

Government Youth Empowerment Programmes and Entrepreneurship Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined government youth empowerment programmes and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, with evidence from Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted a survey research design. Since the exact number of youths who have benefited from, participated in or are knowledgeable about government youth empowerment programmes in Akwa Ibom State is not readily available, Cochran's formula for an unknown population was used at a 95% confidence level to obtain a sample size of 384 respondents. The questionnaire was structured on a five-point Likert scale, while data analysis followed the pattern of frequency distribution, percentages, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression using SPSS 27.0. The findings revealed that skills acquisition training has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State, access to government start-up grants/loans has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State, and business mentoring and advisory support has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State. The study concluded that youth empowerment programmes can strengthen entrepreneurship development when practical skills, start-up support and mentoring are implemented as one integrated system rather than as isolated interventions. It was recommended that the government should strengthen market-relevant training, transparent start-up financing, post-training mentoring, and business monitoring and market linkage for youth beneficiaries in Akwa Ibom State.

Keywords: *Youth empowerment programmes, entrepreneurship development, government start-up grants, skills acquisition, and mentoring support*

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment, underemployment and unstable livelihood conditions continue to give entrepreneurship development a strong policy relevance in Nigeria. The issue has moved beyond the simple absence of paid jobs; it now involves the quality of work available to young people, the dominance of informal employment and the inability of many youths to transform their education into productive economic activity. The Nigeria Labour Force Survey reported youth unemployment at 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2024, while informal employment remained very high at 93.0 percent of total employment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). These figures suggest that many Nigerians who are described as employed are actually working in informal, vulnerable or low-productivity activities.

For young people, this makes entrepreneurship development not merely an academic subject but a survival and development strategy. Harry (2026) argued that digital and entrepreneurial skills are increasingly important in Nigeria because youths require capacities that can help them create work rather than wait indefinitely for wage employment. In the same direction, Chidi (2025) maintained that entrepreneurship education can improve youth employability when it develops innovation, business planning and financial literacy. These positions show that entrepreneurship development has become a necessary response to the changing structure of work in Nigeria.

Government youth empowerment programmes emerged from the need to convert youth potential into productive capacity. Over the years, Nigerian governments have introduced several interventions such as N-Power, National Directorate of Employment schemes, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria, the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme, skills acquisition centres and state-level empowerment initiatives. The intention of these programmes is usually to reduce unemployment, build productive skills, support small businesses and reduce social vulnerability among young people. However, the literature shows that the existence of empowerment programmes does not automatically produce entrepreneurship development. Omoju *et al.* (2023) observed that Nigerian youth-employment programmes are often weakened by poor coordination, inadequate funding, limited institutional capacity, weak oversight and insufficient connection to long-term development plans. Omeje *et al.* (2020) also showed that youth empowerment influences entrepreneurship growth when training, finance, advice and monitoring work together. This means that a programme may be popular and still fail if it trains

beneficiaries without capital, gives capital without guidance or fails to monitor the sustainability of youth-owned enterprises.

Akwa Ibom State provides a useful setting for this study because youth empowerment and entrepreneurship development are important components of the State's development discourse. The State has continued to promote initiatives linked to job creation, skills acquisition, youth registration, training and enterprise support. The ARISE Youth Employment Portal, for instance, was presented as a platform through which unemployed and underemployed youths can register for employment and training opportunities (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2024). More recently, public reports indicated that the State government planned to train about 31,000 youths annually through ARISE Youth Skill Centres across the 31 local government areas of the State (Akpan, 2026). These efforts indicate a policy interest in moving empowerment beyond urban centres and extending skills development to the grassroots. Mboho (2021) also provided local evidence that youth empowerment programmes in Akwa Ibom State are linked to poverty reduction. The issue, however, is not the announcement of empowerment programmes but the extent to which such programmes produce real entrepreneurial outcomes among youth beneficiaries.

