

**YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND POVERTY
REDUCTION IN ORLU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, IMO
STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: This study focused on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. The objective of the study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurial skill acquisition and poverty reduction among youth in Orlu LGA. Using a sample size of 384 respondents, determined through the margin of error formula for an unknown population, eight communities within Orlu LGA were randomly selected. Forty-eight youths actively involved in entrepreneurial ventures were sampled from each of the selected communities. The study utilized a survey research design, chosen for its adaptability in data collection, making it ideal for a quantitative approach. Data were primarily collected through questionnaires distributed to the participating youth and analysed with pie charts, bar charts, and chi-square tests. The study hypothesized a significant correlation between entrepreneurship training/mentorship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among Orlu's youth. The results indicated a notable association between access to such training/mentorship and the youths' entrepreneurial skill acquisition. Based on these outcomes, recommendations included forming partnerships with seasoned entrepreneurs, industry professionals, and local business leaders to provide mentorship that could address the specific challenges of young entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it was suggested to enhance entrepreneurship training and mentorship programs to ensure they are accessible to youth across all communities in Orlu LGA. Additionally, establishing micro-finance programs or grant schemes aimed at supporting young entrepreneurs in Orlu LGA would boost their training participation and facilitate their entry into various business ventures.

Keywords: Youth Entrepreneurship, Poverty Reduction, Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition, Mentorship Programs

INTRODUCTION

The greatest source of economic expansion and sustainable development in any society lies in its natural and human resources. Human resources in this context are the youths who are more informed, civic-minded, talented, knowledgeable and ambitious and are making great inputs in all fields of endeavours. Youth play an integral role in advancing development, democracy and peace, and in promoting societal values among others. Similarly, Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy (2009), asserts that youth comprised of all young persons of age 18-35 who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They are people who are energetic, zealous, focused, curious and hardworking.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in her National Policy on Education, stated that the National Education Goals shall include among others: the inculcation of the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society and the

acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. Continuing, the policy also emphasized that the quality of instruction at all levels of our education has to be oriented towards the acquisition of skills necessary for self-reliance. The idea of self-reliance is all about entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is a national asset, and entrepreneurs are the drivers of that asset for any country. It is a dynamic process that not only increases wealth creation but can also create value that results in improved well-being. It plays a crucial role in changing society for good such as it accelerates economic growth, promotes creativity, innovation, research and industrial development among others. Entrepreneurship is well understood within a real-life context. It is the willingness of an individual(s) to conceive and turn business ideas into action through a planned and systematic way to make profit and be self-reliant. This is in line with Wilfred-Bonse and Sam-Ngwu, (2014), who defined entrepreneurship as “the ability of an individual or a firm or group of firms to invest and innovate, translating vision into mission. This vision he argued may be an innovative idea, an opportunity or a better way of doing old things.

Nnaji and Bagudu, (2017), contended that the definitions of entrepreneurship are generally expressed in terms of identification of investment opportunities, decision making as to opportunities to exploit, promotion and establishment of the business enterprise, aggregation of scarce resources required for production and distribution, organization and management of human and material resources for the attainment of enterprise’s objectives, risk bearing, creation of innovative economic activity, and the bringing about improvement on the methods entrepreneurs do things. Similarly, Biney (2019) observed that youth entrepreneurs are sensitive to the market which makes them continuously innovate and produce new products. More so, Damoah, 2020 regarded youth entrepreneurship as a strategic intervention in solving the unemployment crisis among young people in both developed and developing countries.

Muogbo et al (2021) cited in Osita et al, 2022, the need for growth and expansion of skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria for the economic emancipation of the youths through self-reliance training and employment generation is one of the reasons why the federal government came up with several schemes to assist in watering down joblessness among the youths. In the year 2012 for instance, the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) introduced Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship (SAED) Programs into the NYSC orientation course content. The idea behind the programme was to incorporate, sensitize and for mobilization of young graduates for skill acquisition during and after their service year. Also, the federal government of Nigeria over time has introduced poverty alleviation programmes to improve the citizenry's standard of living. Despite all these programmes, poverty has been prevalent in the country.

