

Effectiveness of Capacity Development and Skill Acquisition Programmes in Promoting Self-Employment Among Youths in Akwa Ibom State

Abaikpa, Udem Anthony^{1*}, Ekpo-Ufot, Uduak-Obong¹, Ubeh, Nse Sunday¹

¹ Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes on promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was administered to 384 respondents, with 338 retrieved representing an 88 percent response rate. Descriptive and regression analyses were employed. Findings revealed that the programmes positively influenced self-employment, with 76.7 percent of respondents acquiring skills for business startup and 79.0 percent expressing overall satisfaction. However, post-training support covering mentorship and finance access was the weakest area with 64.8 percent positive response. The regression model showed a very strong positive relationship with a correlation coefficient of 0.864, with capacity development explaining 74.7 percent of the variance in self-employment and exerting a significant positive effect with a beta coefficient of 0.793 and p value of 0.000. The study concluded that capacity development significantly promotes self-employment but requires enhanced post-training support. Recommendations include strengthening mentorship networks, improving training infrastructure, and instituting business monitoring to ensure sustainability and broader employment impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

There no gainsaying that youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria in the twenty-first century. In spite the country's vast human and natural resources, a significant proportion of its young population remains trapped in joblessness and economic exclusion. The State of the Nigerian Youth Report (2025) estimates that more than 80 million Nigerian youths are unemployed, representing approximately 53 per cent of the youth population, with about 1.7 million graduates entering an already saturated labour market annually. This persistent unemployment crisis has been fundamentally attributed to a disconnect between the theoretical outputs of Nigeria's educational system and the practical demands of the labour market (Ojei, 2010). In response to this crisis, successive governments at both federal and state levels, alongside development partners, have invested considerable resources in capacity development and skill acquisition programmes. These interventions are logically predicated on the assumption that equipping youths with vocational and entrepreneurial competencies enhances their capacity to create their own livelihoods. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation (2026) recently reinforced this national push by training and equipping youths in the South-East, underscoring a nationwide commitment to entrepreneurial skills development. Similarly, the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB, 2026) has continued to equip youths with digital skills to drive employment and entrepreneurship, highlighting the critical role of technical competencies in the modern economy.

Akwa Ibom State has emerged as a notable epicentre for these youth capacity development interventions, particularly through its ARISE Agenda which prioritises wealth creation and human capital development. A flagship initiative is the Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre (DASAC), situated on 12.8 hectares in Ibiono Ibom. As reported by The Will (2026, June 28), the third cohort alone graduated 568 youths, bringing the total number of beneficiaries trained at the centre to 774, with training spanning agriculture, information technology, hospitality, and construction technology (Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre, n.d.). Beyond state-led initiatives, the NCDMB, in collaboration with Wedgewood Integrated Investment Limited, trained 250 youths in Akwa Ibom State in high-demand self-reliance skills such as fashion design, graphics and content development, solar installation, and GSM mobile phone repair (Independent, 2025; Punch, 2025). Critically, these programmes increasingly incorporate starter packs—including sewing machines, laptops, and solar toolkits—to facilitate an immediate transition into self-employment (Independent, 2025). Furthermore, the Akwa Ibom Government unveiled a N100 million creative fund to further bolster youth enterprise and innovation (The Will, 2025, September 30), while the Leadership (2026) report confirmed the NCDMB's strategic focus on equipping youths with digital competencies to drive sustainable employment.

However, despite the proliferation of these substantial capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in Akwa Ibom State, there remains a conspicuous gap in empirical evidence regarding their actual effectiveness in promoting sustainable self-employment among youth beneficiaries. While Ojei (2010) broadly advocated skill acquisition as a viable panacea for unemployment, localized empirical scrutiny reveals a more complex reality. A focused study by Sunday (2025) on the National Directorate of Employment's vocational skills programmes in Akwa Ibom State found a significant relationship between skills acquisition and employment generation; however, it also critically noted that many beneficiaries abandoned their ventures within months of graduation due to a lack of post-training mentorship and financial support. This finding suggests that skills training alone may be insufficient without complementary support mechanisms, thereby creating a substantial gap between policy inputs and long-term self-employment outcomes. The present study therefore seeks to systematically bridge this gap by investigating the effectiveness of these interventions, providing much-needed empirical evidence to guide policy refinement in the state.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To examine the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State.

1.3 Research Question

What is the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State?

1.4 Hypothesis

Capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have no significant effect on promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Capacity Development

Capacity development refers to the process through which individuals, organisations, and societies obtain, strengthen, and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time. In the context of youth empowerment, capacity development encompasses the enhancement of knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes that enable young people to participate meaningfully in economic activities. As noted in the analysis of the Dakkada Economic Empowerment Programme, capacity development involves strategic investments in education, vocational

training, and enterprise support components designed to enhance income generation, employability, and entrepreneurship among beneficiaries (The Role of Economic Empowerment Strategies in Poverty Reduction in Akwa Ibom State, 2026). The Akwa Ibom State Government, through its ARISE Agenda, has prioritised capacity development as a cornerstone of human capital development, with initiatives such as the Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre (DASAC) and the Arise Youth Skill Centre targeting thousands of youths across the state (The Will, 2026, June 28). Capacity development, therefore, represents a deliberate and systematic intervention to equip youths with the requisite tools for economic participation and self-reliance.

