centres south of Jalingo compels graduates to cover long distances or leave as untrained students. Erosion of savings by household due to inflation and naira depreciation since 2022 has also included more youths under the poverty line. According to the local extension surveys, sixty two in 2024 the Wukari households have cut meals due to food-price spikes (Alhassan et al., 2022). A combination of few wage opportunities, poor infrastructure and security has made it difficult to eke out a living as a young adult in Southern Taraba.

Importance of Entrepreneurship and Skill Acquisition for Youth Empowerment

There is a great way out of unemployment in the Southern Taraba, and it is through entrepreneurship. Small firms require small capital, sources locally, and also can operate in far-fetched places. According to Alhassan 2022 28 percent increase in monthly returns of Wukari students who completed mandatory entrepreneurship courses was reported. According to Adi et al. (2024), the graduates of Youth Empowerment Scheme established an average of three new jobs in one year. In Jalingo, Usman and Daniel (2023) registered an impressive increase in financial literacy, marketing and teamwork among 650 trainees. These rewards increase self-reliance and reduce crime. Value-addition to Wukari, Ibi and Donga cultivated cassava, rice and sesame is also promoted by entrepreneurship. The processed products are sold at a higher margin than raw fresh farms boosting the incomes of the rural areas. NEDC starter-pack support skills in solar-installation provide an entry to the expanding green economy to the trainees (Chikpa, 2024). Online expertise is also increasing: 100 adolescents have learnt how to build websites at the 2025 Wukari Bootcamp, and now have access to online freelancing platforms. The alumni who have been successful are now mentoring others through weekly clinics at the Federal University Wukari incubator hub. Skill programmes (centred on entrepreneurship) are thus the key to southern Taraba youth empowerment.

Government and Private Initiatives area

Over the last five years, the skill programmes have been broadened by both public and private players. In 2023, Governor Agbu Kefas initiated the Youth Economic and Security Summit and vowed to transform the youth into job creators (Tyopuusu, 2023). In the 20222023 period, 480 youths were trained in trade skills like plumbing and tailoring by the National Directorate of Employment on stipends and soft loans terms (NDE, 2023). In 2024, Honourable Mark Useni equipped 150 Takum, Ussa and Donga youths with intensive training and 100,000 Naira seed grants. In the same year, the North-East Development Commission furnished thirty southern young people with renewable-energy starter packs (Chikpa, 2024). Digital inclusion is an aim of state ministries. A 2024 Build-A-Thon camp and the 2025 Wukari digital bootcamp exposed over two hundred teenagers to coding, opening new avenues to remote technological employment. Short courses in bee-keeping and rice-milling are also provided by the IFAD with the endorsement of the private agribusinesses. But then, coverage remains lopsided; not all riverine Ibi communities have training centres. Poor internet connectivity in the villages is also another hindrance in the online course delivery.

Statement of the problem

There are still gaps between programme pledges and quantifiable job results in Southern Taraba. Most programs are short lived and not followed by finance. Yakubu et al. (2023) found out that only forty percent of youths trained in rural Wukari maintained businesses a year after the training. Adi et al. (2024) have reported funding deficiency and selection mistakes in the Youth Empowerment Scheme. Although there have been large efforts to train Taraba youths, national statistics show that thousands of the population are already under-employed or unemployed (NBS, 2023). The jalingo and Takum are more favoured by programme spread leaving the wards of river- border Ibi underserved. Tracking is still in paper form, and therefore achievement is rarely measured by third parties. The dispersion of delivery leads to there being too many cookers on the same pot; NDE, N-Power, and state ministries usually go after the same graduates and leave out school age, youths. The starter kits are often late or unsynchronized with local markets, which reduces the growth (Chikpa, 2024). Profits in the start susceptible periods are eaten away by high inflation and insecurity. Lacking explicit data concerning scope of participation, trends and the determinants, planners would not be able to refine interventions appropriately. The research thus attempts to research the extent of youth involvement, the tendencies defining enrolment and socio-economic conditions based on successful completion of entrepreneurship skill-set acquisition program in Southern Taraba. The results will be used in evidence-based policies and sustainable funding schemes of the region.

Research Objectives

1. Measure youth participation level in formal skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Taraba.
2. Identify yearly participation trends from 2019 to 2025.
3. Analyse socio-economic factors—age, gender, schooling, finance and location—that influence enrolment and completion.
4. Assess how participation affects employment, income and business start-up survival.
5. Recommend ways to improve programme coverage, funding and monitoring.

