International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies 14(4):1-14, Oct-Dec., 2026
© SEAHI PUBLICATIONS, 2026 www.seahipublications.org ISSN: 2467- 8465

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.23142998

Impact of Women Skill Acquisition Programs on Unemployment Reduction in Taraba State

[1]Yubuin Priscilia, [2]Danladi Hussaini (Ph.D) & [3]Prof. Cletus Monday Oyidi

Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences
Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria
preciliaa641@gmail.com, danlandihussaini3@gmail.com, cletusmo@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
This study examined the impact of women skill acquisition programs on unemployment reduction in Taraba State. Women skill acquisition programs have become a vital strategy for addressing unemployment and promoting economic empowerment in Nigeria. In Taraba State, such programs are designed to provide women with vocational, entrepreneurial, and technical skills that can foster self-reliance and reduce overdependence on formal employment. Despite these interventions, the rate of unemployment among women remains a pressing socio-economic challenge, necessitating an empirical investigation into the actual impact of these programs on unemployment reduction. The study employed a survey research design to examine the effectiveness of women skill acquisition programs in Taraba State. A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample size of 389 participants, selected using stratified random sampling across different local government areas. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis to establish the relationship between skill acquisition and unemployment reduction. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between participation in skill acquisition programs and unemployment reduction among women in Taraba State. Participants reported improved entrepreneurial capacity, increased income generation, and enhanced employability. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor monitoring, and limited access to markets constrained the full potential of these programs. The study concludes that women skill acquisition programs play a critical role in reducing unemployment and improving the socio-economic well-being of women in Taraba State. Effective program design, coupled with adequate institutional support, can further strengthen their impact. The study recommends increased government and private sector investment in skill acquisition centers, provision of startup capital for trained women, establishment of monitoring frameworks to track outcomes, and improved market linkages for products and services generated through these programs.
Keywords: Women's Skill Acquisition, Unemployment Reduction, Vocational Skills, Entrepreneurship, Women's Economic Empowerment, Self-Employment.

INTRODUCTION

Women's skill acquisition programs have emerged as crucial mechanisms for addressing unemployment, particularly in developing regions such as Taraba State in Nigeria. In many parts of the world, skill development initiatives for women have demonstrated significant potential in alleviating unemployment by equipping them with practical and marketable skills. Globally, these programs have been instrumental in enhancing women's employability, boosting economic independence, and reducing poverty (UN Women, 2020). With an increasing focus on gender equality and women's empowerment, skill acquisition

has become an essential tool for economic inclusion, especially in areas where women's participation in the formal labor market has been historically limited.

In Africa, the issue of unemployment, especially among women, is critical, and skill acquisition programs are being promoted as a solution to the economic challenges women face. According to the African Development Bank (2021), Africa's youth population, including young women, is growing rapidly, but the region's ability to create sufficient job opportunities has not kept pace. Women, particularly in rural and less developed areas like Taraba State, are often disadvantaged in the labor market due to limited access to education, training, and capital. Skill development programs targeting women are seen as a way to bridge this gap and provide alternative income-generating opportunities, fostering greater economic independence and reducing unemployment (World Bank, 2019).

In Nigeria, the challenge of unemployment is pervasive, with women facing a disproportionate impact. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reports that the unemployment rate in Nigeria is significantly higher among women than men, a gap that is particularly wide in northern states such as Taraba. Women in these regions often lack access to formal education and vocational training opportunities, which are critical for securing stable employment. Skill acquisition programs, including vocational training in areas such as tailoring, hairdressing, and information technology, have gained traction as essential tools for reducing unemployment among women (Olajide & Adeyemi, 2020). These programs offer not only technical skills but also entrepreneurship training, which is vital for women looking to start their own businesses.

In Taraba State, the situation is compounded by several socio-cultural factors, such as limited mobility, early marriages, and entrenched gender norms, which restrict women's access to education and employment. However, recent efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations have sought to improve this situation by introducing skill acquisition centers that focus on empowering women in rural and urban areas. These initiatives aim to provide women with the necessary tools and knowledge to secure livelihoods and participate actively in the local economy (Aliyu, 2021). For example, the Taraba State Ministry of Women Affairs has launched several programs to train women in various skills, including agriculture, crafts, and trade, with the hope of reducing unemployment and poverty levels in the state.