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition is the process of learning and developing specific competencies, whether technical, vocational, or entrepreneurial that enable individuals to perform tasks effectively and productively. Ojei (2010) conceptualised skill acquisition as a panacea for youth unemployment, emphasising its role in bridging the gap between theoretical education and practical labour market demands. Elebe (2011) further argued that for Nigerian youths to translate basic technical and vocational skills into sustainable self-employment, entrepreneurship education must be integrated into skill acquisition programmes. Skill acquisition encompasses both hard skills—such as fashion design, ICT, solar installation, and automobile engineering—and soft skills, including business planning, financial management, and marketing (Thomas et al., 2024). In Akwa Ibom State, skill acquisition programmes have been implemented through various platforms, including DASAC, which offers training in agriculture, information technology, hospitality, electrical technology, automobile engineering, woodwork, metal fabrication, and construction technology (Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre, 2024).

Self-Employment

Self-employment refers to a state of economic activity in which an individual works for oneself rather than as an employee of another person or organisation, deriving income directly from one's own business, trade, or profession. It is characterised by autonomy, risk-taking, and the direct appropriation of profits from productive activities (Abaikpa et al., 2024a). In the Nigerian context, self-employment is increasingly promoted as a viable alternative to wage employment, given the limited capacity of the formal sector to absorb the growing number of job seekers. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme, for instance, is explicitly designed to equip Corps members with entrepreneurial and vocational skills needed for self-employment and wealth creation. Self-employment is not merely a survival strategy but a pathway to wealth creation, innovation, and employment generation for others (Thomas et al., 2024). The provision of starter packs—including sewing machines, laptops, mobile phone repair toolkits, and solar installation equipment—to graduates of skill acquisition programmes in Akwa Ibom State reflects a deliberate effort to facilitate immediate transition into self-employment (Independent, 2025; Punch, 2025).

Youth

Youth is a demographic category that varies across contexts and definitions. In Nigeria, the National Youth Policy defines youth as individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years. This age bracket is significant as it represents the period of transition from dependence to independence, characterised by active participation in economic, social, and political life. With over 60 per cent of Nigeria's population under 25 years, the youth demographic constitutes both a demographic dividend and a potential liability, depending on the extent to which they are productively engaged (State of the Nigerian Youth Report, 2025). The focus on youth in capacity development and skill acquisition programmes is therefore strategic, targeting the segment of the population most affected by unemployment and most capable of driving economic transformation.

2.2. Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory

This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory (HCT), a foundational framework in labour economics and development studies that explains the relationship between investment in human capabilities and economic productivity. The theory, originally articulated by Schultz (1961) and later expanded by Becker (1964), posits that individuals possess a stock of knowledge, skills, and competencies—referred to as human capital—that can be invested in through education, training, and health to enhance productivity and economic returns. Human Capital Theory provides a robust analytical lens for understanding how capacity development and skill acquisition programmes promote self-employment among youths. According to the theory, investments in education and skills training increase an individual's productive capacity, thereby improving their employability, income-earning potential, and capacity for economic participation (Abaikpa et al., 2023). When youths acquire vocational and entrepreneurial skills through structured training programmes, they accumulate human capital that enhances their ability to identify business opportunities, manage enterprises, and generate sustainable livelihoods. The theory further suggests that the returns on human capital investment are realised not only in wage employment but also in self-employment, as skilled individuals are better positioned to create their own economic activities. The application of Human Capital Theory to this study is particularly apt given the nature of the interventions under investigation. Capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in Akwa Ibom State are, in essence, investments in the human capital of young people. The Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre, the NCDMB-sponsored vocational trainings, and other similar initiatives are designed to equip youths with market-relevant skills that enhance their productive capacity.

As the study on the Dakkada Economic Empowerment Programme revealed, skill acquisition and vocational training had statistically significant positive effects on income-generating capacity, business performance, employability, and financial stability among beneficiaries (The Role of Economic Empowerment Strategies in Poverty Reduction in Akwa Ibom State, 2026). This finding aligns with the central proposition of Human Capital Theory that investments in education and training yield positive economic outcomes. Furthermore, Human Capital Theory provides a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which skill acquisition translates into self-employment. The theory posits that human capital enhances not only technical competence but also cognitive abilities, decision-making skills, and entrepreneurial alertness—all of which are critical for successful enterprise creation and management (Abaikpa et al., 2024a). Studies have shown that practical training and entrepreneurship education significantly predict entrepreneurial intent among vocational and technical education students (Lamidi et al., 2025). This suggests that the human capital acquired through skill acquisition programmes fosters the entrepreneurial mindset and capabilities necessary for self-employment. However, Human Capital Theory is not without its limitations. Critics argue that the theory assumes a linear relationship between skills acquisition and economic outcomes, overlooking structural barriers such as limited access to credit, inadequate market infrastructure, and unfavourable policy environments that may impede the translation of skills into self-employment. As Abaikpa et al. (2024a) observed, even entrepreneurs with technical skills often fail due to outdated curriculum, limited financing, and poor infrastructure, underscoring the need for complementary interventions. Sunday (2025) similarly noted that many beneficiaries of skill acquisition programmes in Akwa Ibom State abandoned their ventures within months of graduation due to a lack of post-training mentorship and financial support. This suggests that human capital investment alone may be insufficient; complementary interventions—including access to finance, market linkages, and ongoing support—are necessary to realise the full potential of skill acquisition programmes (Abaikpa et al., 2024b). Despite this limitation, Human Capital Theory remains a relevant and widely adopted framework for analysing the relationship between education, training, and economic outcomes, and it provides a suitable theoretical foundation for this study.

