

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AN ASSESSMENT
OF THE N-POWER PROGRAMME IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA (2016 – 2022)**

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Abstract

This paper critically analyzes how youth empowerment programme has influenced human resource development in Osun State, Nigeria. The study is placed in the context of the Human Capital Theory and adopts a qualitative descriptive design using document analysis and structured interviews to question the impact of the N-Power on skill development, entrepreneurial intentions, and job employability among young people in Nigeria. The results obtained with the aid of secondary data indicate that the programme has brought about the development of technical and vocational skills, however, structural and institutional gaps are factors limiting its effectiveness and sustainability. It is worth noting that lack of standardised training curriculum, lack of support after the programmes, and lack of integration into the overall labour market have curtailed the transformative potential of the intervention. Even though the goals of the N-Power are to promote self-sufficiency and economic efficiency, the statistics indicate that many beneficiaries experienced only short-term relief without a way to transition to permanent jobs or ventures. Another finding of the study is a lack of coordination between policy intent and implementation, and the necessity to reform the system and improve policy coordination. Based on theoretical analysis, the study posits that empowerment should be viewed not as simple accomplishment of skills, but also as a process of making the atmosphere conducive within which the youth can realise their potentials in a meaningful manner. The paper concludes that social investment programmes such as the N-Power should move beyond short-term initiatives and become institutionally entrenched strategies linked to long-term economic planning. Some of the policy recommendations are standardised training, integration of the private sector, post-exit support schemes and decentralised governance of the programme.

Keywords: N-Power, Human Resource Development, Skills Acquisition, Youth Empowerment.

1. Introduction

Youth empowerment has emerged as a focus policy towards sustainable socio-economic transformation in modern development discourse, especially in developing countries with large populations. Youth empowerment is a process that is undertaken intentionally to give the young people the skills, knowledge, resources, and opportunities to be able to engage in economic, political and social development meaningfully. It is also closely associated with Human Resource Development (HRD) which aims at improving the capabilities, competencies and productivity of the individuals to facilitate the national development. HRD focuses on the systematic development of competencies, employability, and innovation potentials that empower individuals to play a constructive role in the economic development and social stability (Swanson and Holton, 2009). In countries like Nigeria where the youth population constitutes a large proportion of the overall population, empowering the youths through well organized skills development programmes has not only become a developmental imperative but also a strategic human capital investment. Nigeria has a strong demographic strength as a result of the young population.

The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) claims that more than 70 percent of the population in Nigeria is young, hence they constitute the most economically active segment of the population. Though this is the possible demographic potential, the country has been characterized by persistently high youth unemployment levels, underemployment and job insecurity due to the fact that 13-14% of youths are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The fact that the Nigerian economy cannot absorb the rapidly growing labour force has produced significant developmental pressures, such as poverty, social exclusion, insecurity, and migration pressures. This has led to a greater policy focus on youth-based empowerment programmes to improve skill-building, livelihoods, and employability. These goals align with the principles of HRD, which underlines that investment in human capital in the form of education, training and on-the-job experience is the key to the national productivity and long-term economic stability (Garavan, Carbery, and Rock, 2012).

The development of socio-economic policies in Nigeria has historically been in response to the need to respond to structural issues of poverty, unemployment, inequality and a poor industrial capacity. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, governments have come up with different development policies aimed at boosting the economy and enhancing the social welfare. Initial policy frameworks were marked mostly by state-directed development planning, such as state investments in agriculture, infrastructure and manufacturing via the First to Fourth National Development Plans of 1962-1985. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such initiatives was constrained by structural vulnerabilities in the Nigerian economy, including excessive reliance on oil revenues, inconsistencies in policies, corruption, and inefficiencies in the institutions (Awojobi, 2021). The late 1970s and 1980s economic crises only contributed to the susceptibility of the Nigerian economy and the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. The programme aimed at liberalizing the economy by implementing policies like privatization, deregulation and cutting of government spending. Despite its intentions to stabilize the economy and facilitate market efficiency, SAP also led to severe socio-economic outcomes, such as poverty and worker retrenchment and the growth of inequality (Olanrewaju and Adebisi, 2022). These changes enhanced poverty and joblessness, especially in the youth.

