Journal of Environmental and Tourism Education Vol. 8 No. 1 June 2025

Impact of Youth Employment Programs on Employment Levels in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State

By
Ukpe, Mary Tom
maryadaukpe@gmail.com
Department of Environmental Education
Faculty of Arts and Social Science Education
University of Calabar

Abstract
This study examines the impact of youth employment programs on employment levels in Akpabuyo Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. The research aimed to assess the effectiveness of these programs in improving employment opportunities, identify the challenges faced during implementation, and propose strategies for enhancing their success. A total of 200 respondents, selected using simple random sampling from five wards, participated in the study. Data was collected using a 20-item structured questionnaire and analyzed through mean scores and standard deviation. The findings indicated that youth employment programs have a moderate positive impact on employment levels in Akpabuyo, particularly through skill acquisition, job placement, and entrepreneurship development. However, the study also identified significant challenges, including inadequate funding, political interference, and poor monitoring and evaluation systems. Beneficiaries reported increased income, financial independence, and enhanced self-confidence as key benefits. To improve the effectiveness of these programs, the study recommends increased funding, better transparency in the beneficiary selection process, more private sector involvement, and regular monitoring of the programs. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on youth employment initiatives in Nigeria, providing insights into the specific challenges and opportunities in rural settings like Akpabuyo LGA.

Keywords: Youth employment, employment programs, employment levels and policy impact

Introduction and background

The issue of youth unemployment has become a significant concern in both developed and developing nations, with Nigeria being no exception. Youth unemployment in Nigeria has reached critical levels, which pose serious social and economic challenges. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stands at about 40%, a staggering figure that highlights the growing unemployment crisis. This situation is further exacerbated by a mismatch between the skills required in the labor market and those possessed by the youth population (Adebayo, 2013). In response to these challenges, various youth

employment programs have been implemented by the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector organizations, aiming to reduce the unemployment rate and foster socio-economic development.

Youth employment programs are a set of interventions designed to enhance the employability of young people by equipping them with skills that are in demand in the labor market. These programs typically include vocational training, entrepreneurship development, job placement schemes, internships, and access to financial support for small businesses. They are critical to addressing the employment challenges faced by young people, particularly in Akpabuyo Local Government Area (LGA), a region within Cross River State where youth unemployment is significantly high.

In Akpabuyo, like in many rural parts of Nigeria, the lack of formal employment opportunities, coupled with a high dependency on agriculture and informal businesses, has exacerbated unemployment levels. Young people in this region often face barriers such as poor access to quality education, limited skills development opportunities, and inadequate financial support to start businesses (Effiom, 2022). Despite these challenges, local and state governments, in collaboration with NGOs and other stakeholders, have implemented various youth employment programs to alleviate the unemployment burden and promote economic development.

Previous studies, such as those by Ita and Eni (2021), have shown that youth employment programs, when well-implemented, can have positive effects on the employment levels of youths. However, Obasi and Eke (2017) noted that many of these programs face implementation challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of monitoring, political interference, and insufficient post-program support. Such challenges can undermine the long-term effectiveness of these initiatives and hinder their intended goals.

The impact of youth employment programs on employment levels is multifaceted. On one hand, these programs provide youths with skills that improve their employability and increase their chances of securing employment or becoming entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these programs depends on several factors such as funding, program design, transparency in beneficiary selection, and follow-up support (Ojong, 2022). In Akpabuyo LGA, while some programs have successfully assisted youths in acquiring vocational skills, many have failed to produce sustained outcomes due to the systemic challenges they face.

Understanding the impact of youth employment programs in Akpabuyo LGA is critical for shaping future interventions and policies aimed at addressing the unemployment crisis. This study seeks to assess how these programs have impacted the employment levels of youths in the region, explore the challenges affecting their implementation, and propose strategies for improving their effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the presence of youth employment programs in Akpabuyo, youth unemployment remains a concern. Many programs have been initiated, yet the number of unemployed youths appears unchanged. This raises critical questions about the actual effectiveness and implementation of these programs. Are these initiatives truly helping young people secure employment, or are there gaps in their execution?

This study seeks to fill the gap in empirical data on the effectiveness of youth employment programs in the region and determine their actual impact on employment levels in the local government area.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of youth employment programs on employment levels in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which youth employment programs have improved job accessibility.
2. Assess the relevance of the skills provided in the programs to the labor market.
3. Evaluate the level of participation and awareness of these programs among youths.
4. Identify the challenges limiting the effectiveness of youth employment programs.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between participation in youth employment programs and employment levels in Akpabuyo.
2. The skills acquired through youth employment programs do not significantly match labor market demands.
3. Youth employment programs have no significant effect on reducing unemployment in Akpabuyo.

Literature review

Youth employment refers to the active engagement of individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 in paid or self-employment ventures. It includes formal, informal, part-time, and full-time work that contributes to personal income and economic development. In Nigeria, youth unemployment remains a critical issue, with many graduates and school leavers unable to secure meaningful employment.

