

## E-COMMERCE SKILL ACQUISITION FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The paper examined e-commerce skill acquisition for empowerment as a way forward amidst youth unemployment in Nigeria. E-commerce skills represent an inevitable requirement of the labour market that ought to be provided to youths and graduates. Such skills have created many job opportunities, reduced unemployment rates, doubled productivity rates, and played a vital role for its users in development field. The paper takes a critical look at the concepts of youth empowerment, skill acquisition and e-commerce. The paper also looked at e-commerce skills acquisition and other e-commerce skills needed to be acquired by youths. The paper concluded that if youth unemployment in Nigeria is to be reduced, there is need for the training of educated man and woman who can function effectively in their society in which they live in terms of self-employment and self-reliant which e-commerce education can provide. The paper recommended among others that government and non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations should strengthen and uphold the continuity of skills acquisition training programs in different fields of trade including e-commerce, as it has proven to reduce poverty, unemployment, crime, and joblessness in societies. It can be done by giving more priority to the program and ensuring that the program is sustained for a lifetime program. Inevitability of adding an e-commerce course to tertiary education courses and to develop courses that contribute to the preparation of a highly qualified graduate conforming to the labor market prerequisites.*

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**Keywords:** E-commerce, skill acquisition, youth, empowerment.

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### Introduction

It is common knowledge that about 80% of graduates in most Nigerian universities find it hard to get employment every year, this is largely due to the curricula of the universities and other tertiary schools with emphasis on training for white-collar jobs (Ajufo, 2013). Nigeria, a country with an estimated population of 211.4 million people (National Bureau Statistics, 2021) is well endowed with abundant human and natural resources and a favorable geographical location in the world map. Nigeria like most developing nations of the world is faced with myriad of problems which include youth and graduate unemployment, high rate of poverty, conflict and diseases, insincerity, over-depending in foreign goods, low economic growth and development, lack of capacity and skills needed to move the economy forward and urbanization. Unemployment has become a major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youths causing frustration, dejection and depending on family members and friends. The high rate of unemployment among the youths in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country (Ajufo, 2013). More than half of the Nigerian population is under the age of 30 according to the National Population Commission (2013). Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) observed from the excerpts of statistics obtained from the National Manpower Board and Federal Bureau of statistics that Nigeria has a youth population of eighty (80) Million representing 60 percent of the total population of the country, Sixty four (64) Million of them are unemployed while one million six hundred thousand (1.6 million) are underemployed.

These situations pose great challenges to the very existence of individuals and the national development. To salvage these situations there is need for the training of educated man and woman who can function effectively in their society in which they live in terms of self-

employment and self-reliant which skills acquisition training programs in different fields of trade including e-commerce can provide.

### **Concept of Youth Empowerment**

There is need to enable young people to have a say in decisions which affect them and to have lower and heard voices, this would give young people the economic, social and cultural advancement of their countries, and to gain self-fulfillment. Ezeani (2012) posits that young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of implications of these choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of that action. The way in which a nation defines its youth is related to the objective conditions and realities that exist on the ground especially historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues that need to be addressed, that is why nations use different parameters and variables in defining their youth. Youth according to Jega (2012) is "a special group of people with strong stamina and passion for realizing certain set goals and objectives ". Youth empowerment is an altitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youths and adults (Sasaki, 2006).

Youth empowerment in this context means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. These enabling conditions includes, economic and social base, political will, adequate resources allocation and supportive legal and administrative frameworks, a stable environment of equality, peace and democracy, and access to knowledge, information and skills and a positive value system.

