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EFFECT OF SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMMES ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN AWKA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's economic empowerment in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Specifically, it investigated the effect of vocational skills training on income generation, the influence of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on self-employment opportunities, and the relationship between skill acquisition programmes and women's economic independence. The study was anchored on Human Capital Theory and adopted a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 400 women who participated in various skill acquisition programmes was selected for the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The findings revealed that participation in skill acquisition programmes significantly improved women's income-generating capacity, enhanced self-employment opportunities, and strengthened their economic independence. Women who acquired vocational and entrepreneurial skills were better positioned to establish small businesses, contribute to

household income, and make independent economic decisions. The study concludes that skill acquisition programmes are effective tools for promoting women's economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods in rural communities. It recommends increased government investment in skill acquisition centres, improved access to start-up capital, and strengthened entrepreneurship training and post-training support for beneficiaries.

Keywords: Skill Acquisition, Women's Empowerment, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, Economic Independence.

INTRODUCTION

Women's economic empowerment has gained significant attention in contemporary development discourse due to its vital role in promoting sustainable socio-economic development. Women contribute substantially to household welfare, economic productivity, and community development. However, despite their contributions, many women, particularly in developing countries, continue to experience economic challenges arising from limited access to education, employment opportunities, productive resources, and decision-making processes. These constraints often restrict their ability to achieve financial independence and improve their living standards.

Recognizing the importance of women's empowerment, governments, international organizations, and development agencies have implemented various programmes aimed at enhancing women's economic capacities. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on Gender Equality and Goal 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, emphasize the need to empower women and improve their access to economic opportunities. Economic empowerment enables women to generate income, participate in productive activities, contribute to household welfare, and make informed economic decisions.

One of the major strategies adopted to promote women's economic empowerment is skill acquisition. Skill acquisition programmes provide vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial competencies that enhance employability, encourage self-employment, and improve income-generating opportunities. Through these programmes, women acquire practical skills that enable them to establish businesses,

create jobs, and contribute to local economic development. Beyond financial benefits, skill acquisition also improves self-confidence, decision-making ability, and social participation.

In Nigeria, various empowerment initiatives have been introduced by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and development partners to improve women's access to vocational and entrepreneurial training. In Anambra State, several programmes have been implemented to equip women with marketable skills and promote sustainable livelihoods. Despite these efforts, many women, especially in rural communities, continue to face challenges such as unemployment, low income, inadequate access to finance, and economic dependence.

Awka North Local Government Area is predominantly rural, with farming, petty trading, and small-scale enterprises serving as major sources of livelihood. Women play important roles in these economic activities, yet many still experience limited economic opportunities and inadequate access to productive resources. Although various skill acquisition programmes have been introduced in the area, questions rem hiain regarding their effectiveness in improving women's economic conditions and promoting economic independence.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's economic empowerment in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Specifically, the study investigates the effect of vocational skills training on income generation, the influence of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on self-employment opportunities, and the relationship between skill acquisition programmes and women's economic independence. The study is expected to provide useful insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and other stakeholders interested in promoting women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.

Statement of the Problem

Women's empowerment remains a major development challenge in Nigeria, particularly among women who face limited economic opportunities, unemployment, low income, and financial dependency. Although women contribute significantly to household welfare and community development, many

still lack the skills and resources needed to improve their socio-economic conditions.

To address these challenges, governments and development agencies have introduced various skill acquisition programmes aimed at equipping women with vocational, entrepreneurial, and technical skills for self-reliance and income generation. Despite these interventions, many women continue to experience poverty, unemployment, and limited economic advancement. This situation raises concerns about the extent to which skill acquisition programmes have succeeded in empowering women economically.

Furthermore, while several studies have examined skill acquisition programmes, there is still insufficient evidence on how these programmes influence women's economic empowerment, income generation, entrepreneurial development, self-reliance, and overall economic well-being. This gap in knowledge makes it necessary to investigate the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes in achieving their intended empowerment outcomes. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's empowerment, with particular focus on economic empowerment, income generation, entrepreneurial development, self-reliance, and economic well-being.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's economic empowerment in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the effect of vocational skills training on women's income generation.
2. Determine the influence of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on women's self-employment opportunities..
3. Assess the relationship between skill acquisition programmes and women's economic independence.