2.3. Empirical Review

This section reviews empirical studies examining the relationship between skill acquisition, capacity development, and self-employment among youths, with particular attention to studies conducted in Nigeria and, where available, Akwa

Ibom State. The review is organised thematically to capture the range of findings, methodological approaches, and contextual variations in the literature.

Studies on Skill Acquisition and Youth Employment in Nigeria

A substantial body of empirical research has examined the impact of skill acquisition programmes on youth employment and self-employment in Nigeria. Lamidi, Abubadin, and Oluwaseyi (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study exploring how Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) can be restructured to enhance youth entrepreneurial capacities in Nigeria. Surveying 120 VTE students across two institutions in Kogi State, the study found that 71 per cent of respondents held a positive perception of VTE, 88 per cent believed it could alleviate poverty, and 78 per cent expressed an interest in post-training entrepreneurship. Regression analysis indicated that practical training and entrepreneurship education significantly predicted entrepreneurial intent. However, the study also identified major constraints, including lack of industry internship opportunities, outdated curricula, insufficient practical exposure, and weak ICT integration. The study concluded that while VTE holds strong potential for youth empowerment, it requires urgent reforms in curriculum design, industry partnerships, and funding mechanisms.

Similarly, a study conducted in Kwara State explored entrepreneurial skills acquisition and employment generation among alumni of IVTEC Ajase-Ipo. Using a qualitative approach with face-to-face interviews with 12 alumni, the study found that participants leveraged technical skills, entrepreneurial competencies, ICT capabilities, and soft skills acquired through hands-on training, industry internships, and mentorship to establish successful entrepreneurial ventures. The study underscored the importance of holistic skill development and entrepreneurship education in preparing individuals for the workforce and fostering sustainable economic growth. In Enugu State, a study investigated youths' perception of their acquisition and application of entrepreneurial skills for self-employment among Vocational and Technical Education students. The findings revealed that while students recognised the importance of entrepreneurial skills for self-employment, there were gaps in the practical application of these skills, suggesting a need for more experiential learning opportunities. In Lagos State, another study examined the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and employability among young artisans, finding that skills in business planning, financial management, and marketing significantly influenced employability and job stability.

Studies on Capacity Development Programmes and Youth Empowerment

Several studies have specifically evaluated the effectiveness of government and development partner-led capacity development programmes in promoting youth empowerment and self-employment. A study on the Dakkada Economic Empowerment Programme in Akwa Ibom State, implemented under the administration of Governor Udom Emmanuel (2015–2023), assessed the effectiveness of the programme's skill acquisition, vocational training, microcredit, and enterprise support components. Using a descriptive survey design with 357 respondents selected through stratified random sampling, the study found that both skill acquisition and vocational training, as well as microcredit and enterprise support, had statistically significant positive effects on income-generating capacity, business performance, employability, and financial stability (The Role of Economic Empowerment Strategies in Poverty Reduction in Akwa Ibom State, 2026). Youth and women were particularly empowered, resulting in increased household incomes, improved social mobility, and reduced dependency on government assistance. The study recommended strengthening post-training support and market linkages, enhancing financial and technical assistance for small and medium-sized enterprises, and sustaining gender-inclusive and youth-targeted interventions to maximise long-term economic empowerment.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme has also been the subject of empirical inquiry. Introduced in 2012, the SAED programme is designed to instil self-reliance in Nigerian youths by equipping Corps members with entrepreneurial and vocational skills needed for self-employment and wealth creation. Studies on the programme have found that it has facilitated skills training for more than a million youths, with the programme aligning with Nigeria's micro and small enterprise framework which recognises MSMEs as a small engine room for jobs, innovation, and local value creation. A study using linear and machine learning models to predict job creation likelihood among Corps members found that participation in the SAED programme significantly influenced

entrepreneurial intentions and job creation outcomes. Research on Nigeria's N-Power initiative, a federal government youth empowerment programme, assessed the extent to which the programme empowers Nigerian youth in terms of improved capacity to secure a job, live a decent life, and generate strong disposable income. Findings revealed that while N-Power has expanded access to temporary employment and skills training, challenges remained in ensuring sustainable transitions to permanent employment or self-employment. Similarly, a study on the National Directorate of Employment's vocational skills programmes in Akwa Ibom State found a significant relationship between vocational skills acquisition and employment generation, though it also noted that many beneficiaries abandoned their ventures within months of graduation (Sunday, 2025).