Entrepreneurship development among youths requires more than motivation and policy speeches. It requires practical training, accessible start-up support, continuous mentoring, market linkage and monitoring. Skills acquisition training gives beneficiaries the competence to produce goods or services; start-up grants and loans provide the resources required to begin or expand businesses; mentoring and advisory support help young entrepreneurs avoid common mistakes and improve business survival. Akinola *et al.* (2023) found that entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes strengthen self-reliance among youths when implemented effectively. Bashir (2025) also reported that entrepreneurship skill acquisition improved income generation, financial independence and self-employment among youths in Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. In relation to start-up support, youth enterprise studies have consistently shown that finance is critical because many young people possess ideas and skills but cannot convert them into businesses without capital. Business mentoring is equally important because many youth-owned ventures fail due to weak record keeping, poor pricing, poor customer management and lack of experience.

The relationship between government youth empowerment programmes and entrepreneurship development is therefore best understood as an input-output relationship. Government programmes provide empowerment inputs, while entrepreneurship development represents the expected outcome in the form of business creation, business growth, self-employment, income generation and job creation.

Osimen *et al.* (2025) reported that the N-Power programme had a measurable effect on youth empowerment in Lagos State, with the study showing statistical validity at $p = 0.00$. Udia and Akpan (2025) also examined N-Power in Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State and emphasized the importance of training, stipend payment and transition planning for beneficiaries. These studies point to one major argument: empowerment programmes are more likely to be meaningful when they lead beneficiaries into sustainable economic activity. For Akwa Ibom State, where youth productivity is central to local economic development, evidence is needed on the specific contributions of skills acquisition training, start-up grants/loans and mentoring support to entrepreneurship development. This need provides the background for the present study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Government youth empowerment programmes are expected to reduce unemployment, encourage self-employment and support entrepreneurship development among youths. In practice, however, many empowerment interventions in Nigeria do not produce the expected level of sustainable business creation. Some programmes emphasize training without providing tools or capital, while others provide funds to beneficiaries who do not possess adequate business skills. In some cases, beneficiaries receive support without mentoring, follow-up or monitoring. Omoju *et al.* (2023) noted that weak governance, poor coordination and inadequate funding continue to limit the effectiveness of youth-employment programmes in Nigeria. This creates a serious problem because a programme may distribute benefits without creating sustainable entrepreneurs.

In Akwa Ibom State, youth empowerment programmes have become visible through skills training, employment registration, agricultural support, entrepreneurship support and local development initiatives. Yet, many youths still struggle to establish viable enterprises because of insufficient capital, weak business knowledge, poor mentoring and limited post-training support. Mboho (2021) showed that youth empowerment is relevant to poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom State, but the persistence of youth livelihood challenges suggests that empowerment outcomes require further empirical investigation. Most critical is the uncertainty about which components of empowerment programmes contribute more strongly to entrepreneurship development. If government continues to implement empowerment programmes without understanding the effects of skills training, finance and mentoring, resources may be spent without producing sustainable businesses. Therefore, this study examines the

effect of government youth empowerment programmes on entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, using evidence from Akwa Ibom State.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the effect of government youth empowerment programmes on entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, with evidence from Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Examine the effect of skills acquisition training on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. Determine the effect of access to government start-up grants/loans on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. Assess the effect of business mentoring and advisory support on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were stated in null form:

- H₀₁:** Skills acquisition training has no significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.
- H₀₂:** Access to government start-up grants/loans has no significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.
- H₀₃:** Business mentoring and advisory support has no significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Entrepreneurship Development

Entrepreneurship development stands at the centre of this study because it captures the economic outcome expected when youths are properly empowered. In the Nigerian development context, entrepreneurship development is not limited to business registration or occasional petty trading; it involves opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, risk taking, innovation, business survival and the capacity to generate income through productive ventures. Omeje *et al.* (2020) treated entrepreneurship as a channel through which youth empowerment can contribute to economic diversification, while Chukwuka and Imide (2023) linked entrepreneurship development with the reduction of youth unemployment in a developing economy. The concept is therefore meaningful only when young people are able to convert skills, ideas and support into sustainable enterprises. For youths, enterprise development creates a pathway from

dependence to economic participation. It also helps them to develop resilience in an economy where wage employment is limited and informal self-employment remains dominant. Entrepreneurship development is therefore the dependent variable in this study because it is the expected outcome of training, finance and mentoring.

Entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State is especially important because local opportunities exist in agriculture, trade, food processing, fashion, transport, ICT, creative services and small-scale production. However, these opportunities cannot be fully utilized when youths lack practical skills, capital, business exposure and guidance. Mboho (2021) linked youth empowerment programmes in Akwa Ibom State with poverty reduction, showing that enterprise creation can improve livelihood outcomes when programmes are functional. Bashir (2025) also found that entrepreneurship skill acquisition improved income generation and self-employment among youths in Taraba State, suggesting that training can produce measurable enterprise outcomes when it is locally relevant. The idea is that entrepreneurship development should show itself through business start-up, business expansion, improved income, job creation and reduced dependence on paid employment.

2.1.2 Government Youth Empowerment Programmes

Government youth empowerment programmes form the policy route through which public authorities attempt to transform youth capacity into productive economic participation. In Nigeria, these programmes have appeared through skills acquisition centres, N-Power, the National Directorate of Employment, the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme, agricultural support schemes, digital training initiatives and state-level empowerment programmes. Their purpose is to reduce unemployment, strengthen self-reliance, promote enterprise creation and reduce the vulnerability of young people to poverty and social exclusion. Osimen *et al.* (2025) showed that N-Power contributed to youth empowerment in Lagos State, while Afolabi *et al.* (2025) argued that the programme expanded access to temporary employment and skills training although it faced sustainability limitations. These studies suggest that government empowerment programmes are valuable when they build capacity, but they remain incomplete when they are short-term, poorly monitored or not connected to enterprise survival. The effectiveness of such programmes therefore depends on their ability to produce practical economic outcomes rather than short-term beneficiary satisfaction.

In Akwa Ibom State, empowerment programmes are expected to support the broader goal of youth productivity and grassroots development. The State's youth-related initiatives, including employment registration and planned skill centres, show

an attempt to organize youth empowerment around training and labour-market participation. Udia and Akpan (2025) provided Akwa Ibom-specific evidence by examining N-Power programmes in Eket Senatorial District and emphasizing the need for training, stipend payment and transition plans. Mboho (2021) also showed that youth empowerment programmes in Akwa Ibom State have poverty-reduction relevance. Nevertheless, programme relevance does not mean programme effectiveness. If beneficiaries are trained without capital, funded without mentoring or selected without transparency, entrepreneurship development may remain weak. This study therefore considers government youth empowerment programmes as the independent variable because they represent the public intervention expected to influence youth entrepreneurship outcomes in Akwa Ibom State.

2.1.3 Skills Acquisition Training

Skills acquisition training gives practical substance to youth empowerment because it equips beneficiaries with usable abilities for work and enterprise. In a youth economy where many people possess certificates without marketable capacity, skills training becomes a bridge between education and livelihood. The training may be vocational, technical, digital or entrepreneurial, covering areas such as fashion design, cosmetology, agriculture, welding, catering, ICT, graphic design, digital marketing, poultry, fishery and small business management. Akinola *et al.* (2023) showed that entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes can promote self-reliance among youths when the programmes are properly implemented. Okere and Ihua-Jonathan (2024) also found that entrepreneurship training programmes influenced the socio-economic development of youths, using a survey-based approach and a sample of 376 respondents. These studies point to the fact that skills acquisition does not merely expose youths to activities; it builds the capacity to produce, serve, manage and earn. For this study, skills acquisition training is the first proxy of government youth empowerment programmes because it represents the productive ability given to beneficiaries.

2.1.4 Access to Start-up Grants/Loans

Access to start-up grants and loans addresses the financial barrier that prevents many trained youths from becoming entrepreneurs. In Nigeria, lack of start-up capital remains one of the strongest obstacles facing young people who want to begin or expand business ventures. A youth may acquire a skill and understand a business opportunity but remain unable to rent a workspace, buy equipment, purchase stock, package products or advertise services. Nnaeto and Nwambuko (2023) found that N-Power

contributed to youth entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, but also identified programme challenges that affected performance. Okolo-Obasi and Uduji (2023) similarly showed that public enterprise support schemes can influence entrepreneurial outcomes when access to finance reaches intended beneficiaries. Finance therefore gives empowerment the material support needed for business take-off. However, grants and loans must be adequate, timely, transparent and tied to business plans; otherwise, they may be consumed as welfare money rather than invested as enterprise capital.