Another significant change in the socio-economic policy orientation of Nigeria came with the restoration of democracy in 1999. Democratic governments launched various poverty alleviation and job creating initiatives aimed at dealing with the rampant poverty and unemployment among young people. Among them, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), and the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) stood out as they prioritized development of skills, encouragement of entrepreneurship, and involvement of the private sector in creating employment opportunities (Onafowora, 2020). These interventions were further increased by the subsequent governments with the help of programmes like Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN), the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), and other youth entrepreneurship schemes carried out through agencies like the Bank of Industry and the National Directorate of Employment (Akinresoye et al., 2023). Regardless of these initiatives, most of the programmes have had their share of minimal successes because of issues like poor funding, poor monitoring systems, policy incoherence and politicization. One of the reasons why youth unemployment remains high in Nigeria is the lack of a fit between educational achievements and the labour market demands. Numerous graduates do not have the best trade and industry-related skills as demanded by the employers and the issue of graduate unemployability is on the increase (ILO, 2021).

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is thus more than mere lack of employment opportunities and it is more about structural problems such as skills gaps, skills employability and lack of economic opportunities. In places like Osun State where the industrialization and diversification of the economy are at relatively low levels, youths tend to have limited access to formal job opportunities. Most young people, out of survival, informal economic activities, family support or migration to urban centers to seek greater opportunities. Such conditions reduce the livelihood sustainability and limit the proper use of human resources to develop the region. It is against this background of increasing unemployment and skills disparities that in 2016 the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the N-Power Programme under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. The programme was initiated as one of the key aspects of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) that aimed at enhancing the employability of unemployed youths by developing their skills, providing training, workplace experiences, and by giving them income support. In contrast to previous programs that put more emphasis on financial support, N-Power was aimed at human capital development by providing the participants with real-world skills applicable to the major sectors, including education, healthcare, agriculture, and digital technology (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024 and Akinfiresoye et al., 2023).

Youth empowerment initiatives have also been incorporated in the HRD strategies globally. Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, developed economies, have adopted formal vocational education and apprenticeship schemes that integrate on the job training with technical training. The dual vocational training system in Germany, such as, combines the classroom training with industry based apprenticeships whereby graduates learn in practice and with the demand in the labour market (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2012). These global experiences indicate that sustainable youth employment strategies need coordinated strategies that implement skills development, exposure in the workplace and institutional support.

In global context, the N-Power programme in Nigeria is an effort to bring national policies in the empowerment of the youth in line with the internationally accepted practices in the HRD through capacity building, sectoral training, and work-based learning, with the aims of transforming the unemployed youths

to productive human capital that will help in national development. With youth unemployment also being a big challenge in a state like Osun where the programme is located, the programme has great potentials of enhancing livelihood sustainability, skills acquisition, and employability among the youths. Thus, the investigation of the effects of the N-Power programme in the Osun State would be necessary in order to comprehend the role of government-driven youth empowerment programmes in the human resource development process in terms of skill acquisition, employability and livelihood sustainability in Nigeria. Specifically, this study investigates the role of the N-power programme in enhancing livelihood sustainability among youths in Osun State; and assesses the relevance of the N-power programme on skills and employability opportunities among the youths in Osun State.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment is a multidimensional concept which entails the establishment of enabling conditions, which enable young people to establish the ability of making strategic life choices and impact in decisions relating to their lives. It extends beyond just the employment opportunities, but to the self-confidence, the ability to make decisions, political participation, and access to social and economic opportunities (ILO, 2021). Youth empowerment in Nigeria is mostly linked to government programmes that focus on empowering the youths with entrepreneurial skills, vocational training and educational assistance. Empowerment is not only an outcome but also a process of emancipation and self-realisation leading to agency and autonomy (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). According to scholars, youth empowerment is a process and an outcome. It results in better socio-economic status, employment, and autonomy, whereas as a process aims to increase the capacity, voice, and access of young people to resources (ILO, 2021; Charles and Ifedayo, 2024).