Research Questions

1. What effect does vocational skills training have on women's income generation in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State?
2. To what extent does entrepreneurial skills acquisition influence women's self-employment opportunities in

Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State?

3. What relationship exists between skill acquisition programmes and women's economic independence in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Research Hypotheses

H01: Vocational skills training has no significant effect on women's income generation in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

H02: Entrepreneurial skills acquisition has no significant influence on women's self-employment opportunities in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

H03: There is no significant relationship between skill acquisition programmes and women's economic independence in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment has gained considerable attention in development discourse due to its significance in promoting gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. It refers to the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices, access productive resources, participate in decision-making, and exercise control over economic, social, and political activities. Empowerment enables women to overcome barriers that limit their participation in development processes and enhances their capacity to contribute meaningfully to household and community welfare. According to UN Women (2024), women's empowerment involves expanding women's access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes necessary for improving their overall well-being and quality of life. Empowered women are better positioned to participate in economic activities, influence household decisions, and contribute to national development. As a result, women's empowerment has become a central component of global development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Economic empowerment constitutes one of the most important dimensions of women's empowerment. It involves improving women's ability to generate income, access

financial resources, own productive assets, and achieve economic independence. Studies have shown that economically empowered women contribute significantly to poverty reduction, improved family welfare, and community development. When women have access to income and productive resources, they are more likely to invest in education, healthcare, nutrition, and other activities that enhance household welfare. Despite progress made in recent decades, many women in developing countries continue to face challenges such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, financial services, land ownership, and productive resources. These constraints often restrict their participation in economic activities and reduce their ability to achieve financial independence. Consequently, governments and development organizations continue to implement policies and programmes aimed at strengthening women's capacities and improving their socio-economic status.

The empowerment of women is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for inclusive growth and sustainable development. The World Bank (2024) argues that improving women's economic participation not only benefits women themselves but also contributes to broader economic growth, social inclusion, and national productivity. Therefore, empowering women remains a critical strategy for achieving sustainable socio-economic development, particularly in rural communities where poverty and gender inequalities remain prevalent.

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition refers to the process through which individuals obtain practical knowledge, technical competencies, and entrepreneurial abilities that enable them to perform specific tasks effectively and engage in productive economic activities. It encompasses vocational, technical, entrepreneurial, managerial, and digital skills designed to improve employability, productivity, and self-reliance. In contemporary development practice, skill acquisition is widely regarded as an important instrument for reducing unemployment, enhancing income generation, and promoting economic empowerment. The growing emphasis on skill acquisition is largely driven by the recognition that education alone may not adequately prepare individuals for the demands of modern labour markets. Consequently, governments and development agencies have increasingly

invested in skills development programmes aimed at equipping individuals with marketable competencies that can facilitate employment and entrepreneurship. Such programmes often include vocational training, entrepreneurship education, business management, financial literacy, information technology, and technical skills development.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023), skills development is essential for improving employability, increasing productivity, and facilitating inclusive economic growth. Individuals who acquire relevant vocational and entrepreneurial skills are generally better equipped to secure employment opportunities, establish businesses, and adapt to changing economic conditions. For women, skill acquisition serves as an effective mechanism for overcoming economic exclusion and enhancing participation in income-generating activities. Skill acquisition is closely linked to Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in education and training enhance individuals' productive capacities and economic outcomes. Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) argue that skills and knowledge constitute forms of capital capable of generating returns through increased productivity and earnings. Thus, participation in skill acquisition programmes can be viewed as an investment that improves individuals' economic prospects and quality of life. For women, skill acquisition offers opportunities to develop competencies that can be utilized in self-employment, small-scale enterprise development, and wage employment. Women who acquire vocational and entrepreneurial skills often experience increased income, improved confidence, and greater economic independence. Furthermore, skills development enables women to diversify their livelihood options, reduce vulnerability to poverty, and contribute more effectively to household welfare and community development.

