



Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) in Addressing Youth Unemployment

OKABA, Tamarauemomoemi Blessing¹, Prof. S. O. Ogege²

¹Department of Sociology, Delta State University, Abraka

²Department of Sociology, Delta State University, Abraka

ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges in Nigeria, with profound implications for national development, social stability, and inclusive growth. Despite various government interventions, unemployment among Nigerian youths continues to escalate, reflecting persistent structural imbalances and implementation deficiencies. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP), a state-level initiative designed to reduce youth unemployment through skill acquisition, entrepreneurship promotion, and job creation. Adopting a quantitative research design, the study assessed the programme's impact on employment outcomes, gender inclusivity, and sustainability. Findings revealed that while the DSYDP has successfully provided numerous skill acquisition and empowerment opportunities, its overall impact remains limited by inadequate funding, weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and minimal collaboration with the private sector. The study recommends strengthening accountability mechanisms, aligning training curricula with current labor market demands, enhancing funding sustainability through public-private partnerships, and establishing continuous follow-up support systems for beneficiaries. These measures will help ensure that youth empowerment programs translate into lasting employment outcomes and socio-economic resilience in Delta State and beyond.

Keywords: Youth Unemployment, Delta State Youth Development Programme, Skill Acquisition, Entrepreneurship, Government Intervention, Employment Sustainability

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment in Nigeria poses a profound threat to socio-economic stability, national security, and sustainable development. It undermines the productive capacity of the country's youthful population, who constitute over 60% of the labor force, thereby impeding progress toward achieving inclusive growth and poverty reduction. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stood at 34.9%, one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting a deepening crisis of joblessness among educated and unskilled young people alike. This alarming figure is symptomatic of broader structural weaknesses, including recurring economic recessions, rapid population growth, and limited industrial expansion that fails to absorb new entrants into the labor market. Moreover, the persistent mismatch between academic training and marketable skills has exacerbated the unemployment crisis, as many graduates remain unemployable in contemporary economic sectors. Beyond economic dimensions, youth unemployment has been linked to increased social unrest, migration pressures, cybercrime, and involvement in politically motivated violence, further highlighting the urgency of addressing this challenge through comprehensive, well-targeted interventions.

In response to these multifaceted challenges, the Delta State government introduced the Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) as part of its broader agenda to promote inclusive economic participation and human capital development. The DSYDP seeks to empower young people by equipping them with relevant vocational and entrepreneurial skills, providing start-up capital and mentorship, and fostering partnerships with private sector actors to stimulate job creation. Its objectives align with Nigeria's National Youth Policy (2020), which prioritizes skill acquisition, innovation, and enterprise development as key strategies for tackling unemployment. However, despite these laudable intentions, youth unemployment in Delta State remains persistently high. Critics and scholars have argued that many state-level interventions, including the DSYDP, suffer from poor implementation, inconsistent funding, inadequate stakeholder collaboration, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems (Eze, 2022). As a result, the outcomes of such programmes often fall short of expectations, raising questions about their efficiency, sustainability, and long-term impact. Against this backdrop, a

systematic empirical evaluation of the DSYDP becomes imperative to determine whether it has effectively reduced unemployment and improved youth livelihoods in Delta State, or whether it merely reproduces the implementation inefficiencies characteristic of past interventions.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous intervention efforts, youth unemployment in Delta State remains high, reflecting the persistent gap between government intentions and practical outcomes. The Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) was established to provide sustainable solutions through skills training and entrepreneurship support. However, empirical evidence on its effectiveness is limited. Reports of inadequate funding, poor implementation, and weak evaluation systems raise questions about the programme's long-term viability (Ogundele et al., 2021; Eze et al., 2022).

Existing literature has largely concentrated on national-level interventions, neglecting the peculiarities of state-level programmes like the DSYDP. Adeyemi and Adebayo (2023) observed that many state initiatives operate in isolation from federal programmes, resulting in duplication of efforts and inefficient resource allocation. Furthermore, the lack of qualitative insights into beneficiaries' lived experiences limits understanding of how such programmes affect participants' social and economic realities (Okafor et al., 2020).