2.1.5 Business Mentoring and Advisory Support

Business mentoring and advisory support provide the guidance component of youth empowerment. Many young entrepreneurs do not fail only because they lack money; they also fail because they lack business planning skills, market information, record keeping ability, customer management experience and resilience. Mentoring exposes beneficiaries to experienced persons who can guide them in pricing, savings, credit control, marketing, networking, inventory management and business expansion. Obananya (2021) found that business mentoring had relevance for entrepreneurship development in Anambra State, while Michael (2021) reported that mentoring variables such as internship, seminars, creativity and innovation support entrepreneurial development in Cross River State. These findings show that advisory support is not a secondary issue; it is a survival mechanism for new entrepreneurs. A beneficiary who receives training and capital may still need guidance to avoid early business failure.

2.1.6 Government Youth Empowerment Programmes and Entrepreneurship Development

The relationship between government youth empowerment programmes and entrepreneurship development is strongest when empowerment is treated as an integrated system. Skills acquisition training supplies ability, start-up grants/loans supply resources and business mentoring supplies guidance. When these components work together, youth beneficiaries are more likely to create viable enterprises and sustain them beyond the programme period. Omeje *et al.* (2020) found that youth empowerment variables such as training, access to finance, advice and monitoring contributed to entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria. Osimen *et al.* (2025) also confirmed that N-Power had a measurable impact on youth empowerment in Lagos State. These studies suggest that government programmes can influence entrepreneurship, but the effect depends on implementation quality. The more coordinated the empowerment inputs are, the stronger the expected entrepreneurial outcome becomes.

In Akwa Ibom State, the combined effect of training, finance and mentoring is important because many youths need more than one form of support to become successful entrepreneurs. Training without finance may produce skilled but idle youths; finance without training may encourage misuse of funds; mentoring without capital may leave beneficiaries motivated but unable to act. Udia and Akpan (2025) emphasized training and transition planning in Eket Senatorial District, while Mboho (2021) linked empowerment with poverty reduction in the State.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was propounded by Theodore W. Schultz in 1961. It was later developed and popularized by Gary S. Becker in 1964, especially through his book *Human Capital*. The theorist explained that investment in education, training and skill development increases the productive capacity of individuals. The central argument of the theory is that human beings can become more productive when they acquire knowledge, practical skills and competences that improve their ability to perform economic activities. In the context of this study, the theory explains why skills acquisition training is expected to influence entrepreneurship development. When youths are trained in vocational, technical, digital or business skills, they acquire productive capacity that can be applied to enterprise creation. Recent Nigerian studies support this logic. Akinola *et al.* (2023) showed that entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes promote self-reliance, while Bashir (2025) found that entrepreneurship skill acquisition improved income generation and self-employment. The theory therefore presents skills training as an investment in youth productivity rather than a mere social programme.

The theory has been criticized for assuming that training automatically produces productivity and economic reward. Critics argue that skills alone do not guarantee employment or entrepreneurship where capital, infrastructure, market access and institutions are weak. Omoju *et al.* (2023) noted that Nigerian youth-employment programmes suffer from weak coordination, inadequate funding and poor implementation capacity, meaning that human capital may remain underutilized when the policy environment is weak. Afolabi *et al.* (2025) also observed that N-Power expanded access to training and temporary employment but faced sustainability challenges because of short-term tenure and weak labour-market alignment. These criticisms are important because a youth may be trained and still remain unable to start a business if there is no capital, mentoring or market support. Therefore, Human Capital

Theory explains one part of the empowerment process but does not fully explain why many trained youths struggle to become entrepreneurs.

This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory because skills acquisition training is one of the major independent variable proxies. The theory supports the assumption that practical training increases the productive capacity of youths and prepares them for self-employment. However, the study does not rely on the theory alone because the theory cannot fully explain the roles of start-up finance and mentoring. Its relevance lies in explaining the first objective, which examines the effect of skills acquisition training on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State. Based on the theory, youths who receive practical and market-relevant training are expected to show stronger entrepreneurial outcomes than youths who do not receive such training.

