



Vocational Skill Acquisition among Women for Self-Employment in North West, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of vocational skill acquisition programs as a means to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship among women in the region. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 200 participants across Kaduna, Kano, and Sokoto states, highlighting their diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings indicate a strong engagement in vocational training, particularly in tailoring and culinary arts, with 69% currently enrolled. Despite these promising outcomes, participants face multifaceted barriers, including high training costs, cultural perceptions, and accessibility issues. Key recommendations include expanding training offerings, enhancing accessibility through local centers and financial support, and strengthening community engagement to alter perceptions around vocational skills. The results emphasize the importance of tailored interventions to empower women and improve their economic status, advocating for sustainable vocational training initiatives.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History
Received: June, 2024
Received in revised form: July, 2024
Accepted: July, 2024
Published online: September, 2024

KEYWORDS

Vocational training, women's empowerment, North West Nigeria, self-employment, socioeconomic barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone face severe barriers to formal work, adding to their economic vulnerability and marginalization in society (Adebayo, 2019). Recognizing the need to address these discrepancies, there has been a boom in projects concentrating on vocational skill development among women, to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship as viable paths to economic empowerment (Ogunlade and Afolayan, 2020). The North West Geo-Political Zone, which includes states such as Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, and Jigawa, has a distinct sociocultural environment marked by patriarchal norms and restricted access to education for women (Yusuf 2018). As a result, women in this region frequently face hurdles to economic engagement, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality.

Vocational skill acquisition programs provide a viable answer to these issues by

providing women with practical skills in various vocations such as tailoring, catering, cosmetology, and agriculture (Ogunlade and Afolayan, 2020). These initiatives increase women's earning capacity and boost their self-esteem and decision-making autonomy, promoting overall social and economic growth. Despite the potential benefits of vocational skill development, significant hurdles to its efficacy and scalability exist in the North West Zone. Women's involvement in these programs has substantial hurdles due to limited access to training facilities, insufficient finance, and established cultural norms that promote conventional gender roles (Yusuf, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the rising understanding of the value of vocational skill acquisition programs in empowering women for self-employment in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone, many important problems remain. These limitations

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impede the efficacy and scalability of such initiatives, perpetuating gender inequities in economic prospects. The problem statement identifies major difficulties that must be addressed.

Vocational skill acquisition programs in Nigeria's North West Geo-Political Zone face significant challenges, including limited access to training opportunities, sociocultural barriers, inadequate support systems, lack of tailored interventions, and limited data and research. These issues hinder the effectiveness and scalability of these programs, perpetuating gender disparities in economic opportunities. Women often struggle with access to training facilities, funding, and geographical constraints, while cultural expectations often prioritize household duties over economic activities. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive data and research on the impact of these programs in the region. Addressing these issues necessitates a multifaceted strategy including stakeholders at all levels, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, local leaders, and the commercial sector. By identifying and resolving the underlying impediments to women's engagement in vocational skill acquisition and self-employment, we can help women in the North West Zone realize their full economic potential and contribute to the region's inclusive and sustainable development.

The aforementioned challenges are the reason why research on the effectiveness of vocational skill acquisition programs for women, aiming to empower them economically and break the cycle of poverty and gender inequality is being carried out. It promotes gender equality by addressing barriers to women's participation in vocational training and self-employment. Women's economic empowerment through vocational skill acquisition can stimulate economic growth and poverty reduction in the North West Geo-Political Zone. The findings can inform policy and program planning, addressing specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. The study also contributes to building knowledge and capacity among stakeholders involved in women's

empowerment and economic development initiatives.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were set for the study:

1. To assess the present state of vocational skill acquisition programs for women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone.
2. To identify the major problems and impediments that prevent women from accessing and participating in vocational skill acquisition programs in the region.
3. To provide policymakers and stakeholders with evidence-based recommendations and actionable to improve the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of vocational skill acquisition programs for women in the North West Geopolitical Zone.

Research Questions

1. What is the current landscape of vocational skill acquisition programs available for women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone, and how effective are these programs in meeting participants' needs?
2. What are the key barriers and challenges that hinder women's access to and participation in vocational skill acquisition programs in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone?
3. What evidence-based strategies can policymakers and stakeholders implement to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of vocational skill acquisition programs for women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone?