The positive impact of skill acquisition programs on women's unemployment reduction is not just theoretical but backed by empirical evidence. Studies have shown that women who participate in vocational training programs are more likely to secure employment or become self-employed (ILO, 2020). Moreover, these programs have long-term benefits, including increased household income, improved social status, and enhanced community development. In Nigeria, successful programs such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and various state-level initiatives have made strides in reducing unemployment among women, though challenges remain, especially in less-developed states like Taraba. Ensuring that these programs are adequately funded, accessible, and tailored to local needs is essential for achieving lasting change (Ogunleye, 2019).

The importance of these skill acquisition programs extends beyond the individual women involved; they also contribute to broader national development. Empowered women, who are economically independent and able to create businesses, are crucial to the social and economic fabric of their communities. They help to reduce the dependency ratio, increase economic productivity, and uplift entire families. Globally, the evidence is clear: when women are given the right tools and opportunities, their impact on reducing unemployment and improving economic outcomes is profound (UNDP, 2021). Therefore, addressing the needs of women in Taraba State through skill acquisition programs is not only a necessary response to unemployment but also an essential strategy for long-term economic development and gender equality.

Statement Of The Problem

Despite numerous initiatives aimed at empowering women through skill acquisition programs, unemployment among women in Taraba State remains a significant socio-economic challenge. While these programs are designed to equip women with relevant vocational and entrepreneurial skills, many are either inaccessible, poorly implemented, or unsustainable. The persistent high rate of unemployment

among women in the state suggests that existing skill acquisition initiatives may not be achieving their full potential (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, socio-cultural and economic constraints continue to limit women's ability to fully participate in and benefit from these programs, leaving many economically dependent and vulnerable.

One of the major challenges is limited access to funding and capital, which restricts women's ability to start or scale businesses after completing skill acquisition training. Many women, especially those in rural areas of Taraba State, do not have the financial resources or access to credit facilities to implement the skills they have learned. Even when training is provided, the absence of post-training support mechanisms such as grants, micro-loans, or business mentorship limits the effectiveness of the programs. This financial barrier contributes to a cycle where trained women are unable to transition into economically productive roles, thus perpetuating unemployment.

Another significant issue is the lack of adequate infrastructure and modern training equipment in many of the skill acquisition centers across Taraba State. Many programs are underfunded and operate in poorly equipped environments, making it difficult to provide high-quality, market-relevant training As a result, beneficiaries often acquire outdated or insufficient skills that do not meet the current demands of the labor market. Without relevant and competitive skills, women face continued marginalization in both formal and informal employment sectors.

Cultural and gender-related barriers also pose a serious challenge to the effectiveness of women's skill acquisition programs in the state. In many communities, deeply rooted patriarchal norms discourage women from pursuing vocational training or engaging in income-generating activities. Early marriage, low educational attainment, and domestic responsibilities often limit the time and freedom women have to participate in these programs. Additionally, societal expectations sometimes devalue women's economic contributions, making their involvement in entrepreneurship or trades less supported by their families or communities.

Furthermore, poor coordination and monitoring of skill acquisition programs often result in duplication of efforts and low impact. Many of the programs implemented by government agencies and NGOs lack proper data tracking, follow-up, and evaluation mechanisms to measure outcomes and ensure accountability. This leads to a situation where programs are launched for political or public relations purposes without creating meaningful or lasting change for the target beneficiaries. The absence of strategic planning and long-term sustainability frameworks undermines the goal of reducing unemployment among women in Taraba State

Research Questions

1. What is the impact of women's skill acquisition programmes on unemployment reduction among women in Taraba State?
2. What is the level of accessibility of skill acquisition programmes for women in urban and rural areas of Taraba State?
3. What are the key challenges limiting the effectiveness of women's skill acquisition programmes in Taraba State?

Objectives Of The Study

1. To examine the impact of women skill acquisition programs on unemployment reduction among women in Taraba State.
2. To assess the level of accessibility of skill acquisition programs for women in both urban and rural areas of Taraba State.
3. To identify the key challenges limiting the effectiveness of these programs in the state.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition refers to the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, practical ability, and competencies necessary to perform specific tasks or engage in particular professions. It is often achieved through formal training, vocational education, apprenticeships, or informal learning, and is essential in

preparing individuals for employment or self-employment (Ekong & Ekong, 2016). In the context of developing economies like Nigeria, skill acquisition has become a critical component of strategies aimed at reducing unemployment, poverty, and youth restiveness, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women and the youth.

From a theoretical perspective, skill acquisition is grounded in experiential learning, where learners gain proficiency through hands-on practice and repetition. This approach aligns with the constructivist theory, which posits that people construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Kolb, 1984). In this light, vocational and technical education plays a pivotal role, as it emphasizes practical training in trades such as tailoring, catering, carpentry, mechanics, and ICT. These skills not only enhance employability but also provide individuals with the means to become self-reliant.