At present poverty in Nigeria manifests itself in various ways which include hunger, high maternal and child labour and death, prostitution, armed robbery, underemployment, unemployment, kidnapping, brain drain, and generally low quality of life due to lack of entrepreneurial skills which has further resulted to “Japa syndrome” (leaving the country for good). Given the above, entrepreneurial programmes/trainings are designed to help equip the youths with entrepreneurial skills and ideas to enable the youth escape this deadly disease of poverty. Examples are the 3MTT (3 Million Technical Talents) program introduced by the Federal government of Nigeria (2023) that cuts across all the 36 states of Nigeria in which the impact is yet to be felt, and also the SkillUp Imo project (2023) introduced by State

Government in Imo State. The SkillUp Imo, according to Imo State Ministry of Digital Economy and E-Government (2023), is the premier human capacity development programme focused on empowering Imolites with cutting-edge digital skills that will keep them relevant in the 21st century. By combining hard technical skills with soft employability skills, SkillUp Imo will groom well-rounded professionals who can ply their trade at any level in the local & global digital economy. The SkillUp Imo programme is expected to train 300,000 Imolites over 5 years with 100,000 trained in the first year, connect 60% of the graduates to high-paying jobs, empower 40% of the graduates to their own bosses, become tech entrepreneurs and launch their own companies.

Statement of the Problem

Acquisition of entrepreneurial skills is regarded as a key for poverty reduction. To achieve economic expansion and maintain sustainable development is to recognize that the empowerment of the Nigerian youths via entrepreneurial skills is expedient.

The prevailing situation in Nigeria where a good number of youths are unemployed, unskilled, filled with anger, hopelessness, and hunger that have bedevilled them makes them unproductive and poor. To support this assertion Adebowale (2012) cited in Ogbondah and Nwogu (2017) posits that the dangers or effect of non-empowerment of the youths is devastating thus, youth non-empowerment; and can generate frustration and low self-esteem; create unemployment etc.

The recent removal of fuel subsidy and inflation in Nigeria has further aggravated the youth problems (unemployment and poverty). According to the World Bank (2014), there are about 2.47 billion people in the world living in poverty with an income of \$1.25 or less per day most of them from underdeveloped or developing nations located in the African and Asian continent.

The poverty situation in Orlu LGA has gotten to the point that the youths do not know where their next meal will come from. Some have also resorted to all forms of negative vices to earn a living; some have activated the Japa (“to leave for good”) mood syndrome in order to survive. While a good number of the youths that are still hopeful that the present predicament will change for good and are willing to be empowered via entrepreneurial skill acquisition lack infrastructural facilities, lack technical-know-how, lack access to fund, etc. To support this assertion, Ogundele, (2017) posits that most youths who have the willingness to be empowered via the acquisition of these entrepreneurial skills are limited or discouraged because of lack of electric power supply, good road network, fund, and lack of technical know-how among others. Therefore, this study is set to examine the effect of youth entrepreneurship on poverty reduction in Orlu LGA Imo State.

It is observed among others that lack of education, and lack of entrepreneurial training/mentorship decreases the level of effectiveness and participation of youth in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship does not work with youths who have dull brains. To support this assertion Ayogu and Agu (2015) state that an entrepreneur is a creative person, middleman, a special person; a risk taker; an imaginative person; a person who is alert to opportunities; a resourceful, an innovator; etc. Therefore, a person or youth who wants to engage in entrepreneurship must be a creative person, educated and alert to undertake training/mentorship programmes for self-development and growth. However, this will

undertake the study to assess the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship among young entrepreneurs in Orlu LGA.

More so, research on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction has been generally conducted in other states as most of the reviewed works were not carried out in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State. However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, no known study was carried out on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State. This therefore filled the research gap and added to the body of knowledge.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been posed:

1. What is the effect of youth entrepreneurship on poverty alleviation in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State?
2. What is the level of access to business training/mentorship for young entrepreneurs in Orlu Local Government Area?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurial skill acquisition as a strategy for poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State. Specifically, the study seeks:

1. To assess the effect of youth entrepreneurship on poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State.
2. To assess the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship among young entrepreneurs in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State.

Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship for young entrepreneurs and acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among the youths of Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State.

Significance of the Study

This work is significant in the academic and practical sense.

The relevance of this study to the academic world is that this research work has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. This is because it will provide Academics with relevant/recent information on youth entrepreneurship that will be beneficial to their students, society, and the country as a whole. The benefits of this study to the academic community are of a special kind: findings of this research work could be a stepping stone to more research or open doors to new frontiers. However, it is noteworthy that the core concept of research is the pursuit of knowledge. It seeks to advance new knowledge and developing a more in-depth knowledge of a subject matter which is the goal of this study.

The findings of this study will be of immense benefit to the youth and the general public. Entrepreneurship as a strategy for poverty reduction in any economy is critical, as it contributes to the socio-economic development of societies in various ways. Economies are powered by innovation. Much of that innovation is derived from forward-thinking individuals who possess the drive, skills, and background to turn a business vision into reality. More so, innovation, creativity, and risk-taking are key parts of entrepreneurship. When individuals and businesses embrace an entrepreneurial spirit, they enjoy increased productivity, better problem-solving, and fresher ideas.