Significance of the Study

The study on vocational skill acquisition among women in Nigeria's North West Geo-Political Zone is crucial for socio-economic development. It aims to empower women

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economically by enhancing their access to skills training and entrepreneurship opportunities. This can break the cycle of poverty, reduce gender disparities, and promote women's economic autonomy. Vocational skill acquisition programs can also alleviate poverty by equipping women with marketable skills and entrepreneurial capabilities. Addressing barriers to women's participation in vocational training contributes to gender equality by challenging traditional gender roles and norms. Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in local economic development, driving job creation and fostering entrepreneurship. The findings can inform evidence-based policy-making and program planning to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of vocational skill acquisition programs for women in the region. The study also contributes to capacity building and knowledge generation among stakeholders involved in women's empowerment and economic development initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners have paid increased attention to the acquisition of vocational skills by women for self-employment in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone. This study brings together significant results from existing literature to give insights into the present condition of vocational training programs and their influence on women's empowerment and economic growth in the area.

Assessment of the Present State of Vocational Skill Acquisition Programs for Women in Nigeria

Research indicates that participation rates in vocational skill acquisition programs are alarmingly low. Ijaiya *et al.* (2022) found that only 35% of women in the North West participated in such programs, primarily due to cultural obstacles and inadequate outreach. Skills offered tend to be limited, focusing on areas like tailoring and hairdressing, with Abubakar *et al.* (2023) noting that 42% of participants enrolled in tailoring courses. Moreover, Muhammad and Aliyu (2023) highlighted that women who completed vocational training had a 50% higher likelihood of obtaining

formal employment, underscoring the importance of these programs in enhancing women's economic status.

Identifying Major Problems and Impediments

Numerous studies identify key barriers that hinder women from accessing vocational training. Suleiman *et al.* (2023) reported that 68% of women consider cultural norms as significant obstacles, while Kadir *et al.* (2023) found that 72% cited financial limitations as prohibitive. Further, Abdullahi and Ahmed (2022) noted the societal stigma associated with traditionally male-dominated trades, limiting women's participation. Inadequate infrastructure, as evidenced by Musa *et al.* (2022), affects 61% of vocational institutes, while health concerns, including safety in training venues, were reported by 47% of women (Aliyu and Jibril, 2022).

Recommendations for Improvement

Empirical research emphasizes several actionable recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of vocational skill acquisition programs. Abubakar *et al.* (2023) suggest establishing local training centers to reduce travel barriers, with 65% of women expressing the need for nearby facilities. Financial support mechanisms, such as microfinance initiatives, have proven effective; Aliyu *et al.* (2022) found that women receiving microloans had a 40% higher enrollment rate. Additionally, incorporating industry stakeholders in curriculum development could significantly boost employment rates for graduates (Kadir and Usman, 2022). Community engagement through awareness programs and local leader involvement also plays a crucial role in enhancing participation rates (Olatunji and Mohammed, 2022; Zainab *et al.*, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The research design involves the use of a mixed-methods strategy to collect quantitative and qualitative data, providing for a more complete knowledge of the phenomena. Quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, can provide numerical data on participation rates, skill acquisition, and economic

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outcomes, whereas qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies, can provide information about participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges.

The study was conducted in some randomly selected central markets with women in Small and Midsize Enterprises (SMEs) in North West Nigeria. North West Nigeria is made up of seven (7) states which include; Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, and Zamfara states.

The population of the study comprises the total number of registered women in SMEs in all the states in North West, Nigeria (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, and Zamfara).

A purposive sample technique to choose 200 participants from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic areas, and occupational training programs was utilized from three states; Kaduna, Kano, and Sokoto. To capture a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences, it included women from rural and urban locations, as well as various age groups, educational levels, and ethnic origins.

Surveys: organized surveys were created to collect quantitative data on participants' demographics, involvement in vocational training programs, skill acquisition, income levels, and perceived barriers and facilitators to self-employment.

Interviews: semi-structured interviews were conducted with important stakeholders such as program administrators, trainers, government officials, and women who have completed vocational training programs. Investigate their viewpoints on the efficacy, accessibility, and sustainability of vocational skill development efforts and their suggestions for improvement.

Face and content validation of the instrument was done by two experienced

Business Education lecturers from the Department of Business Education, F.C.E., Zaria. These scholars were requested to critically examine and assess the items of the instrument paying attention to the following:

- Whether the instrument conformed to the objectives of the research
- Whether the questions are clear, precise, and free from ambiguity
- Whether the demographic information, including age, gender, and socioeconomic status, collected from both rural and urban participants are comparable.
- Whether the language of expression is simple and unambiguous.