In Nigeria, skill acquisition has gained prominence as a response to the growing unemployment crisis, especially among graduates and women. Government initiatives such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Youth Empowerment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), and state-level programs have been established to train people in a wide range of vocations (Adebayo, 2013). These programs are often supplemented by private sector and NGO-led initiatives targeting marginalized populations, including women in states like Taraba, where access to formal employment is limited.

The relevance of skill acquisition in today's economy is further underscored by the changing nature of work. With the rise of technology and the gig economy, traditional white-collar jobs are no longer the only viable career path. Skill acquisition enables individuals to adapt to these changes by equipping them with relevant competencies that align with market demands (Osalor, 2019). For women in particular, skills in areas such as digital literacy, agriculture, fashion design, and hairdressing can lead to viable self-employment ventures, thereby contributing to both personal and national economic growth.

Moreover, skill acquisition plays a crucial role in women's empowerment and poverty reduction. In regions like Taraba State, where many women face economic exclusion due to cultural, educational, and infrastructural barriers, skill acquisition provides a pathway to financial independence and social inclusion. When women acquire skills and apply them productively, they not only improve their household income but also gain confidence, respect, and a voice in community decision-making processes (Aliyu, 2021). This ripple effect demonstrates that skill acquisition is not just an economic tool, but also a means of promoting gender equity and community development.

Skill Acquisition Programs

Skill acquisition programs refer to structured and organized initiatives designed to equip individuals with practical skills, technical knowledge, and competencies necessary for employment or self-employment. These programs often target specific groups such as unemployed youth, women, or marginalized communities, aiming to bridge the gap between formal education and the labor market (Ekong & Ekong, 2016). In contrast to traditional academic education, skill acquisition programs are more hands-on and vocational in nature, focusing on trades like tailoring, hairdressing, ICT, carpentry, agriculture, and more. Their purpose is not only to create job opportunities but also to foster entrepreneurship and economic self-reliance.

These programs are typically implemented by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private enterprises, or educational institutions. In Nigeria, for instance, agencies like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), and various state-level ministries have developed and executed skill acquisition initiatives to tackle unemployment (Adebayo, 2013). These programs usually provide short- to medium-term training, and some offer post-training support like access to startup capital, mentorship, and toolkits. Their effectiveness, however, often depends on factors such as quality of training, relevance of the skills taught, and the availability of enabling environments for business start-ups.

Skill acquisition programs are increasingly recognized as effective tools for reducing unemployment, particularly in developing countries. This is because formal employment opportunities are often scarce and competitive, and many graduates lack the practical skills required by employers (Ogunleye, 2019). By providing training in specific trades or vocations, these programs help individuals become employable

or enable them to create jobs for themselves and others. For women, especially in underserved areas like Taraba State, these programs offer a pathway to financial independence and improved socio-economic status, as they often lack access to higher education and formal employment opportunities.

Furthermore, skill acquisition programs play a critical role in economic development and poverty alleviation. When properly designed and implemented, they can contribute to wealth creation, reduce dependency on government jobs, and support the growth of the informal sector, which forms a significant part of the economy in many African countries (World Bank, 2020). For example, training women in agribusiness, food processing, or digital services not only empowers them economically but also adds value to local economies. However, challenges such as poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, and lack of follow-up mechanisms often hinder the effectiveness of such programs.

Another important aspect of skill acquisition programs is their potential to promote social inclusion and gender equity. Women, who are often disadvantaged due to cultural and societal barriers, can benefit greatly from these initiatives if they are designed to be inclusive and accessible. Programs that offer child-care services, flexible training schedules, or rural outreach are more likely to attract and retain female participants (Aliyu, 2021). In Taraba State, where many women live in rural areas with limited mobility and low literacy levels, tailoring programs to meet their unique needs is crucial for meaningful impact.

Unemployment

Unemployment is a critical socio-economic issue that affects both developed and developing nations, and it refers to the condition in which individuals who are capable of working, and are actively seeking employment, are unable to find suitable work (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020). It is a major indicator of economic performance, as high unemployment levels suggest underutilization of labor resources, leading to lower productivity and economic stagnation. In developing countries like Nigeria, unemployment is particularly acute among women and youth, where limited job opportunities, inadequate skills, and structural economic barriers hinder labor market participation.