Recent studies have continued to emphasize the role of skill acquisition in promoting women's empowerment and sustainable livelihoods. UN Women (2024) notes that skills development programmes enhance women's access to economic opportunities, improve employability, and strengthen entrepreneurial capacities. Consequently, skill acquisition remains a vital strategy for addressing unemployment, poverty, and economic dependency among women,

particularly in rural areas where opportunities for formal employment are limited.

Skill Acquisition Programmes

Skill acquisition has become one of the most widely adopted strategies for addressing unemployment, poverty, and economic exclusion, particularly among women in developing countries. It refers to the process through which individuals acquire practical knowledge, technical competencies, and entrepreneurial capabilities that enable them to engage in productive economic activities. These skills may be vocational, technical, digital, managerial, or entrepreneurial in nature and are intended to improve employability, productivity, and self-reliance. In recent years, governments and development agencies have increasingly emphasized skill acquisition as a pathway to inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. The growing recognition of the role of skills in improving livelihoods has led to the establishment of numerous training programmes aimed at equipping women with marketable competencies. According to UN Women, investment in skills development enhances women's access to decent employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, and income-generating activities, thereby strengthening their participation in the economy.

Skill acquisition programmes typically involve vocational training, entrepreneurship education, financial literacy, business management, and technical skills development. Beyond providing technical knowledge, these programmes are designed to build confidence, encourage innovation, and promote economic self-sufficiency among participants. Consequently, skill acquisition has emerged as a critical instrument for improving women's socio-economic status and reducing economic dependency.

Women's Economic Empowerment

Women's economic empowerment refers to the process through which women gain the ability to access economic opportunities, control productive resources, generate income, and make independent economic decisions. It involves increasing women's capacity to participate effectively in economic activities while improving their control over assets, finances, and livelihood opportunities. Economic empowerment goes beyond earning an income. It encompasses women's ability to exercise agency, influence household decisions, and

contribute meaningfully to community and national development. According to UN Women (2024), economic empowerment is achieved when women enjoy equal access to resources, opportunities, income, and economic decision-making processes. The importance of women's economic empowerment has gained significant global attention because of its direct relationship with poverty reduction and sustainable development. Research consistently shows that economically empowered women invest more in their children's education, health, and welfare, thereby contributing to improved family and community outcomes. Moreover, women who possess economic autonomy are generally better positioned to participate in leadership and development initiatives within their communities.

Despite progress made over the years, many rural women continue to face barriers such as limited access to education, finance, land, and business opportunities. These challenges underscore the importance of programmes that equip women with practical skills capable of enhancing their economic prospects.

Vocational Skills Training and Women's Income Generation

Vocational skills training refers to organized learning activities aimed at equipping individuals with practical competencies required for specific occupations or trades. Such training may include tailoring, catering, hairdressing, fashion design, information technology, soap making, agricultural processing, and other marketable skills. Income generation, on the other hand, refers to the ability of individuals to earn financial resources through productive economic activities. For many women, especially those in rural communities, income generation serves as a vital means of improving household welfare and reducing poverty. The relationship between vocational skills training and income generation is well established in development literature. Human Capital Theory suggests that investment in skills enhances productivity and increases individuals' earning potential. Women who acquire vocational skills are often better equipped to secure employment opportunities or establish small-scale enterprises capable of generating sustainable income. Recent evidence indicates that vocational training significantly improves women's ability to participate in economic activities. UN Women reports that vocational and technical training

programmes enhance women's employability, improve access to labour markets, and increase their capacity to earn income independently.

Furthermore, vocational skills provide women with opportunities to diversify their sources of livelihood. Rather than relying solely on agriculture or family support, women can engage in various income-generating ventures that contribute to household financial stability. In rural communities where formal employment opportunities are limited, vocational training often serves as a practical pathway to economic advancement and poverty reduction.

Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition and Self-Employment Opportunities

Entrepreneurial skills acquisition involves the development of competencies necessary for identifying business opportunities, establishing enterprises, and managing business operations successfully. These competencies include business planning, financial management, leadership, communication, innovation, marketing, and risk management skills. Self-employment has become increasingly important in many developing economies due to the shortage of formal employment opportunities. Through entrepreneurship training, individuals acquire the knowledge and confidence required to create businesses and generate income independently. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition plays a significant role in promoting self-employment among women. Women who receive entrepreneurship training are more likely to identify market opportunities, mobilize resources, and establish viable business ventures. Such skills improve their capacity to manage business risks and sustain enterprise growth over time. Recent global initiatives continue to emphasize entrepreneurship as a tool for women's empowerment. UN Women identifies entrepreneurship development as a key strategy for strengthening women's economic participation and expanding opportunities for business ownership. Entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and access to financial services have been found to improve women's ability to establish and sustain income-generating enterprises.

Similarly, studies have shown that entrepreneurship programmes contribute to job creation and economic inclusion by transforming beneficiaries from job seekers into job creators. Women entrepreneurs not only improve their personal income but also

contribute to local economic development through employment generation and increased commercial activities.

Skill Acquisition Programmes and Women's Economic Independence

Economic independence refers to an individual's ability to meet financial obligations and make economic decisions without excessive reliance on others. For women, economic independence is often regarded as a fundamental indicator of empowerment because it enhances self-confidence, autonomy, and decision-making capacity. Skill acquisition programmes contribute significantly to economic independence by equipping women with competencies that enable them to generate income and sustain livelihoods. Through vocational and entrepreneurial training, women acquire practical skills that increase their productivity and earning capacity. According to UN Women, skills development remains one of the most effective approaches for improving women's economic agency and reducing economic inequalities. Women who possess marketable skills are more likely to access employment opportunities, establish businesses, accumulate assets, and exercise greater control over financial resources.

Economic independence also strengthens women's bargaining power within households and communities. When women contribute meaningfully to household income, they often gain greater influence over family decisions relating to education, healthcare, investments, and general welfare. Consequently, skill acquisition programmes do not merely improve income levels; they also promote broader forms of social and economic empowerment. In rural communities, where economic opportunities are often limited, skill acquisition programmes provide women with viable alternatives for achieving financial stability and self-reliance. Through sustained participation in productive economic activities, women become less vulnerable to poverty and more capable of contributing to community development.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey design to examine the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's economic empowerment in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a large number of respondents and

facilitated the assessment of relationships among the study variables.

The target population comprised women who had participated in various skill acquisition programmes within Awka North Local Government Area. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, communities within the local government area were selected, while the final respondents were chosen through simple random sampling from the list of programme beneficiaries.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions regarding vocational skills training, entrepreneurial skills acquisition, income generation, self-employment opportunities, and economic independence. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Public Administration and Development Studies. Its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with the reliability index exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and responses to the questionnaire items. Inferential statistics, specifically simple linear regression analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation, were employed to test the relationships among the study variables. All hypotheses were tested at a 5 percent level of significance using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for policies aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment and rural development. The positive effect of vocational skills training on women's income generation suggests that policymakers should prioritize investment in vocational education and skills development as a strategy for reducing poverty and improving livelihoods among rural women. Expanding access to quality vocational training can enhance women's productive capacities and strengthen their participation in local economies.

The observed influence of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on self-employment

opportunities underscores the need for empowerment policies that integrate entrepreneurship education with practical business support services. Such policies should focus not only on skills development but also on creating an enabling environment that facilitates business start-ups and enterprise sustainability among women.

Furthermore, the significant relationship between skill acquisition programmes and women's economic independence highlights the importance of linking training initiatives with financial inclusion measures. Policies that improve access to credit facilities, grants, cooperative financing, and business development services can enhance the ability of women to translate acquired skills into sustainable economic activities.

The study also reinforces the need for gender-responsive development policies that address structural barriers limiting women's economic participation. Strengthening institutional support for skill acquisition programmes can contribute to increased female labour force participation, reduced economic dependency, and improved household welfare. Consequently, skill acquisition should be recognized as a critical component of broader strategies for achieving inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's economic empowerment in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The review of conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature revealed that skill acquisition programmes constitute important instruments for enhancing women's socio-economic well-being and promoting sustainable development.