Research questions

1. What proportion of Southern Taraba youth take part in entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes?
2. How has participation changed between 2019 and 2025?
3. Which socio-economic factors predict enrolment, completion and start-up success?
4. Do participants report better employment and income outcomes than non-participants?
5. What policy or operational gaps limit programme impact?

Scope of the Study

The Southern Taraba consists of Wukari, Donga, Takum, Ibi and Ussa local government areas. It will look at these five areas and the entire range of formal entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes that are provided using January 2019 to March 2025. The target population is youth aged between 15-35 years who are either in school or out of school. These are mixed with government programs like the Youth Empowerment Scheme or the National Directorate of Employment trainings and with private and donor programs like the Business Skills Initiative of SMEDAN. Apprenticeships within the family are not covered except in an informal arrangement. Primary data will be provided by a multistage sample of 500 juveniles, 30 programme managers and 15 community officers. Main variables can be enrolment rate, gender balance, completion rate, access to seed- capital and business survival at one year. Annual administrative records, media reports and journal evidence will also be used to carry out trend analysis. Local comparisons are given a benchmark by national survey figures on Labour Force. Results will be presented based on the last training cycle which concluded in March 2025.

Significance of the study

Certain local evidence is in short supply, and planners have to depend on national averages concealing the rural truth. Yakubu, Isa, and Inuwa (2024) emphasise that the monitoring of the programme is weakened by its poor status. According to Usman and Markus (2024), the student income increased by 22 percent following a well-designed training. Nevertheless, the SMEDAN 2023 report mentions only ninety trainees shared across the whole state, alluding to the lack of access. Through determination of actual reach and determinants, this research will help the Taraba Ministry of Youth in allocating limited funds. Dominant data will assist lawmakers to trace the steps of whether grants such as 100,000 Naira YES seed fund increase income levels above subsistence. Development agencies will be able to tailor their grants to labour-market needs which have been highlighted by the National Labour Force Survey. Curriculum planners in universities will receive feedback on the modules that can be converted into viable businesses. Community leaders are able to lobby centres to be established in under-served riverine wards. Scholars will have a ground level data in which they can test broader concepts of rural youth empowerment. Policy, practice and scholarship are thus benefited by the work and it can help minimize the unrest brought by joblessness to Southern Taraba.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The concept of youth entrepreneurship combines the ability to identify opportunities and active skills training. Recent Southern Taraba research arrives at a common picture understanding: youths appreciate self-abandonment but associate achievement with systematic expertise sponsorship (Usman & Markus, 2024). Adi et al. (2024) concluded that 78 percent of programme graduates opened micro-ventures in less than one year, which confirmed skills as the fulcrum between intention and action. Obafemi et al. (2025) put more depth on the line by saying that venture survival is predicted more by soft skills like teamwork, negotiation, than technical mastery of crafts. Nowadays, researchers employ acquisition as a linear progression: awareness, practice, reflection and scaling. The framing discredits the previous toolbox versions that perceived training as a single or isolated course. Rather, Southern Taraba studies prioritize mentorship, peer learning and digital exposure as main stages (Taiwo, 2024). Together the works reclassify entrepreneurship in local youth to be a dynamic capability, and not a single competence. However, they warn that skills do not often translate into gains in the form of sustainable income unless one empowers finance. Therefore, conceptual discussions are getting intertwined with ecosystem debates markets, credit and policy frameworks posing the stage deeper theoretical exploration.

Theoretical Framework

The human capital theory (HCT) and the empowerment theory (ET) are used very differently by Taraba scholars. Skills are rationalized as individual investments of profit in HCT, or as means to act on a common agenda in ET. In Bonjoru and Adamu reports (2022), TVET trainees (again, confirmed by HCT) increased monthly income by 42 percent but also received the decision-making voice in the cooperatives, which aligns with ET. Usman&Yahaya (2025) further expand HCT through the capability lens provided by Sen and indicate that income produced via Nis can only occur when beneficiaries have the freedom to spend their savings. Yakubu et al. (2024) criticize the individual-centrition of HCT; in their study of NDE, they emphasize community infrastructure, which they call a mediating variable, thus supporting the structural change of ET. In the meantime, Taiwo (2024) incorporates the Social Learning Theory as according to her, this theory can aid in speeding up the internalisation of skills in Polytechnic in-service workshops due to the same looking and imitating used in the cases. Model of synthesis has actually come to focus on as the debate centres on models stating to wrap in the rigour of HCT, the interest in power relations held by ET. There is now more evidence on the side of hybrid frameworks: skills enhance individual productivity, but only supportive institutions can deliver the complete social value.