There are various forms of unemployment, including frictional, structural, cyclical, and seasonal unemployment. Frictional unemployment occurs when individuals are temporarily without work while transitioning between jobs, while structural unemployment arises from mismatches between job seekers' skills and the demands of the labor market (Adebayo, 2013). Cyclical unemployment results from economic downturns and reduced demand for labor, and seasonal unemployment is linked to seasonal industries such as agriculture or tourism. In Nigeria, structural and frictional unemployment are the most prevalent, particularly due to the education-to-employment gap and insufficient skill development programs.

Unemployment has far-reaching consequences for individuals and society. At the individual level, it leads to financial hardship, reduced self-esteem, and in some cases, increased involvement in criminal or anti-social behavior (Ogunleye, 2019). On a broader scale, high unemployment rates contribute to economic instability, increased poverty, social unrest, and decreased national productivity. For women, unemployment often results in economic dependence, limited social mobility, and reduced participation in decision-making both at home and in society. This is especially true in regions like Taraba State, where traditional gender roles and low access to education further marginalize women in the labor force.

The issue of unemployment in Nigeria has been exacerbated by several factors including rapid population growth, poor industrial development, lack of access to quality education, and policy inconsistency (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). Despite possessing a large and youthful population, Nigeria has struggled to create enough employment opportunities to absorb new labor market entrants. Women are disproportionately affected due to socio-cultural barriers, lack of skill development opportunities, and gender discrimination in the workplace. As such, targeted interventions are required to address these gender-specific challenges and reduce unemployment among women.

One of the most effective approaches to tackling unemployment, especially among women, is the promotion of skill acquisition programs. These programs provide individuals with practical, job-ready skills that enable them to either secure employment or start their own businesses. Research has shown that countries investing in vocational and technical education experience lower unemployment rates,

particularly among vulnerable groups (Ekong & Ekong, 2016). In Taraba State, implementing inclusive and sustainable skill acquisition initiatives tailored to the needs of women can significantly reduce unemployment and improve economic participation.

Unemployment Reduction

Unemployment reduction refers to the strategic efforts, policies, and programs aimed at decreasing the number of individuals who are willing and able to work but are unable to find employment. It involves not only creating more job opportunities but also enhancing the employability of the labor force through education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, and favorable economic policies (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020). In developing countries like Nigeria, where unemployment rates are high, particularly among women and youth, reducing unemployment has become a national priority for fostering sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

One of the primary approaches to unemployment reduction is the promotion of skill acquisition and vocational training programs. These programs provide individuals with practical skills that match current labor market demands, thereby improving their chances of gaining employment or starting a business. For instance, training women in vocations such as tailoring, catering, information technology, and agribusiness can enable them to become self-employed or secure jobs in the informal and formal sectors (Ekong & Ekong, 2016). This strategy is particularly relevant in regions like Taraba State, where access to formal employment is limited, and many women lack marketable skills.

Government intervention also plays a critical role in reducing unemployment. Policies that support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), provide access to credit, and encourage local content development are essential for job creation. In Nigeria, programs such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), and Women's Economic Empowerment Initiatives have been implemented to address unemployment through various empowerment schemes (Adebayo, 2013). However, the effectiveness of these programs depends largely on proper implementation, adequate funding, and consistent monitoring.

Another important component of unemployment reduction is entrepreneurship development. Empowering individuals, particularly women, to start and manage their own businesses can significantly reduce dependency on formal employment and stimulate economic growth. Entrepreneurship not only provides income for the business owner but also creates jobs for others in the community. According to Osalor (2019), fostering entrepreneurial skills among women leads to inclusive growth and contributes to local and national economies. In rural areas of Taraba State, entrepreneurship supported by training and micro-financing has shown promise in reducing unemployment among women.

Furthermore, unemployment reduction requires addressing structural barriers such as gender inequality, low levels of education, poor infrastructure, and limited access to financial services. For women in Taraba State, cultural norms often restrict mobility and limit their participation in economic activities. Therefore, efforts to reduce unemployment must be inclusive and gender-sensitive, ensuring that women have equal access to resources, training, and opportunities. Aliyu (2021) emphasizes that programs tailored specifically to the needs of women—such as flexible training schedules, on-site childcare, and rural outreach—are more likely to yield lasting results in reducing female unemployment.