This study is also significant because it will make Orlu LGA to find new and better solutions to the problems associated with youth entrepreneurship and diversify her economy which will, in turn, create more products, services, and jobs for the youths. This is because complex, and widespread issues like poverty require innovative solutions.

In addition, it will equip young people with the entrepreneurial skills needed to improve the lives of other individuals and communities, as well as the overall economy. They will be instrumental in spurring social change and improving the way people live and work and thus, help raise the standard of living for everyone by creating jobs and making products safer, less expensive, and more functional.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship and poverty reduction

Entrepreneurship is a veritable instrument for youth empowerment and employment generation in any society. This accounts for the position of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) that emphasized the need for technical education which enhances acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge for youth empowerment. In line with this, Friedman (2011) cited in Umaru (2019) defines entrepreneurship as a viable ingredient for poverty alleviation as well as for unemployment reduction, economic development, and job creation.

In furtherance, entrepreneurship is defined as the mobilization of economic resources to initiate new business and identification of new business opportunities and or renew an existing business, under the conditions of uncertainties and risks, for the purpose of making profits under private ownership (Adenutsi, 2009 cited in Umaru, 2019).

On another hand, Hussain et al (2014) sees entrepreneurship as concerned with creating regular cash flow on a group of individuals or an individual for the future through the process of initiative, innovation, and imagination with the aim of minimizing risk and maximizing profits with the view of long-term expansion. However, an entrepreneur is a creative person, middleman; a special person; a risk taker; an imaginative person; a person who is alert to opportunities; a resourceful person, an innovator; and original person; a reward seeker and a coordinator of resources (Ayogu & Agu, 2015).

Entrepreneurship contributes in an immeasurable way towards the creation of new job, wealth, poverty reduction, and income generation for both government and individuals. The contemporary Nigeria is in dire need of youths who will be job “creators” and not job “seekers”. In line with this, Wagbara and Ubulom, (2017) opined that entrepreneurship is the

dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. The wealth is created only by those who assume the major risks in terms of time, equity or in a career commitment to provide value for some product or service. Similarly, Ottih, (2014) contended that entrepreneurship is the purposeful activity of an individual or group of associated individuals, undertaken to initiate, maintain, or aggrandize profit by production or distribution of economic goods and services. To Nnaji and Bagudu, (2017), entrepreneurship can be defined as “the willingness and ability of an individual or group of persons to search for investment opportunities, establish and run a business unit successfully.” Entrepreneurship can also be defined as “the process of generating ideas and venturing into business risks created by dynamic environment and making the best of opportunities for profit purpose.” Entrepreneurship connotes action rather than static events. It involves taking action necessary to analyse business opportunities to launch and/or grow a business, to finance the venture and possibly to harvest it.

Again, entrepreneurship as a concept has a lot to do with how several activities are carried out in an organization for effective operation such as to identify business opportunities, to make choice of business opportunities, to decide on the form of business organization, selection and blending of the enterprise resources for maximum utilization, good leadership, motivation of employees, coordination and monitoring, assumption of risk of different dimensions, and so on. This is in line with the view of Garba, (2010) who described entrepreneurship as a means of providing employment and income generation in the country.

In the same vein, Ajani and Ayelotan (2011) cited in Nnaji and Bagudu, (2017), contended that the definitions of entrepreneurship are generally expressed in terms of identification of investment opportunities, decision making as to opportunities to exploit, promotion and establishment of the business enterprise, aggregation of scarce resources required for production and distribution, organization and management of human and material resources for the attainment of enterprise’s objectives, risk bearing, creation of innovative economic activity, and the bringing about improvement on the methods entrepreneurs do things. Accordingly, Khamis and Mohar, (2021) categorized youth entrepreneurs into three development stages namely: -(i) Pre-entrepreneurs fall under the first formative stage (15-19 years old): this stage involves the transition from security of home or leaving school to work. This stage becomes important as those young people who have profound interest in entrepreneurship increased are likely to go to the next stage. (ii) Budding entrepreneurs fall under the growth stage (20-25 years old): In this stage, youth start gaining some experience, skills and capital that are important to enable them to run their own enterprises. In most cases for those who have not developed necessary entrepreneurial acumen are likely to close business and return to formal employment. (iii) Emergent entrepreneurs fall under prime stage (26-29 years old): In this stage, young people have already gained some valuable experiences in business and emergent entrepreneurs have a higher level of maturity than youth in the lower age groups. They are expected to run more viable enterprises than younger people do.