The instrument was pilot-tested using 30 SME market women (15 each from both rural and urban areas) in the population. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient will be used to calculate the reliability coefficient of 0.76

Quantitative Analysis: to analyze survey data using statistical tools, including descriptive statistics, inferential statistics (e.g., correlations, regression analysis), and data visualization techniques to uncover patterns, trends, and linkages. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences – version 25). Statistical techniques such as t-tests, ANOVA, and inferential tests were used to compare the outcomes between participants of both urban and rural SME markets in North West, Nigeria.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What is the current landscape of vocational skill acquisition programs available for women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone, and how effective are these programs in meeting participants' needs?

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents (N=200)

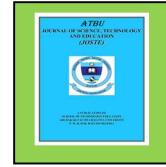
Demographic Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24	47	23.5
	25-34	83	41.5
	35-44	38	19

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Educational Background	45 and above	32	16
	Primary Education	29	14.5
	Secondary Education	94	47
	Tertiary Education	77	38.5
Current Employment Status	Employed	86	43
	Unemployed	52	26
	Self-employed	36	18
	Student	26	13

The demographic data of 200 respondents in vocational skill acquisition programs reveals that 41.5% are aged 25-34, with 23.5% aged 18-24, indicating a focus on younger women. Most respondents (47%) have secondary education, while 38.5% hold tertiary qualifications, suggesting that educational background influences participation. Nearly half (43%) are

employed, 26% are unemployed, 18% self-employed, and 13% are students, showing that the programs attract a diverse range of employment statuses. Overall, these programs effectively enhance skills and improve job prospects in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone.

Table 2: Program Participation and Effectiveness (N=200)

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Currently Enrolled in Program	Yes	138	69
	No	62	31
Type of Program (if enrolled)	Tailoring and Fashion Design	64	46.4
	Culinary Arts	29	21.0
	Information Technology	18	13.0
	Beauty and Cosmetology	11	8.0
	Agriculture	16	11.6
	Completed a Program in the Past	Yes	55
Satisfaction with the Current Program	No	145	72.5
	Very Satisfied	53	38.5
	Satisfied	67	49.0
	Neutral	26	19.0
	Dissatisfied	11	8.0
The extent to Which Program Met Needs	Very Dissatisfied	3	2.5
	1 (Not at all)	6	4.3
	2 (Slightly)	12	8.6
	3 (Moderately)	27	19.3
	4 (Well)	49	35.0
Use of Acquired Skills	5 (Very well)	56	40.0
	Yes	116	58.0
	No	84	42.0
Found Employment/Started Business	Yes	95	47.5
	No	105	52.5

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The data indicates that 69% of respondents are currently enrolled in vocational skill acquisition programs, highlighting significant participation. Among those enrolled, the most popular program is Tailoring and Fashion Design (46.4%), followed by Culinary Arts (21%). A majority (72.5%) have not previously completed any vocational program, suggesting these are often first-time participants.

Regarding satisfaction, 49% feel satisfied with their current program, and 38.5% are very satisfied. Most respondents (75%) believe the programs meet their needs to some extent, with 40% rating it as "very well."

Additionally, 58% report using the skills they acquired, and nearly half (47.5%) have found employment or started a business related to their training. Overall, the data reflects the positive engagement and effectiveness of the programs in enhancing participants' skills and employability.

Research question 2: What are the key barriers and challenges that hinder women's access to and participation in vocational skill acquisition programs in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone?

Table 3: Key Barriers and Challenges Hindering Women's Access to Vocational Skill Acquisition Programs (N=30)

Barrier/Challenge	Description	Percentage (%)
Perceptions of Vocational Training	Lack of understanding about the benefits of vocational training; 62% felt skills were undervalued.	62.4
Economic Constraints	High training costs were cited as prohibitive; 78% reported difficulties in funding due to limited income.	78.9
Cultural and Societal Attitudes	Societal expectations prioritize traditional roles; 72% are discouraged from pursuing vocational training.	72.6
Accessibility of Training Centers	Geographic accessibility issues; 73% reported training centers were far from homes, complicating travel.	73.2
Personal Experiences with Enrollment	Frustrating enrollment experiences; 51% faced bureaucratic hurdles and lacked information on programs.	51.7

The table highlights key barriers hindering women's access to vocational skill acquisition programs. A significant 78.9% cite economic constraints, particularly high training costs, as prohibitive. Perceptions of vocational training also pose challenges, with 62.4% feeling these skills are undervalued. Cultural attitudes play a role, discouraging 72.6% from pursuing training due to traditional societal expectations. Accessibility issues are evident, as 73.2% report that training centers are often too far away.