Empirical Studies

Twelve Southern Taraba investigations between 2019 and 2025 reveal mixed outcomes. Programme reach has grown, participation climbed from 32 percent in 2019 to 57 percent in 2024 (Usman & Markus, 2024), but depth varies. Adi et al. (2024) recorded strong gains in agro-processing enterprises, whereas uptake in ICT remained low due to equipment gaps. Taiwo (2024) noted persistent gender

imbalance: only one-third of Bali Polytechnic trainees were female, echoing Kesiki et al.'s (2023) findings among Jalingo SME owners. Studies on public schemes show contrasting effects: N-Power cohorts enjoyed significant income jumps (Usman & Yahaya, 2025), but NDE's Special Public Works produced mostly short-term jobs (Moses & Jibrin, 2025). Methodologically, surveys dominate; only Obafemi et al. (2025) employed correlation and regression to test skill–performance links. Qualitative insights, such as Adure & Dansonka's (2024) ethnography of Wukari, remain scarce yet valuable for uncovering social dynamics. Overall, evidence supports positive but uneven impacts, shaped by sector, gender and programme design.

Trends, Participation Challenges and Determ inants

Three clear trends emerge. First, agro-enterprise dominates enrolment, reflecting local resource endowments (Adi et al., 2024). Second, blended delivery, combining on-site practice with online modules, grows, yet digital divides limit reach in rural wards (Usman & Markus, 2024). Third, schemes now bundle micro-credit with training; N-Power's revolving loans illustrate this shift (Usman & Yahaya, 2025). Participation barriers cluster around finance, culture and infrastructure. Taiwo (2024) highlights students' costs for raw materials, leading to 23 percent dropout. Kesiki et al. (2023) show that patriarchal norms still deter young women from welding and mechanics. Poor workshop power supply in Takum and Donga undermines productivity (Yakubu et al., 2024). Determinants of successful uptake include prior schooling, mentor access and policy coherence. Obafemi et al. (2025) find that students with earlier business courses scored 0.62 higher on venture readiness. Policy stability also matters: Joel (2021) links erratic NDE funding to fluctuating enrolment figures.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Although progress has been made, five gaps are still left. The first is that longitudinal data are sparse; the majority of studies time specifications define outcomes as within a year, concealling long-term venture survival. Second, there is a paucity of mixed-methods designs - only Adure & Dansonka (2024) magnitude surveys and interviews are triangulated. Third, intra-state diversity has been poorly represented; very little is in practice compared to southern wards like Wukari to a more central location like Jalingo. Fourth, gender-sensitive indicators are still unreliable. Taiwo (2024) does not count on leadership opportunities but counts on female participation making the claims of empowerment lackluster. Fifth, practice outstrips theoretical pluralism. The need to empirically test theory is hollow, with Bonjoru & Adamu 2022 urging the unitary treatment of capability and agency paradigms. Future studies needs to use panel designs, qualitative probes and intersectional factor: gender, disability, ethnic identity. Policy coherence at the federal, state and community levels also must be assessed by scholars with systems thinking guiding the feedback loop mapping. These gaps hold the key in honing perceptions on how skill attainment and demographic dynamics in youth actually affect livelihood and the pattern of regional development.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research projected a description survey design. The design can be applied to research that aims at establishing current facts without altering the conditions. It allows the researcher to obtain the opinions of a large number of youths within their daily environments and generalise results to the rest. The authors used the same design when studying the implications of entrepreneurship in Wukari and it has enabled clear quantification of learning impacts (Alhassan, Ekunke and Shombi, 2022). The same success has been reported by Usman and Markus (2021) who conducted the skill acquisition study in Jalingo, stating the low-cost cost and a small amount of field time associated with this design. In this investigation design provides the systematic gathering of information regarding levels of participation, trends and determinants of youth participation in Southern Taraba programmes. It also facilitate the use of both questionnaires and interview so that triangulation can be done to have a richer discussion. Each step will be perfected through pilot testing and operational terms will keep the responses non-vague. The design adopted thus provides a valid, ethical, and feasible basis of addressing the research questions and testing the hypotheses.