It is observed that youth entrepreneurs are sensitive to market which makes them continuously innovate and produce new products (Biney, 2019). More so, youth entrepreneurship is regarded as a strategic intervention of solving unemployment crisis among young people in both developed and developing countries (Damoah, 2020).

It is estimated about around 11 million youths enter in the labour market every year in sub-Saharan Africa without meaningful occupation (Bezu & Holden, 2014; McCowan, 2014). Therefore, entrepreneurship serves as a strategy for poverty alleviation.

Poverty reduction is conceptualized as a set of measures, both economic and humanitarian, that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty. “Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere” is the first of the 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations with a pledge that no one will be left behind. Development projects and poverty alleviation programmes all over the world are predominantly aimed at reducing poverty of the poor and vulnerable communities through various participatory and community-demand-driven approaches (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2013). Economic growth is one of the principal instruments for poverty alleviation and for pulling the poor out of poverty through productive employment, (Bhagwati & Panagariya, 2012). This is because economic growth generates revenues required for expanding poverty alleviation programmes while enabling governments to spend on the basic necessities of the poor including healthcare, education, and housing.

According to Pramod and Harpalsinh, (2020), poverty can be reduced through entrepreneurial strategies such as community organizations based on micro-financing, capability and social security, market-based, and good governance. Micro-finance, aimed at lifting the poor out of poverty, is a predominant poverty alleviation strategy. Many researchers and policy-makers believe that access to micro-finance in developing countries empowers the poor (especially the youths and women) while supporting income-generating activities, encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit, and reducing vulnerability. The capabilities approach provides a framework for the evaluation and assessment of several aspects of the individual’s well-being and social arrangements. It highlights the difference between means and ends as well as between substantive freedoms and outcomes.

Improving capabilities of the youths is critical for improving their living conditions. Improving youths’ capabilities also helps in the pooling of resources while allowing the youth to engage in activities that benefit them economically. Social inclusion of vulnerable communities through the removal of social barriers is as significant as financial inclusion in poverty reduction strategies. Social security is a set of public actions designed to reduce levels of vulnerability, risk, and deprivation (Pramod & Harpalsinh, 2020). It is an important instrument for addressing the issues of inequality and vulnerability. It also induces gender parity owing to the equal sovereignty enjoyed by both men and women in the context of economic, social, and political activities.

Good governance calls for strengthening a participatory, transparent, and accountable form of governance if poverty has to be reduced while improving the lives of the youths and vulnerable. Besides this, information and communication technology (ICT) contributes to poverty alleviation programmes. Capturing, storing, processing, and transmitting various types of information with the help of ICT empowers the youths by increasing their access to micro-finance, expanding the use of basic and advanced government services, enabling the development of additional livelihood assets, and facilitating pro-poor market development (Sife et al., 2010).

Youth involvement in entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation programmes

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from childhood to adult age; a period of the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence. The United Nations in Furlong & Andy (2013) defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.

In line with this, Wikipedia, (2023) asserts as follows: youth is the time of life when one is young. The word, youth, can also mean the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity), but it can also refer to one's peak, in terms of health or the period of life known as being a young adult.

Youth in Nigeria includes all members of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18–35 (Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy, 2009).

In Vietnam, widespread notions of youth are sociopolitical constructions for both sexes between the ages of 15 and 35. In Brazil, the term youth refer to people of both sexes from 15 to 29 years old. This age bracket reflects the influence on Brazilian law of international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO). It is also shaped by the notion of adolescence that has entered everyday life in Brazil through a discourse on children's rights. In the same vein, the OECD (2018) defines youth as "those between 15 and 29 years of age".

The vast majority of young people live in developing countries: according to the United Nations cited in Furlong and Andy (2013), globally around 85 per cent of 15- to 24-year-olds live in developing countries, a figure projected to grow 89.5 per cent by 2025. Moreover, this majority are extremely diverse: some live in rural areas but many inhabit the overcrowded cities of Nigeria such as Lagos, metropolises of India, Mongolia and other parts of Africa, Asia and in South America, some live traditional lives in tribal societies, while others participate in global youth culture in ghetto contexts. Many young lives in developing countries are defined by poverty; some suffer from famine and a lack of clean water, while involvement in armed conflict is all common. Health problems are rife, especially due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in certain regions. In Line with this, the United Nations estimates that 200 million young people live in poverty, 130 million are illiterate and 10 million live with HIV/AIDS.