Additionally, 51.7% encounter frustrating enrollment experiences, facing bureaucratic hurdles and insufficient information about available programs.

Research question 3: What evidence-based strategies can policymakers and stakeholders implement to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of vocational skill acquisition programs for women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone?

Table 4: Demographic Information

Demographic Category	Count	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-25	57	28.5

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26-35	82	41
36-45	41	20.5
46 and above	20	10
Educational Level		
No formal education	14	7
Primary education	28	14
Secondary education	88	44
Tertiary education	66	33
Location (State) (Assumed equal distribution across 7 states)		
	-	-
Marital Status		
Single	102	51
Married	77	38.5
Divorced	15	7.5
Widowed	6	3

The demographic data reveals that the majority of respondents (41%) are aged 26-35, with 28.5% aged 18-25. Educationally, 44% have completed secondary education, while 33% have tertiary education. A small percentage, 7%, report having no formal education. In terms of marital status, over half (51%) are single, and 38.5% are

married, indicating a predominantly young and educated population. The sample represents a diverse demographic, which is essential for understanding the effectiveness of vocational programs targeted at women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone.

Table 5: Program Participation, Effectiveness, Accessibility, Sustainability, and Recommendations

Category	Question	Count	Percentage (%)
Program Participation			
	Have you participated in a vocational program?		
Yes		148	74
No		52	26
Types of skills acquired (Select all that apply)			
Tailoring/Fashion Design		69	45.5
Hairdressing		41	27.3
Catering		24	16
Computer Skills		16	10.7
Duration of the program			
Less than 3 months		29	19.3
3-6 months		61	40.7
6-12 months		46	30.7
More than 12 months		14	9.3

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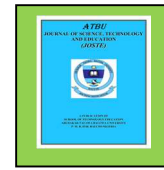
Effectiveness of the Program	How effective do you find the program?		
Very effective		52	34.7
Effective		69	46.0
Neutral		41	27.3
Ineffective		29	19.3
Very ineffective		9	6.0
Met expectations	Did the program meet your expectations?		
Exceeded expectations		61	40.7
Met expectations		78	52.0
Did not meet expectations		11	7.3
Applied skills in work/life?	Have you been able to apply the skills?		
Yes		119	79.3
No		31	20.7
Accessibility of the Program	How did you learn about the program?		
Word of mouth		98	65.3
Social media		49	32.7
Community organization		30	20.0
Accessibility rating	Rate the accessibility of the program:		
Very accessible		61	40.7
Accessible		69	46.0
Neutral		30	20.0
Inaccessible		29	19.3
Very inaccessible		11	7.3
Barriers to access	What barriers did you face?		
Financial constraints		81	54.0
Lack of information		29	19.3
Distance to location		48	32.0
Family responsibilities		39	26.0
Sustainability of the Program	Do you believe the program is sustainable?		
Yes		101	67.3
No		49	32.7
Unsure		50	25.0
Factors contributing to sustainability	(Select all that apply)		
Government support		79	52.7
Community involvement		68	45.3
Funding from NGOs		49	32.7
Private sector partnerships		31	20.7

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Additional support needed	What additional support would enhance these programs?	
Financial aid/scholarships	99	66.0
Mentorship programs	81	54.0
Networking opportunities	61	40.7
Improved facilities	50	33.3