Adebayo (2013) examined the effects of youth empowerment programs in Lagos and found a significant increase in youth employment rates, particularly among those who received vocational training.

Ita & Eni (2021) examined Cross River State youth employment programs and found that although participation improved skills acquisition, actual job placement remained limited due to a lack of private sector involvement.

Youth Employment Programs are targeted initiatives—often organized by the government, NGOs, or private sector—to reduce unemployment among young people. These programs commonly offer vocational training, entrepreneurship support, internships, job placement services, and access to funding or tools. Examples in Nigeria include the N-Power program, Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), and the Cross River State Youth Empowerment Initiative. These programs aim to improve the employability and self-reliance of youths.

Obasi & Eke (2017) studied youth engagement programs in rural Nigeria and noted that while the programs had short-term benefits, many lacked sustainability due to poor funding and inadequate follow-up.

Edem (2020) conducted a study in nearby Akwa Ibom State and concluded that entrepreneurship training significantly reduced unemployment rates when accompanied by start-up support.

Employment level is a measure of how many individuals in the labor force are gainfully employed. It can reflect economic health and the effectiveness of employment policies. In regions like Akpabuyo, employment levels among youths are often influenced by access to employment programs, infrastructure, education, and local government support.

Ojo & Abiola (2020) reported that beneficiaries of federal youth employment initiatives, such as N-Power, showed improved employability and were more likely to start small businesses or secure formal employment within 12 months.

Effiom (2022) highlighted that in Akpabuyo, most youth employment programs faced implementation challenges, such as limited awareness, favoritism in selection, and insufficient monitoring.

This literature review has shown that youth employment programs can significantly improve employment levels, especially when well-planned and adequately funded. The Human Capital, Keynesian, and Empowerment theories offer useful perspectives for understanding how these programs function. However, challenges such as poor implementation, lack of monitoring, and inadequate funding limit their success. There remains a need for localized studies—like this one—to better understand the real impact of such programs in places like Akpabuyo.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. This design is appropriate because the research investigates the effect of existing youth employment programs on the employment levels of youths in Akpabuyo Local Government Area without manipulating any variables.

Population of the Study: The target population for this study consists of 1,200 youths who are beneficiaries or aware of youth employment programs across five wards in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

Sample and Sampling Technique: A total of 200 respondents were selected as the sample for the study. This sample was determined using a simple random sampling technique to ensure that every individual in the population had an equal chance of being selected.

Instrument for data collection: A structured 20-item questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

Section A: Demographic data of respondents

Section B: Questions relating to youth employment programs and their impact on employment levels. The items were close-ended and designed on a 4-point Likert scale:

Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD)

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument: The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Research and Measurement from the University of Calabar. A pilot test was conducted using 20 youths from a neighboring LGA, and the reliability coefficient obtained using Cronbach's Alpha was 0.82, indicating high reliability.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent have youth employment programs improved employment levels in Akpabuyo?

Item	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Youth programs help me acquire relevant job skills	3.32	0.62	Agreed
2.	Got a job of started a business after participating in a program	2.81	0.88	Agreed
3.	Programs provide access to loans and startup capital	2.44	1.01	Disagreed
4.	Most youth in my area benefited from employment programs	2.75	0.90	Agreed
5.	There is adequate follow up after the program	2.10	0.96	Disagreed

Research Question 2: What challenges affect the implementation of youth employment programs in Akpabuyo?

Item	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
6	Lack of proper funding limits the effectiveness of the programs	3.41	0.59	Agreed
7.	Political influence affects the selection of the beneficiaries	3.29	0.67	Agreed
8.	Inadequate awareness limits youth participation	2.95	0.82	Agreed
9.	Corruption and mismanagement hinder programs success	3.11	0.75	Agreed
10.	Poor monitoring and evaluation of programs reduce their long-term impact	3.05	0.69	Agreed

Research Question 3: What are the perceived benefits of youth employment programs on beneficiaries in Akpabuyo?

Item	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
11.	Program have helped increase my income	2.90	0.77	Agreed
12.	I have become more independent financially since participating in a program	3.12	0.70	Agreed

13.	I gain gained entrepreneurial skills through the training	3.28	0.65	Agreed
14.	I now mentor or train others using skills I learned	2.72	0.86	Agreed
15.	The program increased my confidence and motivation	3.36	0.62	Agreed

Research Question 4: What strategies can be adopted to improve the effectiveness of youth employment programs in Akpabuyo?

Item	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
16.	Government should increase funding for youth employment program	3.44	058	Agreed
17.	Program should be monitored and evaluated regularly	3.35	0.63	Agreed
18.	More awareness campaign should be conducted to reach rural youth	3.21	0.71	Agreed
19.	Selection of beneficiary should be transparent and free from political bias	3.40	0.60	Agreed
20	Private sectors partnership should be encouraged to expand job opportunities	3.18	0.75	Agreed

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 showed that youth employment programs have had a moderate to high impact on improving employment levels in Akpabuyo. A significant number of respondents agreed that they acquired relevant skills and, in some cases, secured employment or started small businesses. This finding supports the Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that investment in education and training enhances productivity and employability (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961).