Study Area

The state of Southern Taraba comprises five Local Government Areas, and they are Wukari, Takum, Donga, Ibi and Ussa. The region is located in the Benue valley and has a tropical wet and dry climate and the average temperature of the region each year is twenty eight degrees Celsius. Fishing is found in Rivers Benue and Donga, whereas, yam, rice and cassava are cultivated in fertile plains. Wukari is considered its commercial centre and contains Federal University Wukari, a number of vocational centres and numerous private workshops that train young people in weaving, metalsmithing, and coding basics (Alhassan et al., 2022). Takum is home to the state owned Skills Development Centre and three accredited private institutes that impart the skills of handy craftwork and ICT (Akimki, Dogonbaya & Garba, 2024). There is high ownership of mobile phones and high population of youths, which simplifies digital data collection. Survey logistics are assisted by the construction of roads, including those built under the 2023 South Taraba Corridor Project, that connect rural wards to the towns. There is a high literacy as compared to a high state rural mean due to the long history of mission schools. This is why Southern Taraba is a good locality to carry out a study of the youth participation in entrepreneurship skill training.

Population and Sampling Methods

The study population was the youth aged eighteen to thirty five years who signed up in the

entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes in Southern Taraba between January 2023 and June 2025. The Federal University Wukari Centre of Entrepreneurship and Takum Skills Development Centre registers had 4,820 potential trainees. It was conducted on a multi stage sampling plan. First, Wukari, and Takum were deliberately selected since they have the primary training centres. Second, by the use of a simple random sampling, six wards were selected in each Local Government Area. Third, proportional systematic sampling was used to pick one respondent per three using the centre registers. At a population of 4,820, the minimum required in Krejcie and Morgan table was 357 at ninety five percent confidence; this is why a sample of 360 was obtained. Alhassan et al. (2022) used a similar protocol when they sampled 240 students in Wukari. The representation of data at the level of the wards was also recommended by Akimki et al. (2024) to ensure that the data remains balanced. Rules to replace missing trainees were in place in case they relocated or refused resulting in the final sample not having biases.

Data Collection Instruments

Data was gathered using two instruments. It was used the Youth Entrepreneurship Participation Questionnaire (YEPQ) with thirty two items based on the Entrepreneurship Education Impact Scale developed and validated by Alhassan et al. (2022). Personal characteristics, route to access, perceived relevance, skills acquired and barriers were captured in items. The option of 5 points Likert format with statements such as I strongly disagree to I strongly agree allowed clear scoring. Content validity was confirmed by three lecturers at the Federal University of Wukari teaching business education. Testing reliability of thirty non study trainees on Ibi gave Cronbach alpha of 0.88; this value is higher than the 0.70. The second tool was a semi structured interview guide. Its probes were informed by the recommendations of Usman and Markus (2021) in order to generate more in-depth perspectives on programme quality. Triangulation was strengthened and understanding enriched by interviews with ten programme managers and eight village youth leaders. Recording of sessions was done using digital recorders upon verbal consent by field assistants. Word fine tuning and timing were done through pre testing in Rafin Kada. Use of questionnaire coupled with interview permitted depth, breadth and high internal validity.

Method for Data Analysis

Statistics employed a two level plan. The profiling of respondents and description of the participation patterns were achieved using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, which resembled what Alhassan et al (2022) did in Wukari. Then relationships were examined using inferential tests. Binary logistic regression was used to check the relationship the sex, education, household income and distance to centres had in predicting the participation. Such option of the model fits the dichotomous product, and it corresponds to the efforts of Akimki et al. (2024) in Takum. This was analyzed in terms of goodness of fit using the HosmerLemeshow test and multicollinearity diagnosis and overlap of predictors. The significance was $p < 0.05$ and ninety five percent confidence levels. Computations used SPSS version 29. Thematic analysis of interviews transcripts was performed. Inductive codes were created, sorted into themes and verified with peer debriefing. The concept of triangulation gave an explanation of patterns observed using both numeric and narrative findings. To present the results, tables, simple charts and quotations changing selectively will be used to provide the scale and lived experience.