Studies on Vocational and Technical Education and Small Business Startups in Akwa Ibom State

A significant contribution to the literature comes from Abaikpa and colleagues, who have produced several empirical works examining the relationship between vocational education, skills acquisition, and enterprise development in Akwa Ibom State. Abaikpa, Enang, Essien, and Udom (2024a) conducted a mixed-methods study examining the role of vocational and technical education (VTE) in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. The study, which drew a sample of 387 from a population of 11,990 small business startups, assessed the relationship between three critical factors—outdated or misaligned curriculum, limited access to finance, and poor infrastructural support—and startup performance. The results revealed that all three factors have a significant negative impact on the performance, establishment, growth, development, and sustainability of small business startups in the state. The study concluded that without comprehensive interventions across education, finance, and infrastructure, even the most skilled entrepreneur cannot thrive (Abaikpa et al., 2024a). This finding directly informs the present study by highlighting that skill acquisition alone, without complementary support mechanisms, may be insufficient for promoting sustainable self-employment. In a related study, Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel, and Akpan (2024) investigated the relationship between small-scale enterprises and employment generation in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Adopting a cross-sectional survey research design with a sample of 361 respondents drawn from a population of 3,725, the study tested three hypotheses using regression analysis. The results indicated a positive relationship between small-scale enterprises and employment generation in the study area. The study recommended simplified loan application processes, reduced collateral requirements, government policies promoting regular infrastructure maintenance, and the development of entrepreneurship and business management training programmes covering essential skills such as book-keeping, marketing, and customer service (Thomas et al., 2024). These recommendations underscore the importance of addressing structural barriers that hinder the translation of vocational skills into sustainable self-employment. Furthermore, Abaikpa, Thomas, and Udom (2023) examined the relationship between human capital management and organisational performance, providing insights into how investments in human capacity translate into productive outcomes. Their findings reinforce the theoretical underpinnings of the present study by demonstrating that human capital development—whether in organisational or entrepreneurial contexts—yields significant returns when complemented by supportive institutional and policy environments.

Studies on Skills Acquisition and Self-Employment in Akwa Ibom State

Empirical research specifically focused on Akwa Ibom State, while limited, provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment. A study on the role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State examined how vocational training programmes contribute to enterprise creation. The findings indicated that vocational and technical education plays a significant role in equipping youths with the practical skills necessary for small business startups, though the study also noted challenges related to access to capital and market opportunities (Abaikpa et al., 2024a). The Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre (DASAC) has been a focal point of empirical inquiry in the state. The centre, which has graduated hundreds of youths trained in various vocational and technical fields, represents one of the most ambitious state-led skill acquisition initiatives in Nigeria. Analysis of the programme suggests that skills acquisition is central to tackling insecurity and promoting peace, with Akwa Ibom positioning itself as a hub for youth enterprise through DASAC, the Ibom Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development Centre, and Youth Development Centres under construction in all 31

local government areas (The Will, 2026, June 28). However, empirical evidence on the long-term self-employment outcomes of DASAC graduates remains limited, highlighting the gap that the present study seeks to address.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The empirical literature reviewed reveals several key findings. First, there is a general consensus that skill acquisition and capacity development programmes have the potential to enhance youth employability, entrepreneurial intentions, and self-employment outcomes (Lamidi et al., 2025; Abaikpa et al., 2024a). Second, the effectiveness of these programmes is contingent upon the quality of training, the relevance of skills to labour market demands, and the availability of complementary support mechanisms such as access to finance, mentorship, and market linkages (Abaiakpa et al., 2024a; Thomas et al., 2024). Third, structural barriers—including outdated curricula, limited financing, and poor infrastructure—significantly impede the translation of vocational skills into sustainable self-employment (Abaiakpa et al., 2024a). Fourth, while several studies have examined skill acquisition programmes in various Nigerian states, there is a relative dearth of empirical research specifically focused on Akwa Ibom State, particularly studies that systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the multiple capacity development initiatives operating in the state. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. By examining the experiences of beneficiaries across multiple programmes, including DASAC, NCDMB-sponsored trainings, and other state-led initiatives, the study aims to generate empirical evidence that can inform policy decisions and programme design. The study is guided by Human Capital Theory, which provides a framework for understanding how investments in skills and competencies translate into self-employment outcomes, and builds on the empirical insights from previous studies—particularly the works of Abaikpa and colleagues—to offer a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of these interventions in the Akwa Ibom State context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. The descriptive survey design is well-suited for studies that seek to describe the characteristics of a population, examine relationships between variables, and gather data on participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design enables the researcher to collect quantitative data from a large number of respondents through structured questionnaires, while also incorporating qualitative insights where necessary. The choice of the descriptive survey design is justified by its widespread application in similar empirical inquiries on youth empowerment and skill acquisition programmes in Akwa Ibom State. Sunday (2025), in a study on the vocational skills acquisition programmes of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and their impact on youth unemployment reduction in Akwa Ibom State, adopted a descriptive survey research design. Similarly, a comprehensive study on the Dakkada Economic Empowerment Programme employed a descriptive survey research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess the effectiveness of the programme's skill acquisition, vocational training, microcredit, and enterprise support components. The N-Power programme evaluation in Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State also utilised a survey design to investigate the impacts of the programme on poverty reduction and youth empowerment. The consistency of this design across related studies underscores its suitability for examining the phenomenon under investigation. The descriptive survey design is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a geographically dispersed population of youth beneficiaries across the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. It also facilitates the examination of relationships between the independent variable (capacity development and skill acquisition programmes) and the dependent variable (self-employment outcomes) using appropriate statistical techniques.