Recent global and national disruptions—particularly the COVID-19 pandemic and fluctuating oil prices—have intensified unemployment challenges in Delta State. Udo and Amadi (2021) argue that these economic shocks exposed weaknesses in youth employment strategies and underscored the need for adaptive, resilient interventions. Consequently, this study seeks to fill the existing research gap by evaluating the effectiveness of the DSYDP in reducing youth unemployment, while accounting for both structural barriers and socio-economic shifts between 2020 and 2025.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

- i. Assess the extent to which the DSYDP has reduced youth unemployment in Delta State.
- ii. Evaluate the programme's impact on skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development.
- iii. Examine gender inclusivity and access within the DSYDP framework.
- iv. Identify challenges affecting programme implementation and sustainability.

1.4 Hypothesis

The Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) has no significant effect on youth employment outcomes, skill acquisition, entrepreneurship development, and gender inclusivity in Delta State, and implementation and sustainability challenges do not significantly influence its overall effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has evolved into one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges confronting national development. Structural economic issues, including declining industrial productivity, overdependence on oil revenue, and the slow growth of non-oil sectors, have significantly constrained job creation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), the youth unemployment rate stood at 34.9%, representing one of the highest figures in Sub-Saharan Africa. Adedeji and Bello (2021) argue that prolonged unemployment among the youth population contributes to heightened levels of social unrest, criminal behavior, and increased migration as young people seek opportunities elsewhere. The mismatch between educational qualifications and labor market demands further complicates the crisis, with many graduates lacking the practical and technical skills required by industries. As a result, a significant number of Nigerian youths are either underemployed or engaged in low-paying informal activities that do not guarantee financial stability or career growth.

Beyond its economic implications, youth unemployment poses significant social and political risks. The inability of the formal sector to absorb new entrants into the labor market has fueled frustration and hopelessness, particularly among young people in urban and semi-urban centers. Scholars such as Odukoya (2021) and Joseph and Afolabi (2020) observe that the proliferation of cybercrime, drug abuse, and other antisocial behaviors in Nigeria is closely linked to prolonged joblessness and economic exclusion. This unemployment crisis also undermines social cohesion and weakens the legitimacy of government institutions when citizens perceive public policies as ineffective in addressing their basic livelihood needs. Consequently, addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria requires not only

economic restructuring but also targeted empowerment interventions that equip young people with market-relevant skills and opportunities for sustainable income generation.

2.2 Government Interventions and the DSYDP

Over the years, various levels of government in Nigeria have introduced intervention programs aimed at reducing unemployment and promoting youth empowerment. These programs have focused on skill acquisition, vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and access to microcredit facilities. The Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) represents one of such state-level efforts tailored to address youth unemployment within the Niger Delta region. Aligned with the National Youth Policy (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2020), the DSYDP emphasizes employability enhancement, innovation, and entrepreneurship as sustainable pathways to youth empowerment. The programme seeks to equip young people with practical skills in sectors such as agriculture, ICT, fashion design, and construction, while also providing startup grants and mentorship opportunities to encourage business creation. Through these initiatives, the DSYDP aims to foster self-reliance, reduce dependency on white-collar jobs, and promote inclusive economic growth in Delta State.

However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of government-led interventions remains mixed. Studies such as Onah and Emeka (2023) reveal that while thousands of youths have participated in DSYDP training sessions, only about 40% have been able to secure stable employment or establish successful businesses after completion. This indicates a persistent gap between the acquisition of skills and the transition into gainful employment, raising questions about the alignment between training content and labor market realities. Okonkwo (2025) also argues that weak institutional coordination, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate post-training support undermine the sustainability of such programmes. Furthermore, the absence of robust public-private partnerships limits the scope of job placement opportunities available to trained beneficiaries. These challenges highlight the need for strategic reforms in program design and implementation to enhance the overall impact of the DSYDP on youth livelihoods in Delta State.