2.3 Empirical Review

Ibrahim *et al.* (2026) investigated the impact of the N-Power programme on youths as a sustainable empowerment development strategy in Adamawa and Gombe States. The findings indicated that the N-Power programme created opportunities for skill acquisition and temporary engagement among youths, although sustainability depended on transition support after programme participation. The study concluded that N-Power can support youth empowerment but requires stronger post-programme planning. Sunusi (2026) examined youth empowerment programmes and their impact on unemployment and poverty reduction in Yobe State. The findings showed that youth empowerment programmes contributed positively to unemployment and poverty reduction, although the effectiveness of the programmes was limited by implementation challenges. The study concluded that youth empowerment must be strengthened through proper funding, monitoring and continuity.

Osimen *et al.* (2025) assessed the impact of the N-Power programme on youth empowerment in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings showed that the programme improved beneficiaries' skills, livelihoods and employment-related capacity. The study concluded that N-Power contributed to youth empowerment but required stronger sustainability measures. Udia and Akpan (2025) examined the impact of N-Power programmes on poverty reduction and youth empowerment in Nigeria, using Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State as the study area. The findings emphasized that N-Power had positive empowerment value but that the programme required consistent stipend payment, effective training and a transition plan after the training period. The study concluded that youth empowerment programmes become more useful when beneficiaries are moved into sustainable livelihood and enterprise options.

Bashir (2025) examined the impact of entrepreneurship skill acquisition on the economic empowerment of youths in Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. The findings revealed that skill acquisition significantly enhanced income generation, financial independence and self-employment among young people. The study concluded that skill acquisition is impactful but requires broader structural support to maximize long-term benefits. Hillary *et al.* (2025) investigated digitalized entrepreneurship schemes and youth empowerment in Enugu State. The study examined the impact of online training platforms and digital entrepreneurship support on youth acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. The findings showed that digital entrepreneurship schemes had positive effects on youth skill development and empowerment. The study concluded that online training platforms and digital entrepreneurship support can strengthen youth enterprise capacity when access and implementation are effective.

Okere and Ihua-Jonathan (2024) examined the influence of entrepreneurship training programmes on the socio-economic development of youths. Findings showed that entrepreneurship training programmes influenced youth socio-economic development by improving self-reliance, income opportunities and productive engagement. The study concluded that entrepreneurship training remains a relevant instrument for youth development when it is properly planned and implemented. Abba Ahmed and Zubair (2024) studied youth empowerment for sustainable development in Jigawa State through a baseline survey of market and skills gaps. The findings showed that youth empowerment is more effective when it is based on real market gaps rather than generic training. The study concluded that sustainable youth empowerment requires training that responds to local economic opportunities.

Akinola *et al.* (2023) appraised youth empowerment programmes through entrepreneurial skills acquisition for self-reliance in Ondo State, Nigeria. The findings indicated that entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes contributed to self-reliance among youths, but their effectiveness depended on government support, beneficiary seriousness and continuity. The study concluded that skills acquisition is a key empowerment pathway in Nigeria. Nnaeto and Nwambuko (2023) assessed the N-Power programme and youth entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. Findings showed that N-Power had fared well in promoting youth entrepreneurship and had a positive impact on entrepreneurship development. The study concluded that N-Power contributed to youth enterprise development but faced implementation challenges.

Omoju *et al.* (2023) conducted an empirical review of youth-employment policies in Nigeria. The objective was to examine youth-employment programmes and identify implementation challenges that affect their impact. Findings revealed that

although Nigeria has implemented several youth-employment programmes, they have not produced a marked reduction in youth unemployment. The study identified weak governance, inadequate funding, poor coordination, limited institutional capacity and insufficient prioritization of vulnerable groups as major challenges. The study concluded that youth-employment programmes must be tied to long-term development plans. Mboho (2021) examined youth empowerment programmes and poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom State. Findings showed that youth empowerment programmes contributed to poverty reduction and youth mobilization toward sustainable development, although challenges affected programme effectiveness. The study concluded that empowerment programmes are relevant to livelihood improvement in Akwa Ibom State.