2.1.2 N-Power

The N-Power scheme, the social investment and youth employment scheme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, is a popular topic of study due to its comprehensive approach to mobilizing the youth into the economy by working as temporary placements in the government and stipends, as well as sector-based training (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024). The programme operates through various components, which include N-Teach, N-Health and N-Agro, which offer work placements, vocational exposure and experience to the beneficiaries. Empirical evidence of various states in Nigeria shows that N-Power has led to observable short-term outcomes. They encompass income support in terms of stipends that alleviate short-term vulnerability, a chance to achieve the basic work experience by the participants, and transition to self-employment or wage employment post-programme (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024; Omoju et al., 2023).

2.1.3 Human Resources Development (HRD)

The concept of Human Resource Development (HRD) is increasingly regarded in Nigeria as a planned and purposeful investment as opposed to a collection of isolated training actions (Ohwojero et al., 2024). HRD is a systematic approach whereby organizations prepare individuals with knowledge, skills and competencies needed to address current and forthcoming needs. It is a process that encompasses formal training, career planning, mentoring, knowledge management, and succession planning aimed at enhancing performance at an individual and organizational level (Ohwojero et al., 2024). Empirical research in Nigeria

has shown that HRD initiatives that are consistent with organizational and labour market strategies, so-called strategic HRD, can lead to quantifiable productivity and employability returns.

2.1.4 Skill Acquisition

In Nigeria, Skill acquisition, also known as vocational training, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and entrepreneurship training, is frequently considered one of the key policies aimed at alleviating unemployment among young people and increasing their self-sufficiency (Eze, 2023; Akinfiresoye et al., 2023). Empirical research on the situation in Nigerian states suggests that market-oriented and practical skill training, in particular, in the presence of start-up capital or market access, can make a significant impact on self-employment and income generation. Tailoring, carpentry, barbing, agro-processing, and phone repairs are some of the trades that yielded positive results where trainees not only underwent technical training but also assistance in the tools and market access (Eze, 2023).

2.1.5 Rationale for the Introduction of N-Power in Nigeria

The N-Power Programme was majorly influenced by the necessity to mitigate various acute socio-economic issues afflicting young people in the state and the entire Nigeria. The programme is a component of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), and was initiated in June 2016 when President Muhammadu Buhari was in office. It was aimed at helping to reduce the unemployment of the youth, encourage the development of skills and the delivery of services in a better way by involving the young Nigerians in productive activities. The initiative aims to empower human capital development through structured placements, training, and financial assistance and offer temporary work opportunities to unemployed graduates. The rising rate of youth unemployment and underemployment was one of the key factors that led to the introduction of N-Power in Osun State.

The high rates of poverty and low income among the youths were also another key motivating factor to the programme. A large percentage of the youth in Osun State do not have a stable source of income, which puts them in a situation of poor living conditions and economic vulnerability. The N-Power programme is thus a social safety net as it offers beneficiaries monthly allowances and skills training opportunities. This aid money helps the participants to access basic needs, assistance to the members of the family and investing in small scale economic activities. By doing so, the programme can help to sustain the livelihood and reduce poverty among Nigerian youths (Michael and Hezekiah, 2019).

The programme was also initiated due to social issues that are related to the youth unemployment such as crime, political thuggery and social unrest. The impact of unemployment among the youths has been associated with the high activity of youths in deviant activities in most areas in Nigeria. Programmes like N-Power through which youths are empowered are thus a preventive measure of establishing social stability. The programme discourages criminal activity and promotes civic responsibility and social inclusion through financial support and involvement of the young people in productive activities.

The introduction of the programme was also aided by financial support which was provided by both national and international sources. In 2016, the World Bank approved a credit facility of about \$500 million through the International Development Association to support social safety net programmes in Nigeria (Okoro & Bassey, 2018). Besides, the Nigerian government spent a considerable amount of resources to finance programs in the National Social Investment Programme. National Bureau of Statistics indicates that

millions of Nigerians have been beneficiaries of these interventions in terms of training opportunities and financial support (NBS, 2018). Lastly, N-Power is in line with the wider objectives of the Nigerian government in terms of economic diversification, as well as human capital development. The programme aims to ensure young people have technical and entrepreneurial as well as digital skills in areas including agriculture, education and technology to ensure that they have a skilled workforce that can contribute to sustainable economic development outside of the oil industry. On the whole, the N-Power programme in Osun State was a result of interdependent objectives to decrease unemployment, alleviate poverty, eliminate skills gaps, empower public institutions, and inclusive socio-economic growth.