2.3 Challenges of Implementation and Funding

One of the major obstacles confronting youth development initiatives such as the DSYDP is inadequate funding. Many government empowerment programs in Nigeria are launched with enthusiasm but falter during implementation due to financial constraints. Agbaje (2021) found that inconsistent budgetary allocations and delayed fund disbursements have led to incomplete projects, reduced participant enrollment, and insufficient provision of materials and training equipment. In Delta State, this has translated into a situation where many beneficiaries receive partial training or fail to access the promised startup funds necessary to convert their skills into viable enterprises. Moreover, the dependence on state government resources—without significant private or donor support—makes these initiatives vulnerable to political cycles and fiscal instability. As a result, program continuity and long-term impact are often compromised once funding priorities shift or administrations change.

Equally concerning is the absence of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to track progress and ensure accountability. Ifeanyi and Musa (2022) argue that the lack of standardized data collection mechanisms prevents policymakers from accurately assessing program effectiveness or identifying areas requiring improvement. Without reliable feedback systems, it becomes difficult to measure long-term employment outcomes or to adapt training curricula to evolving industry demands. Furthermore, weak institutional oversight contributes to inefficiencies, leakages, and mismanagement of resources, eroding public confidence in such initiatives. To improve performance, experts such as Adeoye (2024) recommend the establishment of transparent M&E systems, digital reporting platforms, and independent audit mechanisms to enhance accountability and promote data-driven policy adjustments in youth development interventions.

2.4 Gender Dimensions of Youth Employment

Gender inclusivity represents an essential but often overlooked aspect of youth employment and empowerment programs. In many parts of Nigeria, including Delta State, women face distinct social and cultural barriers that hinder their access to economic opportunities. Patriarchal norms, gender-based discrimination, and unequal access to education and finance contribute to the underrepresentation of women in formal employment and entrepreneurship. Agbogun (2022) asserts that most youth programmes are designed with a gender-neutral approach that inadvertently overlooks the specific needs and constraints faced by young women. Consequently, while male participants may thrive in sectors such as construction, transport, or ICT, female participants are often confined to low-income or traditionally “feminized” trades such as tailoring, catering, and cosmetology. This limited scope reinforces gender inequality and reduces the potential impact of empowerment programs on overall socio-economic development.

Additionally, empirical evidence suggests that empowering young women has a multiplier effect on household welfare and community development. Studies by Agba and Udeh (2021) demonstrate that women who gain employment or start businesses tend to reinvest their earnings in family welfare, education, and community projects, thereby promoting inclusive growth. However, without deliberate gender-sensitive strategies, programmes like the DSYDP risk perpetuating existing inequalities. Women’s limited access to credit facilities, mentorship, and digital literacy further restricts their ability to benefit fully from empowerment initiatives. To ensure balanced outcomes, youth development programmes must incorporate gender mainstreaming components, including targeted outreach for women,

mentorship networks, and access to financial services. Enhancing women's participation in the DSYDP would not only promote equity but also strengthen the program's contribution to sustainable development and poverty reduction in Delta State.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory, originally developed by Schultz (1961) and later expanded by Becker (1964), which emphasizes that investments in human beings—through education, skills development, health, and training—are critical to improving individual productivity and fostering broader economic growth. The theory posits that just as physical capital (machinery, tools, and technology) enhances production, so too does investment in human capital enhance the efficiency, creativity, and income-earning potential of individuals. In the context of youth development, Human Capital Theory provides a powerful lens for understanding how targeted interventions such as vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and mentorship programs can enhance employability and self-reliance among young people. The theory assumes that skill acquisition not only improves labor productivity but also equips individuals to adapt to changing economic environments, thereby reducing unemployment and poverty in the long run.

Applied to this study, Human Capital Theory helps evaluate whether the Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) effectively transforms state investments in education and vocational training into measurable employment outcomes. By providing youths with practical competencies, startup funds, and exposure to entrepreneurial opportunities, the DSYDP represents an investment in the human capital of Delta State's labor force. The theory suggests that when such investments are well-designed and efficiently implemented, they lead to higher earnings, reduced joblessness, and enhanced economic participation among beneficiaries. However, the persistence of unemployment despite these efforts raises critical questions about the adequacy and alignment of training with market needs. Therefore, the theory serves as a diagnostic tool for assessing not only the presence of skill-building activities but also their quality, relevance, and sustainability. In essence, the Human Capital Theory anchors this study's exploration of how effectively the DSYDP converts training and empowerment into tangible socio-economic gains for youths in Delta State.