### **Skill Acquisition**

Skills acquisition has to do with different ways through which graduates and youths (educated and non- educated) can be trained to achieve self-reliance rather than waiting for jobs in the formal sector alone. Osita, Oraegbunam and Onuzulike (2022) refers skill acquisition as a process of enhancing entrepreneurial ability and knowledge through structural training and institution building programmes which basically aim at enlarging the base of entrepreneur in order to hasten the pace at which new business are created. It involves the development of a new skill, practices and means of doing things that are usually acquired through formal or informal training (Gumbari, 2011). It has also been described by Isaac (2011) as the panacea for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for financial independence, job and wealth creation, while instilling self-sufficiency and reliance in the trainee. Skill acquisition has been conceived as an effective and efficient tool for self-reliance and sustainability of skills. The skill to be gained, behavior, and qualities of character are transmitted to enable the trainee develop intellectual, and moral character which prepares him/her for self-reliance (Osita, Oraegbunam and Onuzulike, 2022). The whole notion is that, young people should acquire skill training mechanism in addition to their regular academic programme/ curriculum in the crucial sectors in order to remain relevant in this contemporarily competitive world. Gumbari (2011) noted that, skill acquisition is a vital key, needed in eliminating hunger and poverty in a society like Nigeria, because it helps in reduction and elimination of joblessness in any given society.

There is need for growth and expansion of skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria for economic emancipation of the youths through self- reliance trainings and employment generation. This is one of the reasons why federal government came up with several schemes to assist in watering down joblessness among the youths. In the year 2012 for instance, the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) introduced Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship (SAED) Programs into the NYSC orientation course content. The idea behind the programme was to incorporate, sensitize and for mobilization of young graduates for skill acquisition

during and after their service year (Muogbo, Eze, and Obananya, 2021). Before now, the efforts of the government towards youth empowerment programme was in agricultural production but as time went by, the idea was moved from agriculture to industrial, ICT and handcrafts production that can yield income and make the youths viable. In recent years, in order to achieve the desired goal, different training programmes were instituted by different tiers of Nigerian government to instill in youths the habit of creative thinking. Some of the training programmes are:

**National Directorate of Employment:** This is a scheme set up by the federal government in 1986 to help the youth to ensure a base in life. This could be made manifest through workshops, seminars, industrial loan scheme and a lot of others. To make this scheme a reality venture, there were diversity of training by the directorate to make the youths more viable.

**National Open Apprenticeship Scheme:** This is a type of skill acquisition programme created to assist in training of unemployed youths such as school drop out to acquire uncommon skills that will help them to find gainful employment on completion of training. In this scheme, applicants are given forms to complete by indicating their vocational interest, location and educational background. This implies that to a large extent each applicant has a choice as to what trade he or she wants to be engaged in. The significance of skill acquisition to economic development of a country cannot be pushed aside. Thus, the growth of any desirous economy depends on the development of skill needed by her players to carry out a smooth running of their daily business activities (Abdul, 2018). Skill acquisition is essential to the survival of any youth who ventures into entrepreneurship of any sort. This is because, skills are the knowledge established through a superlative performance in certain circumstances, and Skills are acquired and sustained through training (Osita, Oraegbunam and Onuzulike, 2022).

### **E-commerce**

E-commerce has supported many corporations; especially narrow scale ones, to establish a strong existence in the market through providing cheaper yet more efficient distribution channels for their products and services. Al-Balqasi (2020) indicated that e-commerce emerged as a result of the increasing use of computers and advanced systems in banks and companies competing to use of the latest technologies in order to facilitate their customers' commercial processes saving customers' time and effort. In essence, E-commerce relies on the buying and selling several goods through the Internet. E-commerce is a system that allows buying and selling goods, services and information via the Internet. It also provides electronic services that support benefits generation, e.g., enhancing demands for goods, services and information. E-commerce promotes sales support operations and customer service. Hence, it might be described as an electronic market in which communication occurs among sellers e.g., suppliers, companies, or stores, mediators e.g., brokers and buyers. In such a market, products and services are supplied virtually or digitally for which payment is made in electronic money (Al-Balqasi, 2020, p. 95).