2.1.6 Relevance of Youth Empowerment Programme in terms of N-Power Operations on Human Resources Development in Osun State

The N-Power programme has received an extensive academic and policy interest because of its applicability to human resource development (HRD) in Nigeria, especially the states like Osun. The programme, which was launched in 2016 during the tenure of Muhammadu Buhari as part of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), was aimed at equipping the unemployed youths with employability skills, temporary income support, and exposure the participants to sectoral work experiences.

The income-based social protection aspect of the programme is one of the important aspects of its relevance. Monthly stipends are available to the beneficiaries as they participate which alleviates immediate financial stress and economic instability. This is financial aid that enables the participants to focus on learning skills and getting work experience instead of working precariously in informal jobs just to make ends meet. Studies carried out in the South-West, which include Osun State, reveal that the stipend system enhanced the financial independence of many recipients, boosted their self-confidence, and their ability to access basic resources (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024). As Akinfiresoye et al. (2023) assert, in the majority of cases, empowerment efforts start with the establishment of enabling circumstances in which individuals can build and put their capacities into practice. The stipend aspect of the programme in this way offers a basis of skill building, entrepreneurship and economic engagement. In addition to funding, N-Power also helps human resource develop by sector-based training and exposure to the real world of work. The N-Teach, N-Health, and N-Agro components give beneficiaries a chance to have professional experience in key areas. As an illustration, N-Teach participants offer the support of teachers in schools, thus acquiring the skills of classroom management, instructional support, and digital literacy. Equally, N-Health volunteers are involved in community health awareness, primary healthcare provision, and N-Agro beneficiaries support farmers by providing agricultural extension services. Such experiences enhance the development of technical and soft skills, which enhances the employability and readiness to the labour market of the participants (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024). According to Ohwojoro et al. (2024), successful HRD programmes are based on structured training and actual organizational work, which implies that N-Power is based on the main ideas of the contemporary human resource development practice.

Relevance of the programme in terms of skill acquisition and capacity building is another important aspect of the relevance of the programme. Studies also demonstrate that organized training programs boost self-efficacy of youths, their entrepreneurial skills, as well as their ability to innovate (Eze, 2023; Akinfiresoye et al., 2023). Osun state beneficiaries have stated that they have learnt how to assist in teaching, provide agricultural advisory services, health care, information and communication technology and simple entrepreneurship. The competencies enhance the likelihood of participants securing jobs or setting up small-

scale enterprises (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024). This goes in line with the bigger argument that youth empowerment programmes must be based on market-relevant skills that align with labour market requirements (ILO, 2021). The programme helps in consolidating the human capital base of the Osun State by equipping human resource with the competencies. Nonetheless, the applicability of the N-Power programme should also be addressed with a number of operational and structural constraints. Experts have noted that the variability in the quality of training, lack of standardized certification, and poor relationships with employment prospects at the end of the programme hamper its long-term effectiveness (Charles and Ifedayo, 2024; Omoju et al., 2023). In the absence of effective labour market integration policies, there is a risk of many beneficiaries returning to unemployment upon leaving the programme. Ohwojero et al. (2024) highlight that constant skill enhancement and career paths are crucial in the process of sustainable human resource development. Therefore, by enhancing collaboration with vocational training institutions, microfinance institutions, and the employers of the private sector in Osun State, programme outcomes might be greatly enhanced.