Federal government of Nigeria over times has introduced poverty alleviation programmes to improve the citizenry standard of living. Such programmes introduce to fight poverty in Nigeria include entrepreneurship development programmes, National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS) 1&2, and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) to mention but a few. In spite of all these programmes, there has been little or less magnificent change in the development of human thus; poverty has been prevalent in the country. For example, the human development index in 2015 according to UNDP, Human Development Report (2016) revealed that it was at 0.527. The statistic shows improvement compared to 2010 Human Development Index (0.500) but still insignificant when compared to government efforts in this direction.

At present poverty in Nigeria manifests itself in various ways which includes hunger, high maternal and child labour and death, prostitution, armed robbery, underemployment, unemployment, kidnapping, brain drain, and generally low quality of life which has further resulted to Japa syndrome. Given the above, entrepreneurial Programmes are designed to help the youth escape this deadly disease of poverty. For example, currently, the Federal government introduced the 3MTT (3 Million Technical Talents) program (2023) that cuts across all the 36 states of Nigeria in which the impact is yet to be felt, and also the SkillUp Imo project (2023) introduced by State Government in Imo State.

SkillUp Imo according to the Imo State Ministry of Digital Economy and E-Government (2023) is the premier human capacity development programme focused on empowering Imolites with cutting-edge digital skills that will keep them relevant in the 21st century. By combining hard technical skills with soft employability skills, SkillUp Imo will groom well-rounded professionals who can ply their trade at any level in the local & global digital economy. The SkillUp Imo programme is expected to train 300,000 Imolites over 5 years with 100,000 trained in the first year, connect 60% of the graduates to high-paying jobs, empower 40% of the graduates to their own bosses, becoming tech entrepreneurs and launching their own companies.

However, this SkillUp Imo programme has had a significant effect on job creation, digital literacy, technological advancement, mentorship of youths, and among others in Imo State. Furthermore, a good number of the youths who were trained in the cohort 1 and cohort 2 segments of the programme last year were given laptops and tools to enable them to start up their own businesses according to their various fields of skill acquired.

Effect of youth entrepreneurship training/mentorship on acquisition of entrepreneurial skill

Every society aims at promoting the acquisition of relevant life skills in education, industry, and commerce by its citizens so as to deal with the realities of the world. This is why in developed countries of the world; the impact of effective training on skill acquisition has greatly contributed to their technological expertise and economic self-reliance. In developing nations, efforts are being made to inculcate the right type of value, skills and knowledge to its citizens. Nigeria for instance on realizing the inadequacies of the literary ingrained education system inherited from Britain and its consequences on self-employment, introduced the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1977 as seen the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013). The school divided the secondary school level into two tiers of junior and senior secondary school with general emphasis on the acquisition of practical skills (Nwangwu, 2007 cited in Azolike et al, 2021): to be specific the first three years concentrated on the teaching and learning of pre-vocational subjects in addition to academic subjects. The pre-vocational skills were taught as introductory technology with series of technological and practical skills, while the senior secondary emphasized academic subjects and vocational electives. However, the aim of these according to (FRN, 2013) are to: offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles, raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the dignity of labour, and among others.

In Furtherance, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in her National Policy on Education, stipulated that the National Education Goals shall include among others: The inculcation of the right types of value and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society; and that the quality of instruction at all levels of our education will be oriented towards the acquisition of skills necessary for self-reliance. This corroborates with the view of Ogundele, (2017) that entrepreneurial skills such as creativity, innovation, quick decision-making, and risk taking among others are not only relevant to those who have interest in starting and growing their own business, but are relevant to everyone because these skills are necessary in workplace, in our daily activities, in managing the home, and the society at large.

In line with this, Ezeji and Okorie, (2009) assert that Nigeria's socio-economic challenges will be drastically reduced if people are given adequate vocational training in skills, raw materials, machinery and equipment. It is only with skilled men and women that materials can be harnessed, manipulated and transformed.

Generally, skills are made up of two components; the knowledge components and the activity components. The activity components of skill concern those areas of knowledge that pertains to the mode of doing things in entrepreneurial and technical education. More so, entrepreneurship deals with so many aspects of acquiring skills, ideas, and education and when this acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and ideas are achieved, its effect will be seen as many people will be gainfully employed. Therefore, the need to prepare the youth for economic growth and development has become imperative hence the emphasis on acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. According to Mbotto and Udo, (2012), entrepreneurial skills acquisition is defined as the knowledge, capabilities, competencies and behaviours possessed by a person to enable her/him to set up a business venture. Oluwale, cited in Osita et al (2022) refers to skill acquisition as a process of enhancing entrepreneurial ability and knowledge through structural training and institution-building programmes which basically aim at enlarging the base of entrepreneurs in order to hasten the pace at which new businesses are created.