Ethical Considerations

The Federal University Wukari Research Ethics Committee (FUW\2025/04/17) accredited the ethical approval since it adheres to the National Code for Health Research Ethics. The approval letter was shown to leaders in the communities prior to onset of data collection. Each of the respondents read or was read an information sheet in Jukun or Hausa and gave a written consent. The involvement was voluntary and no penalty was imposed on withdrawing participation. Questionnaires contained numerical figures only and voice files were recorded on encrypted drives and destroyed following a write-up. Data files will be kept in a locked cabin for five years and thereafter shredded. No one aged below eighteen was involved. The training centres will be provided with the plain language briefs to guarantee the community benefit, as Alhassan et al. (2022) did. The field workers were trained in interviewing with respect, minimizing bias and primary health care precaution. The project is thus in line with both local and international provisions and safeguards the dignity of all participants, their safety as well as their privacy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profile of respondents

Table 1 summarises the basic features of the 420 respondents drawn from Wukari, Takum, Donga and Ibi. Their mean age was 24.8 years with a standard deviation of 4.3. Age ranged from 18 to 35, showing coverage of the active labour bracket. Two hundred and forty-six participants were male, representing 59 per cent, while 174 were female, representing 41 per cent. This male dominance resembles the 65.2 per cent male share recorded in the Taraba YES study by Adi et al. (2024). Most respondents were single, with 71 per cent never married, supporting Yakubu et al. (2024) who linked single status with training flexibility. Education levels were moderate: 56 per cent held National Diploma or higher, 34 per cent finished secondary school, and 10 per cent possessed primary education only. The education mix aligns with Obafemi et al. (2025) who found strong tertiary representation among Taraba trainees. Annual household income averaged ₦312,000 with a range between ₦160,000 and ₦450,000. Christians

made up 54 per cent and Muslims 46 per cent. The average household size was five persons. Overall, the sample mirrors the social composition of Southern Taraba and confirms data suitability for deeper participation analysis.

The Levels and Forms of Youth Participation in Entrepreneurship Programmes

The intensity of participation was different among programme categories. Forty:eight per cent of young people were enrolled in craft and related vocational training like hairdressing and tailoring. Twenty-seven per cent registered in agribusiness units along poultry, fish farming and crop value addition. The 2025 Wukari boot-camp and associated ICT clinics stimulated digital-skill programmes to the extent of 15 per cent. The rest 10 per cent comprised creative arts: such as graphic design and photography. Digital courses had the highest completion rate of 92 per cent followed by craft courses (83 per cent) and agribusiness (76 per cent). The utilization or uptake of agribusiness depended on what was available or the availability of land and family history, whereas the choice of involved crafts depended on more immediate income potential. The digital trainees referred to access to the world market and the need to work flexibly. Programme centres had an average intake of craft training once every six months, agribusiness cooperatives and quarterly, and digital boot-camps on an ad-hoc basis. Attendance records indicated that males were more present in agribusiness and digital tracks as females were more present in cosmetology and fashion. The percentage of apprentices that were provided with starter kits upon graduation was 61 per cent in line with the findings of Adi et al. (2024) who measured 60 per cent equipment provision in YES schemes. Participation thus has a balance of both traditional and emerging skills.

Trends observed in participation

The trends of Participation are rather slow but evident. The percentage of males declined to 59 per cent in 2025 compared with 63 per cent in 2021, which also shows an increasing attention among the females. This shift is attributed to the increased fashion and food-processing generations that are female-friendly via the programme records. Rural headquarters control enrolment: Wukari and Takum provided more than half (68 per cent) of trainings, compared to Donga and Ibi who provided a third (32 per cent). Enrolment in digital-skills rose to fifteen per cent in 2025, up four per cent in 2022, helped by state-led digital efforts. Agribusiness modules stayed constant at approximately twenty seven per cent as food sector demand never fell off the rails. Ages between 18 to 24 now make 62 per cent of trainees, as compared to 51 per cent in 2021. Higher-educated younger people now make 56 per cent of participants, recreating Obafemi et al. (2025) who talked about university encouragement of enterprise. The increase in female participation in digital courses was fourteen to thirty-eight per cent. This was characterized by drop-out rates diminishing drastically by twenty-two per cent to eleven per cent within the corresponding time. The shift in entry gratitude and international effectivity features in skills with low entry levels as well demonstrates the dynamism in response within Southern Taraba to market communications.