The programme is also affected by operational challenges which influence its effectiveness. The delayed or irregular payment of stipends is one of the issues that is frequently reported. Beneficiaries are supposed to be paid 30,000 nairas per month, but administrative problems, including the inconsistency of Bank Verification Numbers (BVN), and inconsistency in records have caused delays in their payments (Aderonmu, 2017). Such irregularities usually cause financial strain to those participants who utilize the stipends to transport, feed and other necessities. The temporary nature of the programme and lack of exit strategy is also another limitation. The N-Power programme is usually two years, at the end of which most beneficiaries are uncertain about the job opportunities. According to scholars, the absence of formal connections to stable jobs or entrepreneurship decreases the long-term contribution of the programme to human resource development (Okoro & Bassey, 2018). This is one of the ways that in Osun State where post-programme integration is still a key socio-economic issue, the sustainability of the results of empowerment suffered.

2.2 Theoretical Justifications

Relevant theories on Human Resource Development-Youth Empowerment relationships are many, the study aims to examine the suitability of the Human Capital Theory (HCT). The Human Capital Theory (HCT) is the model that establishes an economic rationale as to how individuals and societies can obtain economic gains through the investment in education, training, health, and skills that enhance productivity. The theory considers human beings as an asset whose potential can be improved via a conscious investment of knowledge and skill improvement. In this light, human capital is as significant to the national development as the physical or financial capital. In the case of the countries with high unemployment rates among youth and fast-increasing youth population, such as Nigeria, the Human Capital Theory can be a valuable tool in explaining how empowerment work schemes such as N-Power may assist in creating a viable labour force and igniting economic change. One of the advantages of Human Capital Theory is its high level of applicability to the policy of a state. The theory is used by many governments, especially in developing countries to justify their investments in education, vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes. The logic behind the N-Power programme design in Nigeria is evident. The programme aims to transform the youth unemployment problem into an opportunity by investing in skills, and offering temporary employment opportunities. N-Power plans to enhance the employability and productivity of

young Nigerians through training, work experience and funding. This is in line with the HCT assumption that capacity building and welfare support can result in a better skilled and employable workforce.

Nevertheless, to implement the Human Capital Theory in Nigeria, it is also necessary to consider its drawbacks. The theory presupposes that the labour markets are efficient, and those, who develop skills, would be paid with jobs. In practice, the qualified citizens are not always able to find a job due to such structural issues as patronage politics, corruption, unequal distribution of resources in the regions, and inconsistency in policies (Aiyede, 2014; Ogundele et al., 2012). Consequently, when technical or vocational training is offered by programmes such as N-Power, the absorptive capacity of the Nigerian labour market is limited and this may not enable the beneficiaries to convert the skills that they have acquired into sustainable jobs. To overcome these weaknesses, N-Power was thus implemented in 2016 as the part of the National Social Investment Programme to integrate welfare provision with skill training and temporary employment opportunities. Although these are the intentions, the programme has been curtailed by operational issues like late stipends, poor mentoring, poor monitoring systems and absence of exit strategies. Still, Human Capital Theory has not been forgotten since it underlines the necessity to invest in youth capacity as a channel to national development. The theory can be used to assess the extent to which government investments in programmes such as N-Power are effectively changing skills into productive labour or whether structural constraints still inhibit the successful utilization of human capital.

2.3 Empirical Review

The link between skill acquisition, employability and livelihood sustainability has found wide application in the empirical studies on youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria and other developing countries. The literature indicates generally that vocational, technical and entrepreneurial skills are necessary in enhancing labour market participation, generation of income and long term economic stability among young people. The success of these programmes however is heavily reliant on the design, the institutional capabilities as well as the overall economic context in which the programmes are run. The initial research on youth employment programmes in Nigeria points to the fact that they are hindered by a number of structural issues. According to Aiyede (2014) analyzed youth jobs programs like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and discovered that despite the aim of the programmes, which was supposed to offer vocational and entrepreneurial skills, the programmes were not effective due to lack of sufficient funding, poor coordination, and effective monitoring. Consequently, lots of beneficiaries failed to transfer their learned skills into sustainable jobs. In the same way, Aiyede (2014) noted that most vocational programmes were primarily technical skills oriented without offering their complement like mentoring, access to funding and market connections. In the absence of such support systems, most participants found it hard to create viable businesses or to attain sustainable livelihoods.