The Impact of Women Skill Acquisition Programs on Unemployment Reduction Among Women in Taraba State

Women skill acquisition programs in Taraba State have become a vital strategy in the fight against unemployment and economic dependency among women. These programs aim to equip women with practical skills such as tailoring, catering, hairdressing, soap making, ICT, and small-scale farming, which can be used to either gain employment or start micro-enterprises. According to Ekong and Ekong (2016), skill acquisition programs directly contribute to reducing unemployment by enhancing employability and promoting self-reliance, particularly in regions with limited formal job opportunities like Taraba. In rural communities, where traditional roles and lack of education often exclude women from formal employment, these programs serve as a lifeline to economic empowerment.

One significant impact of these programs is the creation of self-employment opportunities for women who would otherwise remain jobless. Many beneficiaries of government and NGO-sponsored programs in Taraba State have gone on to establish small businesses, generating income for themselves and, in some cases, employing others within their communities. This shift from dependence to self-sufficiency reduces household poverty and improves living standards. A study by Aliyu (2021) found that over 60% of women trained in skills such as fashion design and food processing were able to start income-generating ventures within a year of completing their training.

Additionally, women who participate in skill acquisition programs often experience enhanced confidence, decision-making power, and greater participation in family and community life. These programs do not just impart technical skills but also build leadership and business management capacities. As women gain financial independence, they are more likely to contribute to household expenses, invest in their children's education, and break cycles of generational poverty. Ogunleye (2019) emphasized that empowered women are central to community development, and skill acquisition is a key driver of such empowerment in underserved areas like Taraba.

However, the impact of these programs is sometimes limited by challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of access to startup capital, and poor post-training support. Many women struggle to transform their newly acquired skills into sustainable livelihoods due to a lack of tools, business mentorship, or access to markets. This highlights the need for more comprehensive and supportive program designs that go beyond training to include financial literacy, equipment grants, and continuous monitoring. Olajide and Adeyemi (2020) argue that without follow-up support, the long-term impact of skill acquisition programs on unemployment reduction may be significantly weakened.

The Level of Accessibility of Skill Acquisition Programs for Women in Urban and Rural Areas of Taraba State

The accessibility of skill acquisition programs for women in Taraba State varies significantly between urban and rural areas due to differences in infrastructure, awareness, and socio-cultural factors. In urban centers like Jalingo and Wukari, women generally have better access to training centers, information, and support services. Government agencies and NGOs tend to concentrate their operations in urban areas where logistics are easier and infrastructure such as electricity, transportation, and training facilities are more readily available (Ekong & Ekong, 2016). As a result, women in these areas benefit more consistently from structured programs in tailoring, ICT, catering, and business management.

Conversely, in rural areas of Taraba State, the accessibility of skill acquisition programs is limited. Many rural women are unaware of available programs due to poor information dissemination, language barriers, and low literacy levels (Aliyu, 2021). In addition, the absence of adequate training facilities and poor transportation networks further reduce the likelihood of rural women participating in these initiatives. Cultural restrictions also play a role, as some communities discourage women from traveling far from home or participating in mixed-gender training sessions. These factors collectively limit the reach and effectiveness of skill acquisition efforts in rural regions.

Economic barriers also contribute significantly to unequal access. Many rural women cannot afford the transportation costs or training fees, even when programs are subsidized. Furthermore, lack of access to child care and the burden of household responsibilities often prevent women—especially married ones from attending training regularly (Adewale & Ibrahim, 2020). In contrast, urban women may have more support systems and flexibility to engage in these programs. These disparities show that without deliberate efforts to target rural populations, skill acquisition programs may inadvertently widen the gap between urban and rural women in terms of economic empowerment.

Several attempts have been made to address these access challenges, including mobile training units, community-based training, and partnerships with local women's associations. However, the impact has been limited due to inconsistent funding, poor policy implementation, and lack of follow-up support. Olajide and Adeyemi (2020) note that most rural-targeted programs lack sustainability and are often short-term interventions with little monitoring. This undermines the goal of long-term unemployment reduction and women empowerment in rural Taraba.

Challenges Limiting the Effectiveness of Skill Acquisition Programs in Taraba State

Despite the potential of skill acquisition programs to reduce unemployment among women in Taraba State, several key challenges hinder their overall effectiveness. One major challenge is inadequate funding. Many of these programs lack sufficient financial resources to provide high-quality training, tools, materials, and post-training support. Without funding, training centers struggle to pay qualified instructors, maintain equipment, or offer stipends to trainees. As noted by Ekong and Ekong (2016), underfunding leads to poorly equipped facilities and low motivation among both trainers and participants, thereby reducing the quality and sustainability of the programs.