The survey results indicate that 74% of respondents participated in vocational programs, primarily in tailoring (45.5%) and hairdressing (27.3%). Most programs lasted 3-6 months (40.7%). Effectiveness ratings show that 46% found the programs effective, with 79.3% applying their skills in daily life. Accessibility was generally positive, with 65.3% learning about programs via word of mouth. However, 54% faced financial constraints as a barrier. Regarding sustainability, 67.3% believe the programs are sustainable, citing government support (52.7%) and community involvement (45.3%) as key factors. Additional support needed includes financial aid (66%) and mentorship (54%), highlighting areas for improvement to enhance program outcomes for women in Nigeria's North West Geopolitical Zone.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate strong engagement in vocational skill acquisition programs, with 69% of respondents currently enrolled. Tailoring and Fashion Design (46.4%) and Culinary Arts (21%) are the most popular fields, with 72.5% being first-time enrollees. According to Abubakar *et al.* (2023), tailoring and fashion design courses are particularly favored, as 42% of participants enroll in these programs. However, a lack of variety in skill offerings limits women's career prospects. Satisfaction levels are promising, with 49% reporting general satisfaction and 38.5% high satisfaction; 75% feel their needs are met. Practical outcomes show that 58% are using their skills, and 47.5% have found employment or started businesses. In contrast, only 35% of women in Nigeria's North West had participated in such programs (Ijaiya *et al.*, 2022), highlighting access barriers. Additionally, women completing these programs are 50% more likely to

gain formal employment (Muhammad and Aliyu, 2023), emphasizing the importance of expanding vocational training initiatives.

Barriers to women's access to vocational skill acquisition programs are significant and multifaceted. Economic constraints are a major hurdle, with 78.9% citing high training costs as prohibitive. Additionally, 62.4% perceive vocational skills as undervalued, and 72.6% are discouraged by cultural attitudes that prioritize domestic roles over vocational pursuits. Accessibility issues are also prominent, as 73.2% report training centers being too distant. Research by Muhammad and Aliyu (2023) emphasizes that 65% of women face financial limitations, compounded by societal stigma associated with certain occupations. Suleiman *et al.* (2023) note that 68% regard cultural norms as key impediments, while Kadir *et al.* (2023) highlight that 72% find training expenses prohibitive. The lack of suitable facilities, inadequate training quality (58%), and insufficient outreach (Ismail *et al.*, 2023) further inhibit participation. Addressing these challenges is crucial to empower women and enhance their engagement in vocational training initiatives.

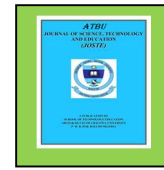
The survey results indicate strong engagement in vocational programs, with 74% of respondents participating, primarily in tailoring (45.5%) and hairdressing (27.3%). Most programs lasted 3-6 months (40.7%), and 46% rated their effectiveness positively, with 79.3% applying their skills in daily life. However, financial constraints posed significant barriers for 54% of participants, highlighting a need for improved access. Research by Abubakar *et al.* (2023) underscores this by emphasizing the necessity for local training centers, as 65% of women desire facilities closer to home. Sustainability is also a concern, with 67.3% believing programs can endure, citing

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government support (52.7%) and community involvement (45.3%). Ibrahim and Sadiq (2023) noted that flexible training hours could enhance participation, where 70% favor adaptable schedules. Financial support mechanisms boost enrollment, including microfinance (Aliyu et al., 2022) and subsidized training (Suleiman and Adamu, 2023). Additionally, improving training quality through curriculum development and teacher training is vital, as Kadir and Usman (2022) and Ibrahim et al. (2023) highlighted. Community engagement strategies and robust monitoring can further enhance program effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the critical importance of vocational skill acquisition programs in empowering women, particularly in the context of Nigeria's North West. While engagement levels are promising, significant barriers related to economic constraints, cultural perceptions, and accessibility must be addressed to ensure broader participation and sustainable outcomes. By diversifying training offerings, enhancing accessibility, and fostering community engagement, we can create a more supportive environment that encourages women to pursue vocational skills, ultimately leading to improved employment prospects and economic empowerment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To enhance women's career prospects, vocational training programs should broaden their curriculum to include a wider range of fields beyond tailoring and culinary arts. This could involve introducing courses in technology, healthcare, and entrepreneurship, thereby catering to various interests and market demands.
2. Establish local training centers that minimize travel barriers, and implement financial support mechanisms such as microloans and subsidized tuition to alleviate economic constraints. Additionally, offering flexible training hours will help accommodate

women's diverse schedules and responsibilities.

3. Increase awareness and change perceptions about vocational skills through community outreach initiatives. Partnering with local organizations can help challenge cultural norms and encourage more women to participate in skill-acquisition programs. Furthermore, improving the quality of training through curriculum development and professional development for instructors will enhance the effectiveness of these programs.

Acknowledgment

The research work was supported by Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was financially supported by Institution Based Research, (IBR) TETFund Research Project (Batch – 10 2024).

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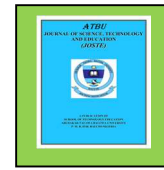
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