3.2 Study Area

The study is conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and shares boundaries with Cross River State to the east, Rivers State to the west, Abia State to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The state capital is Uyo, which also serves as the commercial and administrative hub of the state. Akwa Ibom State comprises 31 local government areas and is populated predominantly by the Ibibio, Anaang, and Oron ethnic groups. Akwa Ibom State is strategically selected as the study area for several reasons. First, the state has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, unemployment in Akwa Ibom stood at 34.9 per cent in 2023, well above the national average of 33 per cent. Some independent studies suggest that more than half of the state's young people—approximately 52 per cent—are without work. This high rate of youth unemployment underscores the critical need for effective capacity development and skill acquisition interventions in the state. Second, Akwa Ibom State has witnessed a proliferation of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes targeting youths. The Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre (DASAC) in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area has graduated hundreds of youths trained across nine faculties and departments, including Agriculture, Hospitality and Lifestyle Management, Civil and Building Technology, Electrical and Electronics Technology, Automobile Technology, ICT, Metal Technology, and Wood Technology. The state government, under the ARISE Agenda, has also committed to training 1,500 youths annually at DASAC, with each local government area sending 100 youths per academic session. Additionally, the Nigeria Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB), in collaboration with Wedgewood Integrated Investment Limited, has trained 250 youths in market-driven skills covering fashion and garment making, graphics design and content development with social media marketing, solar installation, GSM/mobile phone repair and maintenance, and business skills with a strong entrepreneurship focus. Third, the state is positioning itself as a hub for youth enterprise through DASAC, the Ibom Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development Centre, and Youth Development Centres under construction in all 31 local government areas. The concentration of these interventions in Akwa Ibom State makes it an ideal location for examining the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises all youths in Akwa Ibom State who have participated in capacity development and skill acquisition programmes implemented by various organisations, including state government agencies, federal government agencies, and development partners. Youths are defined in this study as individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years, consistent with the definition provided in the Nigerian National Youth Policy. The youth population of Akwa Ibom State is substantial. Youths constitute approximately 60 per cent of the state's population. With the state's population estimated at over 5 million people, the youth population is estimated to be over 3 million. However, for the purpose of this study, the target population is narrowed to youths who have participated in specific capacity development and skill acquisition programmes, including:

- Graduates of the Dakkada Skills Acquisition Centre (DASAC) across various cohorts
- Beneficiaries of the NCDMB-sponsored vocational training programmes in collaboration with Wedgewood Integrated Investment Limited
- Beneficiaries of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) vocational skills programmes in Akwa Ibom State
- Participants in the NYSC Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme within the state
- Beneficiaries of other state and federal government youth empowerment initiatives in Akwa Ibom State

The total population of beneficiaries across these programmes is estimated to be several thousand. However, due to the absence of a comprehensive central database of all beneficiaries, the exact population size cannot be determined with precision. For practical purposes, the study adopts a target population of youth beneficiaries who have completed capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in Akwa Ibom State within the last five years (2021–2026).

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

This study employs a multi-stage sampling technique to select respondents from the population of youth beneficiaries. The multi-stage sampling approach is appropriate given the geographic spread of beneficiaries across the 31 local government areas of Akwa Ibom State and the multiple programme types under investigation. The sampling procedure involves three stages:

Stage One: Stratification by Senatorial Districts. Akwa Ibom State is divided into three senatorial districts: Uyo Senatorial District, Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, and Eket Senatorial District. Each senatorial district comprises several local government areas. This stratification ensures representation from all parts of the state. The use of stratified sampling in youth empowerment studies in Akwa Ibom State is well-established. For instance, a study on youth participation in Community and Social Development Projects employed stratified random sampling to select 180 respondents from Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Eket senatorial districts. Similarly, the N-Power programme evaluation in Eket Senatorial District adopted a simple random sampling technique to select 600 N-Power beneficiaries from the three federal constituencies that make up the senatorial district.

Stage Two: Purposive Selection of Local Government Areas. From each senatorial district, local government areas with a high concentration of programme beneficiaries were purposively selected. This purposive selection is informed by the distribution of training centres and programme implementation sites. For instance, DASAC is located in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area (Uyo Senatorial District), while NCDMB trainings have been conducted across various locations in the state.