Another critical issue is the absence of post-training support mechanisms, such as access to start-up capital, business mentorship, and follow-up monitoring. Many women complete training but are unable to implement their skills due to a lack of financial resources or guidance on how to establish and manage small businesses. According to Olajide and Adeyemi (2020), the lack of integration between training and entrepreneurship support significantly limits the long-term impact of skill acquisition programs. Without tools, capital, or markets, the acquired skills often go unused, and the cycle of unemployment continues.

Cultural and gender-related barriers also limit the effectiveness of these programs, particularly in rural communities. In many parts of Taraba State, traditional gender roles and societal expectations discourage women from participating in vocational training or starting businesses. Additionally, domestic responsibilities, early marriage, and low literacy levels make it difficult for women to fully engage in or benefit from such programs (Adewale & Ibrahim, 2020). These cultural constraints not only reduce women's participation but also affect their confidence and willingness to pursue economic independence.

Poor program design and lack of coordination among implementing bodies further weaken the effectiveness of skill acquisition initiatives. In some cases, multiple government agencies and NGOs run overlapping or inconsistent programs without proper needs assessment or alignment with local labor market demands. This often results in duplication of efforts or training in outdated skills with limited economic value (Aliyu, 2021). Moreover, the absence of data tracking systems and performance monitoring makes it difficult to assess the outcomes of these programs or improve them over time.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Empowerment Theory as it theoretical framework. Empowerment Theory focuses on enabling individuals and groups—particularly marginalized populations—to gain control over their lives, access necessary resources, and actively participate in decisions that affect their well-being (Kabeer, 1999). At its core, the theory emphasizes the importance of agency, opportunity, and access to social, economic, and political power. It holds that true empowerment occurs when people are not only provided with skills and knowledge but also given the means to apply them meaningfully. For women, especially in developing contexts like Taraba State, empowerment is both a process and an outcome that involves challenging existing power dynamics, overcoming systemic barriers, and building self-confidence and self-reliance (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005).

In the context of skill acquisition programs for women, Empowerment Theory serves as a relevant framework to understand how these initiatives contribute to reducing unemployment. Such programs do more than teach technical skills—they also promote independence, increase decision-making capacity, and foster economic self-sufficiency. For example, when a woman in rural Taraba State acquires a skill like tailoring or food processing and is able to start a business, she transitions from dependency to agency. According to Aliyu (2021), skill acquisition enhances women's confidence and financial stability, allowing them to play a more active role in household and community decision-making. This shift contributes to broader development goals such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and economic resilience.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine the impact of women's skill acquisition programs and unemployment reduction in Taraba State. The descriptive survey design is appropriate

because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large population of women participants and stakeholders, and to analyze existing conditions without manipulating any variables. It is useful for describing, explaining, and interpreting the perceptions of women regarding the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs and how these initiatives influence their employment opportunities and economic independence. This design also supports the use of questionnaires and interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive analysis of how skill acquisition programs contribute to unemployment reduction in the state.

The population of this study consists of enrolled women participating in skill acquisition programs within the Wukari, Jalingo, and Sardauna Local Government Areas of Taraba State. Specifically, the target population includes women engaged in various vocational training fields such as tailoring, catering, hairdressing, fashion design, bead-making, and small-scale entrepreneurship. For the purpose of this research, a total of 14,790 women trainees have been identified as the population, representing individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds and educational levels. This population size is appropriate for capturing a diverse range of perspectives on how women skill acquisition programs contribute to unemployment reduction and economic empowerment in Taraba State.

Simple random sampling was used to select a total of (389) respondents out of the total population of 14,790 in the area. This is based on the researcher's application for the Taro Yamane (1967) method in determining the sample of the study. It is mathematically expressed as; n=N/(1=N(e)2 . Where;

n =signifies the population size.
K=constant value
N= signifies the population under study
e= signifies the margin of error Therefore,

n= 14,790
(1+14,790(0.05)2
n= 14,790
(1+14,790(0.0025)
n= 14,790
37.975
n=389.4

An approximately (389) respondent served as the sample of this study

The primary method of data collection for this study on women skill acquisition programs and unemployment reduction in Taraba State is the use of structured questionnaires administered to selected women beneficiaries across targeted communities in the state. The questionnaire is designed to capture respondents' perspectives on the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of skill acquisition programs, as well as their perceived impact on employment opportunities and income generation. In addition, interviews with program coordinators, trainers, and community leaders are conducted to gain deeper insights and validate the questionnaire findings. This mixed-methods approach ensures the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how women skill acquisition initiatives contribute to reducing unemployment in Taraba State.