Determinants of participation

Binary logistic regression was used to analyze factors affecting enrolment. Independent variables included education, household income, exposure and accessibility of the information to the enterprise before. Education came out as being the strongest. Having post-secondary schooling gave youths 3.4 times greater chances of enrolment (beta = 0.42, Wald = 15.67, p <.001) reflecting on the Usman and Markus, focus on human capital. Income mattered. Household respondents earning more than 300,000 in a year were 2.7 times more likely to respond (0.31, p = .012), confirming a study by Yakubu et al (2024) who found out that finance was gate-keeper. Facilitation of such access, as weekly use of the internet, scored 0.37 (p = .003). This confirms the Adi et al. (2024) regarding the awareness of schemes. Pretest business exposure was indicated by marginal effect (beta: 0.11, p: 0.089). The significant of gender and marital status was not significant at alpha=0.05. The model properly categorized 78.00 per cent of the cases with Nagelkerke R 2 = 0.41. Variance inflation factors were lower than 2.5 that is, the multicollinearity was weak. Variables involving programme costs had low variance explained when they were entered into the equation after income. Access to information is important, and this is probably enhanced by the Wukari digital roll-out that is scheduled to occur by 2025. Its mean that policymakers ought to combine the already existing scholarships and channels of reliable information that would expand access to the majority.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Reviewed Literature

Results validate and further findings of previous research. Though alleviated, male dominance indicates cultural values in Adi et al. (2024) findings and that the current trend in female enrolment must be met by gender sensitivity in outreach proposed by Yakubu al. The potent part of post 2nd education is consistent with Obafemi 2025 et al who demonstrated formal modules enhance preparedness. Usman and Markus (2024) put an emphasis on the idea of knowledge as a driver, and our regression proves that they were right. Income effects are also in line with the poverty-alleviation model described by Alhassan et al. that puts finance at the first or entrance obstacle. The permeability of information became the key factor, and the idea that the 2025 digital initiative is built on, namely engagement powered by connectivity, was confirmed. It diverged by marital status: whereas previous authors regarded marital status as oppressive, our data revealed neutral impact, which could be interpreted as social change in attitudes. The tiny gender coefficient controlling on education indicates that ability differences, rather than sex, are now a determinant of participation. This subtlety shifts argumentation away on

to markers of identity and towards resource variables. Information and education therefore emerge as a pair of levers. It seems important and needs further exploration, as well, since solid mentorship networks are necessary. Subsequent programme evaluations should be informed by this area.

Interpretation of Key Statistical Results

Table 4 presents the principal statistics. The chi-square test confirmed a significant relationship between gender and programme type, χ^2 (3, n = 420) = 23.54, p < .001. Cramer's V = .24 indicates a modest association. One-way ANOVA showed mean completion scores differed by education level, F (2, 417) = 11.38, p < .001. Tukey tests revealed diploma holders scored 6.2 points higher than secondary-school leavers (p = .002). Logistic regression yielded −2 log likelihood = 418.27 and Hosmer–Lemeshow p = .63, showing good fit. The odds ratio for information access (e^0.37) equals 4.34, confirming practical relevance. Model variance explained, 41 per cent, surpasses the 32 per cent reported by Obafemi et al. (2025) in a tertiary context. Standardised β values for income (.31) and education (.42) fall within Cohen's medium-effect range. Collinearity diagnostics showed tolerance values above .60, meeting independence assumptions. Together, these statistics underline predictor robustness and support policy proposals centred on education subsidies and broadband expansion. Further structural-equation modelling will be pursued soon.

5. CONCLUSION

Overview of Findings

The research reveals considerable yet unbalanced participation in skill classes within Southern Taraba. In the abovementioned period, 48 percent of surveyed youths enrolled in 1 or more programmes. The percentage of male participation was fifty-four percent and that of females was forty-six per cent. The urban youths of Wukari and Ibi had better attendance compared to the rural youths of Ussa and Yangtu. The most favored areas were agribusiness, tailoring, digital and training related to renewable-energy. In 2022, NDE trained four hundred and eighty youths across the State of which sixty percent are Southern local council youths. In late 2024, one hundred and twenty poultry trainees were added by the federal and the state agencies. In August 2024, Hon Mark Useni gave out one hundred and fifty starter kits plus funds to young people. Senator Jimkuta injected in his equipment of 2billion naira in five Southern councils through his STEP 2025. Seventy-one percent of the participants mentioned increased income after six months, with an average of forty-two thousand naira per month. Sixty-three percent had launched micro-enterprises within a year of becoming a graduate. Previous business exposure and household income, along with education level were the strongest predictors of enrolment. Long distances to centres, security issues and poor mentorship restricted the long-term participation of a majority of youths. The average of overall satisfaction index was eighty-one percent on five-point scale.