It involves the development of a new skill, practices and means of doing things that are usually acquired through formal or informal training. It has also been described by many as the panacea for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for financial independence, job and wealth creation while instilling self-sufficiency and reliance in the trainee (Isaac, 2011). Entrepreneurship skill acquisition has been conceived as an effective and efficient tool for self-reliance and sustainability of skills.

The whole notion is that, young people should acquire skill training mechanism in addition to their regular academic programme/curriculum in the crucial sectors in order to remain relevant in this contemporarily competitive world. Gumbari (2011) opined that, skill acquisition is a vital key, needed in eliminating hunger and poverty in a society like Nigeria, because it helps in reduction and elimination of joblessness in any given society. Also, Skills acquisition has to do with different ways through which graduates and youths (educated and non- educated) can be trained to achieve self-reliance rather than waiting for jobs in the formal sector alone. It is believed that training through skill acquisition programmes will enhance their sustainability in different fields of trade. This is possible when the culture of creative thinking is infused in them at early stage in life to make them self-reliant members of the society and employer of labour. It is the ability to do or perform an activity that is related to some meaningful task, assignment or job.

The skill to be gained, behaviour, and qualities of character are transmitted to enable the trainee develop intellectual, and moral character which prepares him/her for self-reliance (Osita et al, 2022). There is need for growth and expansion of skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria for economic emancipation of the youths through self- reliance trainings and employment generation. This is one of the reasons why federal government came up with several scheme to assist in watering down joblessness among the youths. In the year 2012 for instance, the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) introduced Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship (SAED) Programs into the NYSC orientation course content. The idea behind the programme was to incorporate, sensitize and for mobilization of young graduates

for skill acquisition during and after their service year (Muogbo et al, 2021 cited in Osita et al, 2022).

However, this will ensure that clear, streamlined and relevant information is available for young people/graduate to inspire them to consider entrepreneurship training and help them take ideas/action forward to become self-reliant and even become an employer of labour. In support of this, Ugochukwu (2015) added that the kind of skill acquired by young graduates from the various tertiary institutions will to a large extent influence entrepreneurial abilities and will favourably affect them in the world of business.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is anchored on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory because it addresses the most basic needs of man (youths) which are physiological needs which is also the goal youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction are trying to achieve. The youths need to satisfy their hunger and thirst, learn new skills, and new information and better understand the world around them. This is because learning more about their environment enables them to meet their other needs; for example, learning more about developing a better understanding of a business one is passionate about can contribute to self-actualization. As already noted, Maslow's hierarchy places physiological needs as a basic physical need in the category of self-actualization. In other words, Maslow essentially believed that physiological needs had to be met and prioritized before any other need could be addressed and achieved. According to him, once these needs are met, we are now free and comfortable enough to express ourselves and attain other needs that will eventually lead to self-actualization.

Research Design

The researcher adopted a survey research design. The researcher's choice of this design is because of its flexibility to permit the use of a variety of data collection techniques. It is a useful tool which enables investigators to verify, theorize, test and validate hypotheses. To this end, this study involved the collection of data on entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State.

Population and Sample Size

The population of this study is unknown to the researcher due to constant security challenges and sit-at-home orders especially in the area. This however culminated into the migration of most of the residents thereby making the record to be obsolete. Hence the margin of error formula ($n = (Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q) / E^2$) was used for the determination of the sample size. Thus, gives rise to a sample size of 384 youths (18-41 years) who are residents of Orlu LGA of Imo State.

Sample size determination for unknown population: $n = (Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q) / E^2$

Substituting the values:

$$n = (1.96^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5) / 0.05^2$$

Simplifying the equation:

$$n = (3.8416 * 0.25) / 0.0025$$

$$n = 0.9604 / 0.0025$$

$$n \approx 384.16$$

Sampling Technique

Random sampling technique was used to select eight (8) communities as follows: Umuzike, Eziachi, Owerre-Ebeiri, Ihioma, Ihitte-Owerre, Umuna, Umuowa, and Umudioka -Ukwu. This brought the total number of sampled communities to eight out of twenty-three communities in the Orlu Local Government Area. Then forty-eight youths (young male and female who are engaged in one business venture or the other) were distributed evenly from each of the eight selected communities via snowballing. This gave rise to three hundred and eighty-four respondents.

Techniques for Data Collection

The questionnaire was the major tool for data collection.