The data collected for the study on Women Skill Acquisition Programs and Unemployment Reduction in Taraba State were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize the responses from the questionnaires. Additionally, inferential statistics, particularly regression analysis, were applied to examine the relationship between participation in women skill acquisition programs and the reduction of unemployment in the state.

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 381)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25 years	62	16.3%
	26–35 years	97	25.5%
	36–45 years	78	20.5%
	46 years and above	50	13.1%
Marital Status	Single	84	22.0%
	Married	162	42.5%
	Widowed/Divorced	41	10.8%
Educational Level	No formal education	39	10.2%
	Primary education	68	17.8%
	Secondary education	102	26.8%
	Tertiary education	78	20.5%
Area of Residence	Urban	137	36.0%
	Rural	150	39.4%
Type of Skill	Tailoring	65	17.1%
	Catering	51	13.4%
	Hairdressing	46	12.1%
	ICT	34	8.9%
	Soap/Cosmetics Making	48	12.6%
	Others	43	11.3%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic data show that most respondents were within the productive age groups of 26–35 years (25.5%) and 36–45 years (20.5%), with fewer participants aged 46 years and above (13.1%). A large proportion were married (42.5%), followed by singles (22.0%), indicating that many participants had family responsibilities that could motivate skill acquisition for income generation. In terms of education, secondary education holders (26.8%) formed the largest group, with notable representation from those with tertiary (20.5%) and primary education (17.8%), while 10.2% had no formal education. The distribution between rural (39.4%) and urban (36.0%) residents suggests that the program reached participants across both settings. Tailoring (17.1%) was the most common skill acquired, followed by catering (13.4%) and soap/cosmetics making (12.6%), while ICT had the lowest participation (8.9%), reflecting a preference for traditional vocational skills over technology-based ones.

Table 2: The impact of women skill acquisition programs on unemployment reduction among women in Taraba State

1. Has participation in skill acquisition programs improved your chances of employment?	Yes	218	**57.2%**
	No	69	**18.1%**
2. Have you been able to start your own business as a result of the skills acquired?	Yes	193	**50.7%**
	No	94	**24.7%**
3. Do you believe skill acquisition programs have reduced unemployment among women in your community?	Yes	232	**60.9%**
	No	55	**14.4%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results show that a majority of respondents (57.2%) indicated that participation in skill acquisition programs had improved their chances of employment, while 18.1% reported no such improvement.

Similarly, 50.7% of the women stated that they had been able to start their own businesses as a result of the skills acquired, whereas 24.7% had not started any business. Furthermore, 60.9% believed that skill acquisition programs had reduced unemployment among women in their community, while only 14.4% disagreed. These findings suggest that skill acquisition initiatives in Taraba State have had a generally positive impact on women's employment opportunities, entrepreneurial activities, and perceived reduction of unemployment.

Table 3: the level of accessibility of skill acquisition programs for women in both urban and rural areas of Taraba State.

1. Are skill acquisition programs easily accessible to women in your area?	Yes	165	43.3
	No	216	56.7
2. Do rural women face more barriers to accessing these programs compared to urban women?	Yes	204	53.5
	No	177	46.5
3. Are awareness campaigns about skill acquisition programs adequately reaching women in your community?	Yes	147	38.6
	No	234	61.4

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results reveal that less than half of the respondents (43.3%) indicated that skill acquisition programs were easily accessible to women in their area, while a larger proportion (56.7%) reported limited accessibility. More than half (53.5%) agreed that rural women face more barriers in accessing these programs compared to their urban counterparts, suggesting that geographical and infrastructural challenges may hinder participation. Furthermore, only 38.6% of respondents believed that awareness campaigns about skill acquisition programs were adequately reaching women in their community, whereas a significant majority (61.4%) felt that such campaigns were insufficient, indicating a potential gap in outreach and information dissemination efforts.

Challenges Limiting the Effectiveness of Skill Acquisition Programs

1. Do you think lack of access to start-up capital limits the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs?	Yes	225	59.1
	No	156	40.9
2. Are cultural or gender-related barriers a major challenge to women's participation in these programs?	Yes	198	52.0
	No	183	48.0
3. Do you believe poor follow-up and support after training reduce the long-term impact of these programs?	Yes	236	61.9
	No	145	38.1