There is also empirical evidence that undertaking skill acquisition programmes can have a tremendous enhancing effect on the employability in the case where training is undertaken in accordance with the labour market demands. Adebayo and Ogunleye (2016) discovered that a good number of Nigerian graduates do not have practical skills that the employers need. Their work revealed that programmes which involve both theoretical training and practical working experience have better employment outcomes. There is however a breakdown between the training curriculums and the needs of the labour market which has led to a situation where skills acquired are not utilised fully. The N-Power programme is one of the most discussed in terms of youth empowerment and skill development since its launch in 2016. Aderonmu (2017) noted

that the programme contributed to the decrease in short-term unemployment through temporary employment opportunities and monthly payments to unemployed graduates. Work place exposure also offered participants some basic professional competencies. However, the programme faced difficulties with delayed stipend payments, poor training, and poor supervision reducing its ability to enhance long-term employability. Likewise, Abimbola and Adesote (2018) discovered that, despite N-Power offering income support and work experience, participants reported a lack of professional mentorship and career development, despite opportunities.

Research on individual elements of the programme gives additional information. Okoro and Bassey (2018) discovered that a high proportion of N-Teach volunteers working in schools did not receive proper pedagogical training and their professional competence was constrained even with the acquired teaching experience. In his turn, Awojobi (2021) noted that participants in the N-Tech component gained digital skills, including software development and hardware maintenance. However, lack of innovation centres, incubation centres and funding of startups meant that many beneficiaries were not able to translate these skills into sustainable businesses. Studies also indicate that workplace experience is significant towards improving employability. According to Ojo and Aluko (2020), N-Power participation enhanced the communication abilities, workplace discipline, and professional confidence of the beneficiaries. But the lack of organised career transition pathway reduced the capacity of the participants to bag permanent jobs after the programme.

The livelihood sustainability studies are mixed, Ojo and Aluko (2020) also discovered that monthly stipends through the programme enhanced short-term income security and economic vulnerability among the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, a large number of participants did not know their future economically because there was no definite way of leaving. Equally, Adegbite (2023) documented that despite the programme offering temporary jobs and financial stability in Osun State, irregular payments of stipends, lack of supervision, and post-programme opportunities decreased its role in developing human resources sustainably.

Another significant factor in the programme outcomes is institutional challenges. Eme and Onyishi (2019) determined bureaucratic inefficiencies, insufficient funding, and poor coordination between federal and state governments as factors that influenced programme implementation. Similarly, Eze (2023) emphasised the role of politics in beneficiary selection and ineffective monitoring mechanisms as barriers to successful programme implementation. In general, the empirical evidence indicates that employability and livelihood sustainability can be improved with the help of skill acquisition programmes that are facilitated by effective institutional arrangements, labour market connections, and entrepreneurship. Yet, most youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, such as N-Power, are more likely to yield temporary job and income relief, than lasting economic change.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

Although the literature on youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria is increasing, there are still some significant gaps in research. A significant gap is associated with the geographical small scope of studies. Northern or southeastern states are the focus of many empirical studies, whereas the region of the Southwest, specifically Osun State, has been relatively less studied by scholars. As an example, Onafowora (2020) concentrated more on Lagos and other more urbanized regions where the N-Power programme is

more apparent. As a result, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the programme in less urbanized and economically limited settings like Osun State. This deficiency of local research limits the capacity of policy makers to develop youth empowerment strategies that are based on the socio-economic realities of the regions. A second large gap seems to be the focus on short-term outcomes of most research. The current literature tends to emphasize the short-term gains like skills development, stipends, temporary jobs (Omoju et al, 2023). Even though these results indicate the short-term programme effects, no empirical studies on the long-term sustainability of these effects are available. Other problems like sustained employability, entrepreneurship growth and sustained income stability amid beneficiaries are under-researched. The lack of longitudinal studies restricts the knowledge of whether the programme has a long-term developmental impact on participants.