Stage Three: Simple Random Sampling of Beneficiaries. From the selected local government areas, beneficiaries were randomly selected from programme rosters and contact lists. This ensures that every beneficiary has an equal chance of being included in the sample, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the findings. The sample size for this study is determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

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

Where: N = Population. 1 = constant. e = Level of significance. n = sample size.

Given the large and indeterminate population of beneficiaries across multiple programmes, the study adopts a sample size of 384 respondents. This sample size is considered sufficient for descriptive surveys and is consistent with sample sizes employed in similar studies. For instance, the Dakkada Economic Empowerment Programme study collected data from 357 respondents selected from the programme's beneficiaries using stratified random sampling. The N-Power programme evaluation in Eket Senatorial District sampled 600 N-Power beneficiaries. A study examining the role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State drew a sample of 387 from a population of 11,990 small business startups. To account for potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, the study will administer 400 questionnaires to ensure that the target sample size of 384 is achieved.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire designed to elicit information on the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes in promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. The questionnaire is developed based on the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses, and is informed by the theoretical framework of Human Capital Theory and empirical findings from previous studies. The questionnaire is divided into four sections: Section A: Demographic Information. This section collects demographic data on respondents, including age, gender, marital status, educational qualification, local government area of residence, and senatorial district. Section B: Programme Participation Information. This section collects data on respondents' participation in capacity development and skill acquisition programmes, including the name of the programme, training

institution, duration of training, skill area(s) acquired, year of graduation, and receipt of starter packs or post-training support. Section C: Effectiveness of Capacity Development and Skill Acquisition Programmes. This section assesses respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the programmes across various dimensions, including:

- Relevance of training content to labour market demands
- Quality of instruction and practical exposure
- Adequacy of training duration and facilities
- Provision of post-training support (mentorship, follow-up, access to finance)
- Overall satisfaction with the programme

Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Neutral (0).

Section D: Self-Employment Outcomes. This section assesses the self-employment status and outcomes of respondents, including:

- Current employment status (self-employed, employed by others, unemployed)
- Type and nature of business venture (if self-employed)
- Monthly income from self-employment
- Duration of business operation
- Challenges encountered in sustaining self-employment
- Factors perceived as facilitating or hindering self-employment success

3.6 Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the instrument was subjected to content and face validity assessments. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in research methodology, vocational education, and youth development to assess the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the items. Their feedback were incorporated to refine the instrument. Additionally, the questionnaire were pilot-tested with a small sample of 30 youth beneficiaries who are not part of the main study sample. The pilot test helped identify ambiguous questions, assess the clarity of instructions, and determine the approximate time required for completion. The findings from the pilot test informed final revisions to the questionnaire.

3.7 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was established using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered to the same group of 30 pilot respondents on two separate occasions, with a two-week interval between administrations. The responses from the two administrations were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above were considered acceptable, indicating that the instrument is stable and consistent.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The statistical methods adopted for data analysis were simple percentages, correlation analysis and simple regression. The data were analyzed with the help of a statistical tool using SPSS.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to established ethical principles in social science research. The following ethical considerations were observed:

- **Informed Consent:** All respondents were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participation were voluntary, and written or verbal consent were obtained before questionnaire administration.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Respondents' identities were protected. Questionnaires were not required respondents to provide their names or other identifying information. Data were stored securely and accessed only by the research team.
- **Privacy:** Respondents were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic research purposes and would not be disclosed to third parties.
- **Beneficence and Non-maleficence:** The study ensured that participation causes no harm to respondents. The findings of the study contributed to evidence-based policymaking that benefits youth beneficiaries and programme implementers.

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Presentation of Data

This section is basically designed to present, analyse and interpret the primary data obtained via the questionnaire which was purposively administered to the respondents. These are shown in the Table 4.1.

Table 1: Number of questionnaire copies administered and returned

		Percentage
Copies of Questionnaire Administered	384	
Copies of Questionnaire Retrieved	338	88.0
Copies of Questionnaire not Retrieved	46	11.9
Total		100

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 2 Percentage analysis of the Responses on Effectiveness of Capacity Development and Skill Acquisition Programmes Dimension

Effectiveness of Capacity Development and Skill Acquisition Programmes Dimension	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
The training content I received was relevant to the current labour market demands and entrepreneurial opportunities in Akwa Ibom State.	154 (45.6%)	105 (31.1%)	19 (5.6%)	38 (11.2%)	22 (6.5%)	338 (100%)
The instructors demonstrated adequate practical expertise and provided sufficient hands-on exposure during the training programme.	118 (34.9%)	112 (33.1%)	34 (10.1%)	49 (14.5%)	25 (7.4%)	338 (100%)
The duration of the training and the facilities provided (equipment, workspace, materials) were adequate for effective skill mastery.	134 (39.6%)	100 (29.6%)	19 (5.6%)	53 (15.7%)	32 (9.5%)	338 (100%)
The programme provided adequate post-training support, including mentorship, follow-up visits, and guidance on accessing finance for business startup.	92 (27.2%)	127 (37.6%)	28 (8.3%)	59 (17.5%)	32 (9.5%)	338 (100%)
Overall, I am satisfied with the capacity development and skill acquisition programme I participated in.	165 (48.8%)	102 (30.2%)	19 (5.6%)	31 (9.2%)	21 (6.2%)	338 (100%)