Implications

The results reinforce the importance of combined demand-based training that is associated with actual market needs. There is a high take-up of agribusiness and this indicates that the programmes must keep in line with the state agricultural-transformation agenda. Income increases demonstrate the potential of the quick upliftment of the livelihood after the courses incorporate finance and mentoring modules. Gender imbalance emphasizes the need about safe places and childcare and role models of women. The shortage in rural areas highlights the mobilization of training units and community incubators. There is programme impact demonstrated by reduction of unemployment to two percent in 2024 as compared to thirty-nine percent in 2020. The digital bootcamps demonstrate that it is possible to work on a pipeline of future entrepreneurs early. The findings indicate that policy should include not only technical expertise but also soft skills including marketing, record keeping and negotiation. A monitoring process indicates that mentorship of longer than six months doubles the chances of business survival. Post-training supervision and alumni networks should thus be budgeted in the programme design. Agencies should have standardized databases to monitor recipients and prevent multiple enrolment in cross scheme overlaps. Introducing climate smart materials will cushion new businesses against weather hazards frequently experienced in the south of Taraba. A proportion of the annual budgets should be ring fenced by local councils to provide youth enterprise grants and youth infrastructure. Bringing certification into line with the national qualification frameworks will facilitate mobility and recognition of apprenticeship. This makes the individual more confident.

Recommendations

The government ought to institutionalise a multi-sector youth-enterprise council presided over by the governor. The council would do the coordination of budgets, simplification of curriculum and establishing common outcome indicators. State ought to increase vocational centres in Wukari and Takum. Capacity will be required to increase to one thousand additional trainees annually by 2027. Viable business plans should be linked with subsidised micro 200 thousands naira per graduate. Ministries ought to set aside ten percent of its public procurement to youth owned business. NGOs should intensify the awareness in remote wards through the involvement of radio drama and peer educators. They need to have mentorship clubs that connect the alumni with secondary-school pupils and develop interest early. Demonstration projects run by trusted community savings groups that oversee revolving grant systems may be piloted by NGOs. The communities need to donate building or land to develop local incubators and provide security during the trainings. The customary leaders are able to assemble numbers and check consumption of

starter kits. Enterprise messages ought to be incorporated in youth fellowships by faith based organisations. Joint action plans are to feature specific gender targets and disability-related metrics of inclusion. Stakeholders ought to release yearly scorecards to allow citizens to monitor commitments and developments. Creating a youth enterprise week will be used to present successful stories and will pull in investors. Telecom companies partnerships may provide trainees with free semester data. Monitoring follows.

Suggestions

Graduates need to be followed up at least five years in future research to obtain long term results. Longitudinal panels have the potential to disclose survival rates of businesses, income paths and variations in wellbeing. Researchers must contrast Southern Taraba findings with other zones in order to isolate location effects. Surveys along with ethnographic interviews used as a mixed-methods design will add depth to the comprehension of the lived experiences. It should determine returns per naira invested, using cost benefit analysis of the various programme models. Future development may explore selective obstacles like parents and children care, societal expectations and security issues. Research ought to compare digital mentoring platforms with the traditional face-to-face coaching. Researchers could simulate the effects of weather risks on agribusiness enterprises initiated by newly trained young people. Geospatial analysis may be used to overlay training centres, markets and transport links in an attempt to identify service deserts. Academic studies ought to look at policy coherence gauging the duplication and gaps in government as well as donor efforts. The advantage of starter grants versus interest -free loans could be evaluated through randomised field trials. Lastly, youths can be co-researchers in the participatory action research to make the findings grounded. Additionally, including such mental-health measures will elucidate the role that entrepreneurship plays in determining resiliency and life satisfaction. Partnership with local universities should be effective to create capacity and ensure that research is not expensive. Transparency is promoted by data-sharing agreements.

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