There is also a theoretical gap within the literature. Numerous studies are largely based on the Human Capital Theory, which highlights skill acquisition as the main avenue to the employability (Becker, 1964). Nevertheless, this view is not entirely true to the structural facts of the Nigerian labour market, such as institutional vulnerabilities, governance issues, and the lack of employment opportunities (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018; Aiyede, 2014). These gaps should be filled to devise more context-relevant, evidence-based and sustainable youth empowerment policies in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the role of the N-Power programme in the development of human resource in Osun State, Nigeria. This design was thought to be suitable since it allows the researchers to get in-depth information about respondents on their experiences, perceptions and opinions about a phenomenon. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information in the description of the current situation and the gathering of first hand information regarding the implementation of the programme and the results. In this research, the method enabled the researcher to obtain first-hand data of the N-Power beneficiaries and other interested parties on the impact the programme has had on skill acquisition, employability and livelihood sustainability in the area of study.

Osun State was chosen due to its high level of involvement with the N-Power programme under the National Social Investment Programme where beneficiaries are deployed in various sectors like education, agriculture, health, and information technology. The study sample consisted of 57 participants, including registered N-Power beneficiaries, programme coordinators, supervisors, and community leaders. The sample of beneficiaries in the local government areas was selected through simple random sampling, and purposive sampling was done on the officials and those stakeholders who had the necessary programme knowledge. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather primary data and the government reports and academic publications were used to gather secondary data. The thematic critical analysis was used to analyze the data to determine patterns associated with the outcomes of youth empowerment.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this paper have shown that the N-Power initiative in Nigeria has been able to contribute significantly to the empowerment of the youth, acquisition of skills and employability. Nonetheless, the structural, institutional, and operational challenges affect the sustainability and depth of such contributions. These results can be analysed in terms of the Human Capital Theory (HCT) and the Capabilities Approach

that can give a more comprehensive picture of the role of the programme in the development of human resources in Osun State. The Human Capital Theory which was formulated by Becker (1964) contends that education, training and development of skills enhance individual productivity and economic growth of the nation. This concept is manifested in the N-Power programme to provide training on various sectors based on the elements including N-Tech, N-Agro, N-Teach and N-Health. Document analysis and interviews have provided evidence that the beneficiaries acquired beneficial skills in information technology, agriculture, teaching, and healthcare. Such competencies in theory enhance employability and business entrepreneurial potential. Indicatively, a participant of N-Teach stated that the programme enhanced the teaching skills and offered a monthly allowance that assisted in satisfying basic family requirements (Interview, N-Teach beneficiary, Osun State, 2026). Accordingly, an N-Agro beneficiary indicated that the knowledge acquired during the programme helped to start poultry business with over 1,000 birds and illustrated the practical use of the acquired skills and economic empowerment (Interview with key informant/N-Agro beneficiary, 2026). These results confirm the key thesis of the Human Capital Theory that the acquisition of skills could increase the productivity and make livelihood outcomes better.

Alongside these positive results, the research also shows that there are significant shortcomings in the practical implementation of the Human Capital Theory. In the theory, it is assumed that acquisition of skills automatically results in better economic opportunities but this study established that a good number of beneficiaries went back to unemployment following the completion of the programme. Such aspects as poor absorption in the labour market, absence of a recognised certification, and post-programme support lessened the long-term effect of the skills gained (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018; Aiyede, 2014). The gap outlines the fact that skill development cannot be achieved in isolation and without accommodating economic and institutional frameworks. The other important conclusion is the fact that N-Power programme was not sufficiently integrated with the rest of the economy and institutions. Documentary and interview evidence indicate that the programme was rather a self-governing programme, and not well-linked to national industrial policies, local government development strategies or to the employment prospects of the private sector. An example is that there were no robust mechanisms which connected the beneficiaries to credit facilities via the Bank of Industry or the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria. Likewise, job placement did not work well with networks of the National Directorate of Employment. As a result, many beneficiaries struggled to apply their newly acquired skills in productive economic activities (NSIP Implementation Report, 2022; Yusuf and Olanrewaju, 2023).