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings revealed that a majority of respondents (59.1%) believed that lack of access to start-up capital significantly limits the effectiveness of women's skill acquisition programs, while 40.9% disagreed. Similarly, more than half (52.0%) indicated that cultural or gender-related barriers pose major challenges to women's participation, compared to 48.0% who did not see these as significant barriers. Furthermore, a substantial proportion (61.9%) agreed that poor follow-up and support after training reduce the long-term impact of these programs, whereas 38.1% did not share this view. These results suggest that financial constraints, socio-cultural factors, and inadequate post-training support are

perceived as key obstacles to maximizing the benefits of skill acquisition programs for women in Taraba State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a significant positive impact of women skill acquisition programs on unemployment reduction among women in Taraba State. A majority of respondents reported that participation in these programs improved their chances of employment, and indicated that they were able to start their own businesses as a result of the skills acquired. This supports the assertions of Eze and Okeke (2020), who found that skill acquisition programs empower women economically by equipping them with marketable skills that promote self-employment and income generation. Similarly, Ojo (2019) reported that skill training significantly reduces unemployment rates among women by enhancing their employability and entrepreneurial capabilities. These findings demonstrate that such programs are crucial in addressing the high unemployment rate among women in Taraba State and contribute to broader economic development.

Regarding the level of accessibility, the study revealed that respondents found skill acquisition programs easily accessible, but a substantial disagreed, indicating disparities in access. Notably, rural women face more barriers than urban women. This is consistent with the findings of Abdullahi et al. (2018), who noted that rural women in Nigeria encounter greater difficulties accessing skill development initiatives due to factors such as poor infrastructure, limited transportation, and cultural restrictions. Similarly, Musa and Ibrahim (2021) emphasized that rural areas often lack adequate training centers and information dissemination, limiting rural women's participation. The nearly even split on awareness campaigns also highlights a gap in effective communication, suggesting that program outreach requires strengthening, especially in rural communities.

The study also identified key challenges limiting the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs. A substantial majority cited lack of access to start-up capital as a major impediment, while cultural and gender-related barriers, and pointed to poor follow-up and support after training. These challenges align with existing literature. For example, Nwosu (2017) emphasized that inadequate financial support is a significant barrier that prevents women from translating acquired skills into sustainable livelihoods. Cultural barriers limiting women's participation in skill acquisition programs have also been widely documented by Okonjo (2019), who noted that entrenched gender norms restrict women's economic activities. Furthermore, inadequate post-training support was identified by Adebayo and Adetunji (2020) as a critical factor that undermines the long-term success of skill development efforts. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive program designs that include financial assistance, culturally sensitive approaches, and robust follow-up mechanisms.

Overall, these findings illustrate that while skill acquisition programs have a positive impact on reducing unemployment among women in Taraba State, significant gaps remain in accessibility and program sustainability. Addressing these gaps requires coordinated efforts by policymakers, program implementers, and community leaders to ensure that financial, social, and infrastructural barriers are minimized. The incorporation of support systems such as microcredit schemes, mentorship programs, and community sensitization campaigns could enhance program effectiveness and foster broader participation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that women skill acquisition programs play a significant role in reducing unemployment among women in Taraba State by enhancing their employability and entrepreneurial abilities. The majority of participants reported positive outcomes such as improved chances of employment and the ability to start their own businesses, highlighting the programs' effectiveness in promoting economic empowerment. However, the level of accessibility to these programs remains uneven, with rural women facing more substantial barriers compared to their urban counterparts. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited awareness, and cultural restrictions continue to hinder full participation, particularly in rural communities. Additionally, key obstacles including lack of

start-up capital, cultural and gender-related barriers, and insufficient follow-up support limit the long-term impact and sustainability of the programs. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions and inclusive policies is essential to maximize the benefits of skill acquisition initiatives and foster greater economic opportunities for women across Taraba State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhance Funding and Financial Support**:** To maximize the impact of women skill acquisition programs on unemployment reduction, it is essential that government agencies, NGOs, and financial institutions provide accessible start-up capital and microcredit facilities. This financial support will enable women to effectively apply the skills acquired, start businesses, and sustain their livelihoods, reducing unemployment rates among women in Taraba State.
2. Improve Accessibility in Rural Areas**:** Efforts should be made to expand the reach of skill acquisition programs into rural communities by establishing more training centers closer to these populations. Additionally, mobile training units and digital platforms can be leveraged to overcome geographical barriers. Awareness campaigns must be intensified in rural areas to ensure women are informed about available opportunities, addressing the existing urban-rural divide in program accessibility.
3. Address Cultural and Gender Barriers: Program designers and implementers should engage community leaders and stakeholders to sensitize and challenge cultural norms that limit women's participation. Incorporating culturally sensitive approaches—such as flexible training schedules and women-only training sessions—can help increase enrollment and retention among women who face social restrictions.

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