Source: Researcher's computation (2026)

Table 2 presents the respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes. The findings indicate an overall positive perception of the programmes among the respondents. Regarding the relevance of training content to current labour market demands and entrepreneurial opportunities in Akwa Ibom State, 154 respondents (45.6%) strongly agreed and 105 (31.1%) agreed, representing a combined positive response of 76.7%. Conversely, 38 respondents (11.2%) disagreed and 22 (6.5%) strongly disagreed, while 19 (5.6%) were undecided. This suggests that most respondents considered the training content relevant to prevailing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. On the practical expertise of instructors and the availability of hands-on exposure, 118 respondents (34.9%) strongly agreed and 112 (33.1%) agreed, giving a combined positive response of 68.0%. However, 49 respondents (14.5%) disagreed and 25 (7.4%) strongly disagreed, while 34 (10.1%) were undecided. This indicates that although the majority perceived the instructors as competent and the training as practically oriented, some respondents may have experienced limitations in practical exposure. Concerning the adequacy of training duration and facilities, 134 respondents (39.6%) strongly agreed and 100 (29.6%) agreed, resulting in a combined positive response of 69.2%. In contrast, 53 respondents (15.7%) disagreed and 32 (9.5%) strongly disagreed, while 19 (5.6%) were undecided. The result suggests that the duration and facilities were generally considered adequate for effective skill acquisition, although some gaps may exist in the provision of equipment, workspace, or training materials. Regarding post-training support, including mentorship, follow-up visits, and guidance on accessing finance for business start-up, 92 respondents (27.2%) strongly agreed and 127 (37.6%) agreed, representing a combined positive response of 64.8%. On the other hand, 59 respondents (17.5%) disagreed and 32 (9.5%) strongly disagreed, while 28 (8.3%) were undecided. This was the least positively rated item, suggesting that post-training support remains an area requiring improvement. Finally, with respect to overall satisfaction with the capacity development and skill acquisition programme, 165 respondents (48.8%) strongly agreed and 102 (30.2%) agreed, producing the highest combined positive response of 79.0%. Meanwhile, 31 respondents (9.2%) disagreed and 21 (6.2%) strongly disagreed, while 19 (5.6%) were undecided. This demonstrates that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the programme.

Table 3 Percentage analysis of the Responses on Self-Employment Dimension

Self-Employment Dimension	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
The skills I acquired from the programme enabled me to start and sustain my own business venture.	154 (45.6%)	105 (31.1%)	19 (5.6%)	38 (11.2%)	22 (6.5%)	338 (100%)
My self-employment income is sufficient to meet my basic personal and family needs.	118 (34.9%)	112 (33.1%)	34 (10.1%)	49 (14.5%)	25 (7.4%)	338 (100%)
I have been able to expand or grow my business since its establishment.	134 (39.6%)	100 (29.6%)	19 (5.6%)	53 (15.7%)	32 (9.5%)	338 (100%)
The business I started has created employment opportunities for at least one other person (employee, apprentice, or assistant).	92 (27.2%)	127 (37.6%)	28 (8.3%)	59 (17.5%)	32 (9.5%)	338 (100%)
I am confident that my self-employment venture will remain viable and sustainable in the long term.	165 (48.8%)	102 (30.2%)	19 (5.6%)	31 (9.2%)	21 (6.2%)	338 (100%)

Source: Researcher's computation (2026)

Table 3 presents the respondents' responses on the self-employment dimension. The results indicate that the capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have contributed positively to the respondents' ability to engage in and sustain self-employment. Regarding whether the skills acquired enabled respondents to start and sustain their own business ventures, 154 respondents (45.6%) strongly agreed and 105 (31.1%) agreed, representing a combined positive response of 76.7%. In contrast, 38 respondents (11.2%) disagreed and 22 (6.5%) strongly disagreed, while 19 (5.6%) were undecided. This suggests that the majority of respondents considered the skills acquired from the programme useful in establishing and sustaining their own businesses. Concerning the sufficiency of self-employment income to meet basic personal and family needs, 118 respondents (34.9%) strongly agreed and 112 (33.1%) agreed, giving a combined positive response of 68.0%. However, 49 respondents (14.5%) disagreed and 25 (7.4%) strongly disagreed, while 34 (10.1%) were undecided. This indicates that although a majority of respondents earned sufficient income from self-employment