The study found that vocational skills training plays a significant role in improving women's income generation. Evidence from the reviewed literature indicated that women who acquire vocational competencies are better positioned to engage in productive economic activities, improve their earning capacity, and contribute meaningfully to household welfare. Vocational skills training was found to enhance employability, productivity, and access to income-generating opportunities, thereby reducing poverty and economic vulnerability among women.

The study further revealed that entrepreneurial skills acquisition contributes

significantly to the creation of self-employment opportunities among women. The reviewed literature showed that entrepreneurial competencies enable women to identify business opportunities, establish enterprises, mobilize resources, and sustain profitable ventures. As a result, entrepreneurial skills acquisition was found to promote self-reliance, reduce unemployment, and strengthen women's participation in economic activities.

The findings also indicated that skill acquisition programmes contribute positively to women's economic independence. Women who participated in vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes were found to possess greater financial autonomy, improved control over economic resources, and enhanced decision-making capacity. The acquisition of practical and entrepreneurial skills was observed to reduce economic dependency and strengthen women's ability to sustain independent sources of livelihood.

The study further established that the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes is influenced by complementary factors such as access to finance, availability of start-up capital, market opportunities, mentorship support, and institutional assistance. While skills acquisition enhances women's productive capacities, the realization of sustainable empowerment outcomes depends largely on the availability of enabling socio-economic conditions.

Overall, the study concluded that skill acquisition programmes remain viable mechanisms for promoting women's economic empowerment through enhanced income generation, expanded self-employment opportunities, and improved economic independence. Consequently, sustained investment in vocational and entrepreneurial training initiatives is essential for strengthening women's economic participation and fostering inclusive development in Awka North Local Government Area and similar communities.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of skill acquisition programmes on women's economic empowerment in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The findings revealed that skill acquisition programmes play a significant role in enhancing women's economic well-being by improving their capacity to generate income,

create self-employment opportunities, and attain greater economic independence. The study established that women who participate in vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes are better positioned to engage in productive economic activities, establish small-scale enterprises, and contribute more effectively to household income and welfare.

The findings further demonstrated that economic empowerment extends beyond income generation to include increased financial autonomy, improved decision-making capacity, and greater participation in economic activities. Through the acquisition of relevant skills, women are able to reduce economic dependency and strengthen their ability to pursue sustainable livelihoods.

Overall, the study concludes that skill acquisition programmes constitute an effective mechanism for promoting women's economic empowerment in rural communities. By enhancing women's productive capacities and entrepreneurial capabilities, these programmes contribute to poverty reduction, improved living standards, and sustainable socio-economic development. Therefore, continued support and investment in skill acquisition initiatives remain essential for strengthening women's economic participation and fostering inclusive development.

Recommendations

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

1. Government at all levels should strengthen vocational skills training programmes by establishing well-equipped training centres and expanding access to quality skill acquisition opportunities for women.
2. Entrepreneurship and business management training should be integrated into skill acquisition programmes to enhance women's self-employment potential and enterprise sustainability.
3. Government, financial institutions, and development partners should provide accessible credit facilities and start-up support to enable women beneficiaries to establish and expand businesses.
4. Mentorship, business advisory services, and technical support should be provided to women entrepreneurs to improve business growth and sustainability.

5. Efforts should be made to improve market access for women-owned enterprises through trade fairs, cooperative societies, and digital marketing platforms.
6. Local governments should collaborate with non-governmental organizations and private sector stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of women empowerment programmes.
7. Regular monitoring and evaluation of skill acquisition programmes should be conducted to assess outcomes and improve programme implementation.
8. Special interventions should target rural women by improving their access to training, productive resources, and financial services.
9. Financial literacy education should be incorporated into skill acquisition programmes to strengthen women's financial management skills and economic independence.
10. The Anambra State Government should formulate supportive policies that promote women's economic empowerment through skills development and entrepreneurship programmes.

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