3. Methodology

The study adopted survey research design, using quantitative data. The population comprises youths aged 18–35 who participated in the DSYDP between 2020 and 2025, estimated at 10,000 individuals. Using the Yamane (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a sample size of 385 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling across Delta North, Central, and South senatorial districts. A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on participants' demographic profiles, training experiences, and post-programme employment outcomes. Additionally, Key Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation) with the aid of SPSS version 25 was used.

4. Data Presentation and Interpretation

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	120	31.2
	26–30	105	27.3
	31–35	85	22.1
	Above 35	75	19.4
Gender	Male	210	54.5
	Female	175	45.5
Education	Secondary	140	36.4
	Tertiary	180	46.8
	Postgraduate	65	16.8
Employment Status (Post-Training)	Employed	130	33.8

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	Self-employed	115	29.9
	Unemployed	140	36.3
	Total	385	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The demographic distribution indicates that a majority of DSYDP beneficiaries were aged between 18 and 30 years (58.5%), reflecting the programme's youth-centric focus. Gender participation was balanced, reflecting the programme's effort toward inclusivity. Most participants (46.8%) had tertiary education, suggesting that the initiative attracts relatively educated youths seeking practical skills or self-employment opportunities. However, unemployment after training remained high at 36.3%, indicating a gap between skill acquisition and actual job creation.

Table 4.2 Correlation Analysis between Socioeconomic Variables and Employment Outcomes

Variable	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
Education Level	0.462	0.000	Positive and significant relationship
Skill Acquisition Quality	0.518	0.000	Positive and significant relationship
Access to Start-up Funds	0.431	0.001	Positive and significant relationship
Programme Duration	0.382	0.003	Positive and significant relationship
Overall Relationship	0.448	0.000	Significant

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The correlation results show a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between education level, skill acquisition quality, and employment outcomes among DSYDP participants ($r = 0.518$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that better-trained and more educated participants were more likely to secure employment or establish businesses. Access to start-up funding also had a significant positive influence ($r = 0.431$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that financial support is critical to post-training success. The overall correlation ($r = 0.448$) suggests that the DSYDP has a moderately strong positive effect on employment outcomes, although gaps remain in sustaining long-term impact and scalability.

4.1. Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that while the DSYDP has provided valuable skills and entrepreneurship opportunities, it has not fully resolved the problem of youth unemployment. The positive correlations between skill acquisition, funding access, and employment outcomes affirm the theoretical assumptions of Human Capital Theory, emphasizing the importance of training quality and financial empowerment. However, persistent unemployment among graduates points to systemic issues, including weak linkage between training and labor market demands, as noted by Adeoye (2024). The results also echo Eze (2022) and Agbaje (2021), who highlighted that inadequate funding and monitoring mechanisms undermine program sustainability.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study conclude that the Delta State Youth Development Programme (DSYDP) has made commendable progress in enhancing youth skills and promoting empowerment across the state. However, its overall impact on reducing unemployment remains limited due to structural and implementation challenges. While many beneficiaries have gained valuable vocational and entrepreneurial skills, the transition from training to sustainable employment or business creation has been relatively weak. This indicates a gap between the programme's objectives and actual outcomes, particularly in translating skill acquisition into long-term livelihood opportunities. The need for a more adaptive and inclusive framework is therefore evident, as youth unemployment continues to threaten social stability and economic growth in Delta State.

To strengthen the programme's effectiveness, several key recommendations are proposed. First, the training curricula should be regularly updated to reflect evolving industry trends and technological innovations, ensuring that graduates possess market-relevant skills. Second, funding sources should be diversified through strategic public-private partnerships to enhance financial sustainability. Third, robust monitoring and evaluation systems must be instituted to track progress, identify gaps, and measure impact objectively. Additionally, gender-specific barriers should be addressed through deliberate inclusion strategies that empower young women to participate equally. Finally, post-training support structures, including mentorship, financial access, and market linkages, should be institutionalized to ensure that skills acquired translate into viable employment and entrepreneurship outcomes. Together, these measures can enhance the DSYDP's contribution to sustainable youth development and economic transformation in Delta State.

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