to meet their basic needs, a considerable proportion still faced income limitations. With respect to business expansion and growth, 134 respondents (39.6%) strongly agreed and 100 (29.6%) agreed, representing a combined positive response of 69.2%. Conversely, 53 respondents (15.7%) disagreed and 32 (9.5%) strongly disagreed, while 19 (5.6%) were undecided. The result suggests that most respondents had experienced some level of business growth since establishing their ventures, although not all businesses had achieved significant expansion. Regarding the creation of employment opportunities for at least one other person, 92 respondents (27.2%) strongly agreed and 127 (37.6%) agreed, producing a combined positive response of 64.8%. On the other hand, 59 respondents (17.5%) disagreed and 32 (9.5%) strongly disagreed, while 28 (8.3%) were undecided. This indicates that the self-employment ventures established by many respondents had contributed to employment creation, although the capacity of some businesses to employ additional workers remained limited. Finally, concerning confidence in the long-term viability and sustainability of their self-employment ventures, 165 respondents (48.8%) strongly agreed and 102 (30.2%) agreed, representing the highest combined positive response of 79.0%. Meanwhile, 31 respondents (9.2%) disagreed and 21 (6.2%) strongly disagreed, while 19 (5.6%) were undecided. This suggests that most respondents were optimistic about the long-term sustainability of their businesses.

4.2. Presentation of Data

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.864 ^a	.747	.746	.41112

a. Predictors: (Constant), Capacity_Dev

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	176.863	1	176.863	1046.388	.000 ^b
	Residual	59.834	354	.169		
	Total	236.698	355			

a. Dependent Variable: Self_Emp

b. Predictors: (Constant), Capacity_Dev

Coefficients ^a						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.819	.096		8.537	.000
	Capacity_Dev	.793	.025	.864	32.348	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Self_Emp

The regression results examine the effect of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes on self-employment. The model summary indicates a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.864, signifying a very strong positive relationship between capacity development and self-employment. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.747, implying that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes explain 74.7% of the variation in self-employment, while the remaining 25.3% is attributable to other factors not included in the model. The Adjusted R^2 of 0.746 confirms that the model retains a strong explanatory power after adjusting for sample size and the number of predictors. The standard error of the estimate (0.41112) indicates a relatively low prediction error and suggests a good fit of the regression model.

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-value of 1046.388 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the model is considered statistically significant and appropriate for predicting self-employment from capacity development and skill acquisition programmes. This indicates that capacity development significantly contributes to explaining variations in self-employment.

The coefficient results further reveal that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have a positive and statistically significant effect on self-employment ($B = 0.793$, $\beta = 0.864$, $t = 32.348$, $p = 0.000$). This means that a one-unit increase in the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes is associated with a 0.793-unit increase in self-employment. The standardized beta coefficient of 0.864 indicates a very strong positive influence of capacity development on self-employment. The constant of 0.819 implies that when capacity development is zero, the predicted level of self-employment is 0.819 units.

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, the study concludes that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have a positive and statistically significant effect on self-employment.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

The hypothesis of the study states that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have no significant effect on promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. The coefficient results further reveal that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have a positive and statistically significant effect on self-employment ($B = 0.793$, $\beta = 0.864$, $t = 32.348$, $p = 0.000$). This means that a one-unit increase in the effectiveness of capacity development and skill acquisition programmes is associated with a 0.793-unit increase in self-employment. The standardized beta coefficient of 0.864 indicates a very strong positive influence of capacity development on self-employment. The constant of 0.819 implies that when capacity development is zero, the predicted level of self-employment is 0.819 units. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, the study concludes that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have a positive and statistically significant effect on self-employment. This is in agreement with the study and finding of (Abaikpa et al., 2024a; Thomas et al., 2024) who asserted that the effectiveness of these programmes is contingent upon the quality of training, the relevance of skills to labour market demands, and the availability of complementary support mechanisms such as access to finance, mentorship, and market linkages.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The study found that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes have a significant positive effect on promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. Descriptive results showed that 79.0 percent of respondents were overall satisfied with the programmes, while 76.7 percent affirmed that acquired skills enabled them to start and sustain businesses. However, post-training support, including mentorship and finance access, received the lowest positive rating of 64.8 percent, indicating a critical gap. Inferential analysis confirmed a very strong positive relationship between capacity development and self-employment with a correlation coefficient of 0.864, with the programmes explaining 74.7 percent of the variance in self-employment as indicated by an R squared value of 0.747. The regression coefficient of 0.793 with a p value of 0.000 established that capacity development significantly and positively predicts self-employment, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that capacity development and skill acquisition programmes are effective instruments for promoting self-employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. The programmes have substantially equipped participants with relevant entrepreneurial skills, enabling business startup, growth, and income generation. Nevertheless, the sustainability and broader impact of these initiatives are constrained by inadequate post-training support, particularly

in mentorship and access to finance. Strengthening these support mechanisms is essential for maximizing the long-term viability of youth-owned enterprises and their contribution to employment creation.

5.3 Recommendations

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

- Programme implementers should establish structured mentorship networks and facilitate access to micro-credit schemes to address the identified gap in post-training support.
- Training centres should be equipped with modern tools and extended practical sessions to improve hands-on skill mastery.
- Government and non-governmental organizations should institute regular follow-up evaluations to track business performance and provide targeted interventions for struggling entrepreneurs.

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