The primary data for the study were collected by the researcher with the aid of two trained research assistants through questionnaires. A questionnaire provides a way for gathering data that are beyond the reach of the researcher. The questionnaire has two sections; A & B. Section A requires the bio-data of the respondents while section B requires the study problem. It was purposively distributed to the youths who are residents and are engaged in one business venture or the other in the study area. This was done to elicit information from them on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu LGA. The secondary data for this study was obtained from journals, textbooks, official documents, the internet etc. on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction.

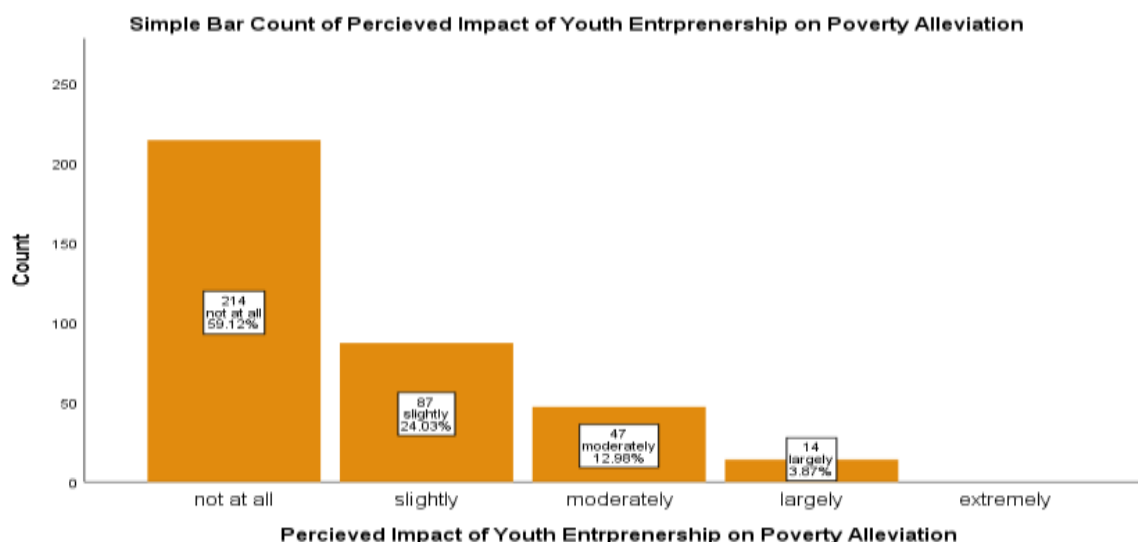
Techniques for Data Analysis

The data was statistically computed with the use of bar chart, pie-chart and tables. The Chi-Square analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Adoption of this approach contributed to a deeper understanding of and provided valuable insights for potential interventions and policies to address the issues of youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

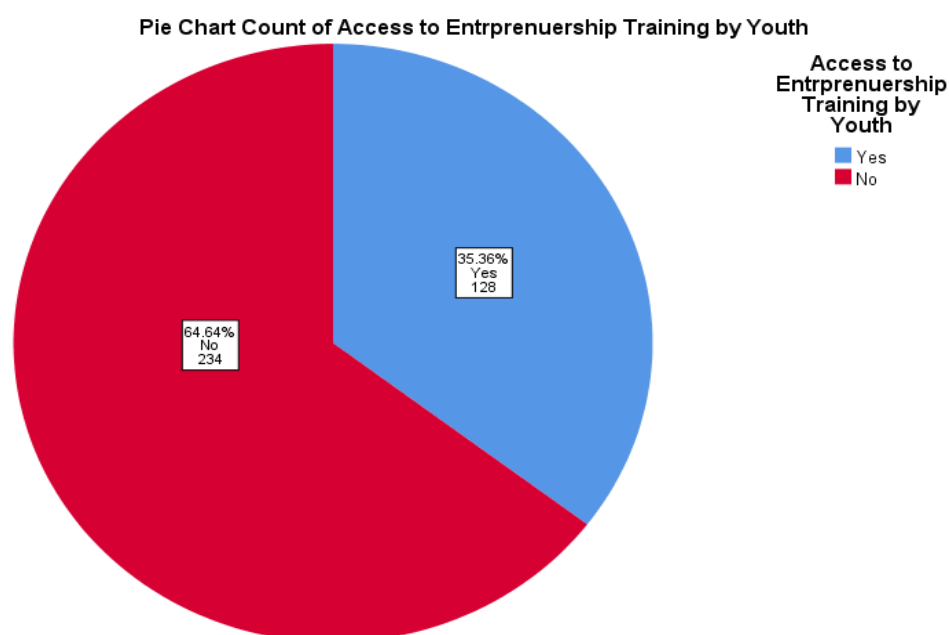
The findings of the study shed light on youth entrepreneurship and its effect on poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area (LGA), Imo State, Nigeria. The findings indicated no effect of youth entrepreneurship on poverty alleviation, 24.0% said it slightly has an effect, 13.0% said moderately while the remaining 3.9% indicated a large effect. More so, the findings indicated that 35.4% of respondents reported access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship, while 64.6% of respondents indicated that they had no access to entrepreneurship training. It was also revealed that the majority did not perceive youth entrepreneurship to have any effect on poverty alleviation. However, the findings revealed that a significant proportion of participants had no access to entrepreneurship training.