Further programme limitations were operational challenges. It was found that the late and inconsistent payment of stipends caused financial strain among participants (Interview with key informant/N-Health beneficiary, 2026). Irregular payments are also listed as one of the main problems of the programme implementation in previous studies (Abin, 2018). Also, bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference and corruption were also reported to have influenced programme accessibility and transparency. However, the programme brought about positive results that were measurable. The beneficiaries spoke about the increase in the quality of life, the development of entrepreneurship, and the acquisition of skills (Omoju et al, 2023). Certain programme strands created sectoral outcomes: N-Teach and N-Health facilitated the provision of educational and healthcare services, and N-Tech increased the digital competencies and a chance to work as a freelance.

These results indicate the drawbacks of applying the Human Capital Theory only. Although HCT focuses on the economic worth of skills, it does not pay a lot of attention to structural obstacles that do not allow people to effectively make use of such skills. The Capabilities Approach focuses on the ability to develop skills, as well as the freedom and opportunity to use them purposefully. Regarding the human resource development view, the successful youth empowerment programmes should not be restricted to the training and stipends. Sustainable development involves the establishment of a balance between individual capacity building, institutional support and economic opportunities (Swanson and Holton, 2009). Despite N-Power being an important initiative to tackle the youth unemployment by investing in human capital, its long-term effects have been limited by poor institutional interconnections, inefficiencies in operations, as well as lack of structured post-programme opportunities. On the whole, the results indicate that the future youth empowerment programs must incorporate skills development with enhanced institutionalisation, labour market, and sustainable economic opportunities to guarantee meaningful and enduring human resource development.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals that the N-Power programme has already produced significant impacts on the empowerment of the youth, acquisition of skills and improvement of livelihoods in Nigeria, especially in Osun State. Those beneficiaries of the N-Tech, N-Agro, N-Teach and N-Health components reported to be more employed, to have an entrepreneurial capacity and to have increased household income. These results confirm the assumptions of the Human Capital Theory, which has been developed by Gary Becker (1964) which suggests that the investments in education and training increase productivity and the national economic growth. Interviews and previous research have shown that a portion of beneficiaries shifted to freelance work in the digital realm, opened agricultural businesses, and enhanced better educational and health services (Interview with key informants, 2026). Such results underscore the utility of skill development and stipend assistance in enhancing the human resource capacity.

In spite of these successes, the research also found that there were a number of structural and operational constraints to the sustainability of the programme. The key factors of concern are inconsistent stipend payments, political influence, lack of training, and infrastructural support. These problems with operations undermined the capacity of the participants to plan on a financial basis and enjoy the programme to its fullest. Moreover, the sustainability of empowerment outcomes was greatly hampered by the institutional weaknesses, including the lack of integration with the labour market framework, access to credit facilities, and exit strategies (Abin, 2018; NSIP Implementation Report, 2022; Yusuf and Olanrewaju, 2023). Sectoral differences also influenced the results of the programmes with beneficiaries in various streams achieving different degrees of success in using their skills.

Some recommendations were made based on these findings to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of youth empowerment programmes like N-Power. First, the Nigerian government ought to normalise the training content, accreditation and match the training modules with the labour market needs. There should be closer cooperation with the institutions like the National Board of Technical Education and the industry organizations to enhance the quality and credibility of training. Skill programmes in vocational and digital skills, especially N-Tech and similar programmes, must be aligned with the international standards of certification to improve employability.

Second, the programme must secure well-designed and organized exit mechanisms to assist beneficiaries upon completion. This encompasses collaborating with microfinance institutions, cooperatives, and employers in the private sector to give an opportunity to work or to give start-up grants and business assistance.

Third, there is a need to reform institutions and governance to reinforce programme implementation. Stipend payments should be made in time and transparently and programme administration should be decentralized to enhance responsiveness and accountability. The programme must also pursue a multi-stakeholder form of governance whereby civil society, state governments and actors in the private sector are involved.

Altogether, the research points out that youth empowerment is the essential aspect of inclusive national development in Nigeria, where the percentage of people below the age of thirty is rather high. Properly planned and institutionalized, such programmes as N-Power can be turned into a revolutionary means of human capital and socio-economic development. Nonetheless, in order to realise this objective, it is necessary to go beyond temporary welfare provision to blanket policies that integrate skill training and institutional assistance with integration into the labour market, as well as governance reform.

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