The researcher believes that there is no specific agreed upon definition of ecommerce, yet diverse and multiple definitions. Therefore, for the researcher, ecommerce represents "one of the commercial activities that are based on communicators' electronic interaction through electronic means acting as mediator for displaying, selling and distributing different goods and services using electronic payment systems. E-commerce is important for reducing product purchase cost, achieving greater benefits attainment, achieving better buyer service delivery, shopping speed and price comparison, accessing different markets, creating new jobs, and freedom from restrictions (Al-Attar, 2021, pp. 21-22). E-commerce skills represent an inevitable requirement of the labor market that should be provided to youths and graduates. Such skills have created many job opportunities, reduced unemployment rates, doubled productivity rates, and played a vital role for its users in development field.

### **E-commerce Skills Acquisition**

E-commerce can be operated using Internet and Web. Accordingly, Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017), defined the e-commerce skills as experience and slack resources that are peculiar to development and management of Internet-based businesses. The skills required in carrying out e-commerce transaction successfully according to Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) can be classified into three broad computer application areas, such as fundamental word processing applications, web designs and web developments, electronic payment systems. Word processing is an application programme that allows one to create letters, reports, newsletters, tables, form letters, brochures and Web pages. Using this application programme, one can add pictures, tables and charts to documents. One can also use it to check spelling and grammar. The application packages under word processing include: Microsoft office packages (Ms Word, Excel, Power point, and Access) and CorelDraw. Web design prepares students for careers as professional website designers, including those who are interested in designing the look, layout and organization of websites, while, Web development prepares students for careers as professional Web developers, including those who are interested in developing functional aspects of Websites such as database integration, programming and other server-side components.

The application packages under Web design and Web developments, includes: database management system, MYSQL, internet navigation skills and graphics. An electronic payment system is a system of financial exchange between buyers and sellers in the online environment that is facilitated by a digital financial instrument (such as encrypted credit card numbers, electronic checks, or digital cash) backed by a bank, an intermediary, or by legal tender. The application packages under electronic payment system include e-banking system, such as: smart card, electronic cheque, electronic cash and online payment systems. AL-kardousei (2023), also categorized e-commerce skills into two (2) main skills which include; the skill of building e-commerce sites via social networks and the skill of building e-commerce websites via the web.

### **Other E-commerce Skills Needed to be Acquired by Youths**

The professional skills and knowledge of e-commerce needed to be acquired by youths and graduates according to Wang (2021) include; skill of managing online store, product uploading and processing skill, skill of foreign trade, skill of marketing, skill of dealing with conflicts in business, skill of business data analysis, knowledge of foreign trade. These are 21st century skills which are rarely covered by the formal school curricula (Dede, 2007; OECD, 2009, 2011). These sets of skills are relevant to youths and graduates who are seeking for self-employment or employment in the informal sector (Dede, 2007; Burnett & Jayaram, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

The paper examined e-commerce skill acquisition for youth empowerment in Nigeria. Based on the literatures that were reviewed, the researchers conclude that if youth unemployment in Nigeria is to be reduced, there is need for the training of educated man and woman who can function effectively in their society in which they live in terms of self-employment and self-reliant which e-commerce education can provide.

### **The Way Forward**

Based on the conclusion of the present study, the researchers recommends:

1. Government and Non-governmental organizations, Civil Society Organizations should strengthen and uphold the continuity of skills acquisition training programs in different fields of trade including e-commerce, as it has proven to reduce poverty, unemployment, crime, and joblessness in societies. It can be done by giving more priority to the program and ensuring that the program is sustained for a lifetime program.

2. Inevitability of adding an e-commerce course to tertiary education courses and to develop courses that contribute to the preparation of a highly qualified graduate conforming to the labor market prerequisites.
3. Lecturers and instructors should be trained and retrained in the areas of e-commerce skill acquisition. This would enable them to effectively impart on students the desired e-commerce skills.
4. Finally, there is a need for the government to shift its policies towards making effective skills acquisition training programs in different fields of trade including e-commerce that will ensure continuity and the program's sustainability.

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