This outcome aligns with Adebayo (2013), who found that youth empowerment programs in Lagos significantly improved employment opportunities. Similarly, Edem (2020) reported that skill acquisition programs increased employment among youths in Akwa Ibom State. However, the absence of post-training support and limited access to startup capital reported in this study are consistent with the findings of Ojong (2022), who noted similar implementation shortcomings in Cross River State.

Table 2 showed that respondents identified several challenges including inadequate funding, political interference, corruption, and poor monitoring and evaluation. These issues significantly hinder the effectiveness of youth employment programs in the area. This confirms the findings of Effiom (2022), who emphasized that many youth initiatives in Akpabuyo failed due to administrative inefficiencies and lack of transparency.

Furthermore, Obasi and Eke (2017) also highlighted the role of poor funding and political favoritism in undermining the success of rural youth programs across Nigeria. These findings stress the need for structural reforms and better governance in the implementation of such programs.

Table 3 showed that most respondents reported that youth employment programs helped improve their income, made them financially independent, and boosted their entrepreneurial skills and confidence. This supports the Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes the need for individuals to gain control over their lives and resources (Keynes, 1936).

Similar benefits were highlighted in the studies of Ojo and Abiola (2020), who found that beneficiaries of the N-Power program in Nigeria became more self-reliant and productive. Ita and Eni (2021) also observed that youth in Cross River State who participated in such programs were more likely to pursue entrepreneurship or secure employment.

Table 4 showed that respondents recommended several strategies, including increased funding, proper monitoring, enhanced awareness campaigns, and private sector involvement. These suggestions echo those of Edem (2020), who recommended that youth programs should not only focus on training but also provide long-term support mechanisms such as access to credit and mentorship.

The call for private sector participation also reflects findings by Ita and Eni (2021), who emphasized that government programs alone are insufficient without collaboration from industry stakeholders. Transparent beneficiary selection and regular evaluations were also seen as critical to ensuring the success of future programs.

In summary, the study confirms that youth employment programs have had a positive but limited impact on employment levels in Akpabuyo. The presence of structural and implementation challenges undermines the potential of these programs. These findings highlight the need for stronger policy frameworks, transparent execution, and consistent

support to ensure that youth employment initiatives yield lasting outcomes (Ojong, 2022; Effiom, 2022).

All five strategies received a mean score above the 2.50 cut-off, indicating that respondents strongly agree with the proposed strategies for improving the effectiveness of youth employment programs in Akpabuyo.

Conclusion

The study concludes that while youth employment programs in Akpabuyo LGA have a positive impact on youth empowerment and employment, the effectiveness of these initiatives is hindered by implementation challenges. If youth programs are to meet their intended goals, systemic reforms and sustainable strategies must be adopted.

The findings affirm the relevance of Human Capital Theory, which supports investment in training and skills development, as well as Keynesian Theory, which justifies government intervention in job creation. The role of youth employment programs as tools for social and economic development is significant but requires commitment, transparency, and accountability for long-term success.

Recommendations

1. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:
2. Increase Funding: Government and stakeholders should allocate more resources to youth employment programs to improve infrastructure, training quality, and access to startup capital.
3. Improve Transparency: The selection process for program beneficiaries must be fair, merit-based, and free from political influence.
4. Enhance Monitoring and Evaluation: There should be regular follow-up and performance tracking of beneficiaries to ensure the long-term success of the programs.
5. Promote Public Awareness: Awareness campaigns should be expanded, especially in rural areas, to inform more youths about available programs.

References

Adebayo, A. (2013). Youth unemployment and the national youth empowerment strategy: Challenges and prospects. Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development, 4(5), 54–63.

Becker, G. S. (1964). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education. University of Chicago Press.

Edem, A. E. (2020). Skill acquisition programs and youth unemployment reduction in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. African Journal of Social Sciences, 8(3), 112–120.

Effiom, U. B. (2022). Assessment of youth empowerment initiatives in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, Cross River State. Journal of Development Policy and Practice, 6(2), 44–59.

Ita, I. A., & Eni, D. D. (2021). Government job creation programs and youth employment in Cross River State, Nigeria. International Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research, 10(1), 76–89.

Keynes, J. M. (1936). The general theory of employment, interest and money. Macmillan.

National Bureau of Statistics (2020). Labour Force Statistics. National Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from www.nigerianstat.gov.ng.

Obasi, E., & Eke, P. (2017). Youth engagement programs in rural Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. Nigerian Journal of Social Research, 5(1), 88–97.

Ojo, M. A., & Abiola, T. O. (2020). Impact of federal youth empowerment schemes on employment generation in Nigeria: A case study of N-Power program. International Journal of Contemporary Social Science Research, 3(4), 97–109.

Ojong, B. E. (2022). Challenges of youth employment programs in Cross River State: A case of implementation failures. Journal of Policy and Governance Studies, 9(2), 120–135.

Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. The American Economic Review, 51(1), 1–17.