Diagram 1: Perceived Effect of Youth Entrepreneurship on Poverty Alleviation



It could be seen from the above diagram that out of the 362 respondents who participated in the study, the majority (59.1%) indicated no effect of youth entrepreneurship on poverty alleviation, 24.0% said it slightly has an impact, 13.0% said moderately while the remaining 3.9% indicated a large effect. The findings revealed that the majority did not perceive youth entrepreneurship to have any effect on poverty alleviation.

Diagram 2: Access to Entrepreneurship Training/Mentorship by Youth



From the diagram above, there were 35.4% of respondents reported access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship, while 64.6% of respondents indicated that they had no access to entrepreneurship training. This suggests that a significant proportion of participants had no access to entrepreneurship training.

Chi-Square Test

Table 1: The relationship between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship for young entrepreneurs and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among youth in Orlu LGA Imo State.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	101.284 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	98.531	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	101.238	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	101.004	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	362				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 25.46.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

A chi-square test of association was conducted to examine the relationship between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship for young entrepreneurs and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among youths in Orlu LGA, Imo state. The results revealed a statistically significant association between the variables, $\chi^2(1) = 101.284$, $p < .001$. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among the youths in Orlu LGA. The effect size was substantial, with a likelihood ratio of 101.238.

Further supporting the significance of the relationship, Fisher's exact test also yielded a p-value of .000. The linear-by-linear association test produced a chi-square value of 101.004 with a corresponding p-value of .000. It is noteworthy that none of the expected cell counts were less than 5, ensuring the validity of the chi-square test. The minimum expected count was 25.46.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship for young entrepreneurs and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among the youths of Orlu LGA of Imo State. The chi-square test above showed a statistically significant association between the variables, $\chi^2(1) = 101.284$, $p < .001$ showing a significant relationship between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among the youths in Orlu LGA.

However, this result is aligned with Alkali and Yakubu (2020) which emphasize the significant effect of entrepreneurship training on youth development. Also, Fayolle and Gailly (2015), emphasize the positive effect of tailored training programs on entrepreneurial capabilities among young individuals.

Conclusions

Conclusively, this research study delved into the crucial relationship between youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria. The findings of the study, which involved 362 participants aged 18-41, revealed significant insights into the effect of entrepreneurship training/mentorship on poverty alleviation. Statistical analysis, particularly the chi-square test, demonstrated a significant association between the level of access to entrepreneurship training/mentorship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among the surveyed youths. This implies that variations in access to training/mentorship are linked to differences in entrepreneurial skill acquisition, suggesting that enhancing such access could positively influence the development of entrepreneurial skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of youth entrepreneurship programs and contribute to poverty alleviation;

1. Collaboration with experienced entrepreneurs, industry experts, and local business leaders to provide mentorship opportunities that address the specific challenges faced by young entrepreneurs, will strengthen entrepreneurship training and mentorship programs, ensuring widespread accessibility for youth across all communities in Orlu LGA.
2. Establishing micro-finance programmes or grant schemes specifically designed to support youth entrepreneurs in Orlu LGA will also enhance the youth training attendance level and as well as facilitate their entry into various business ventures.

Contributions to Knowledge

The study shed light on various empirical reviews which provided support for Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory with the understanding of the motivations, challenges, and benefits associated with youth entrepreneurship & poverty reduction. More so, research on youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction has been generally conducted in other states as most of the reviewed works were not carried out in Orlu LGA of Imo State which however covers the gap in knowledge.

It is equally significant for the fact that it will provide academics with relevant/recent information on youth entrepreneurship that will be beneficial to their students, society and the country as a whole.

In addition, this study will contribute to the discovery of solutions to many of the problems that our society and industry face such as youth entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Orlu LGA. Again, basic inputs for planning and policy decision making can also be found in this study when published.

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