Omeje *et al.* (2020) examined youth empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria and its implication for economic diversification. Findings indicated that most variables used to capture entrepreneurship growth and development were statistically significant, while some variables such as tax rates, transportation cost and land access were not significant for some enterprise-size comparisons. The study concluded that youth empowerment contributes to entrepreneurship growth when training, access to finance, advice and monitoring are properly integrated. Fatoki (2019) assessed the skills acquisition programme and youth empowerment development in Ondo State. The findings showed that skills acquisition programmes had positive effects on youth empowerment by improving productive capacity and livelihood opportunities. The study concluded that skills acquisition remains a necessary strategy for reducing unemployment and improving youth development outcomes.

Mbah and Odozi (2018) investigated entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment in selected states in South-East Nigeria. The findings showed that entrepreneurship education contributed positively to youth empowerment by improving entrepreneurial awareness, skills and readiness for self-employment. The study concluded that entrepreneurship education remains a viable tool for equipping young people for enterprise participation.

METHOD

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to obtain primary data from youths in Akwa Ibom State through a structured questionnaire. The design also supports the use of descriptive statistics, correlation

analysis and regression analysis in examining the effect of government youth empowerment programme variables on entrepreneurship development.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises youths in Akwa Ibom State who have participated in, benefited from or are knowledgeable about government youth empowerment programmes. These include youths who have been exposed to skills acquisition training, start-up support, business mentoring, entrepreneurship training, agricultural empowerment, digital training or other government-related empowerment interventions. Since the exact number of such youths across all programmes and local government areas is not readily available, the population is treated as unknown or indeterminate.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Since the population is unknown, Cochran's formula for unknown population was used to determine the sample size. The formula is stated as:

$$n = Z^2pq/e^2.$$

Where n is sample size, Z is 1.96 at 95 percent confidence level, p is 0.5, q is 0.5 and e is 0.05.

$$n = (1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)/(0.05)^2 = 384.16.$$

Therefore, the sample size for the study is 384 respondents. To allow for non-response, 400 copies of the questionnaire may be distributed.

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique. First, Akwa Ibom State was divided into the three senatorial districts. Second, selected local government areas will be chosen from each senatorial district. Third, purposive sampling will be used to select youths who have participated in, benefited from or are knowledgeable about government youth empowerment programmes. Finally, simple random sampling will be used where lists or accessible groups are available.

Table 3.1: Sample Size

Senatorial District	Sample Size
Uyo Senatorial District	128
Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District	128
Eket Senatorial District	128
Total	384

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

3.4 Sources and Method of Data Collection

Primary data was used for the study. The data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to selected respondents. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale consisting of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

3.5 Validity of Instrument

The questionnaire was presented to the supervisor and other knowledgeable persons in entrepreneurship, management and research methodology for review. Their corrections and suggestions were used to improve the clarity, relevance and content coverage of the instrument.

3.6 Reliability of Instrument

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. A coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for the study.

Table 3.2: Reliability Test

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Skills Acquisition Training	5	0.783
Start-up Grants/Loans Business	5	0.811
Mentoring/Advisory Support	5	0.790
Entrepreneurship Development	5	0.847

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

3.7 Empirical Specification of model

The functional relationship for the study is stated as:

ENTD = f(SAT). Model 3.1

ENTD = f(SGL). Model 3.2

ENTD = f(BMS). Model 3.3

For empirical estimation, the simple regression models are specified as follows:

$ENTD_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SAT_i + \mu$ Equation 3.1

$ENTD_i = \beta_0 + \beta_2 SGL_i + \mu$ Equation 3.2

$ENTD_i = \beta_0 + \beta_3 BMS_i + \mu$ Equation 3.3

Where: ENT D is entrepreneurship development, SAT is skills acquisition training, SGL is start-up grants/loans, BMS is business mentoring/advisory support, i is responses, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 to β_3 are coefficients and μ is the error term.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 5 percent level of significance, following the SPSS output pattern of model summary, ANOVA and coefficient tables. The decision rule is that the null hypothesis was rejected if the p-value is less than 0.05 and not rejected if the p-value is greater than 0.05.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 4.1: Skills Acquisition Training

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
Government empowerment programmes provide youths with practical business-related skills.	156 (40.6%)	164 (42.7%)	34 (8.9%)	20 (5.2%)	10 (2.6%)
The skills acquired by youths are relevant to current business opportunities.	148 (38.5%)	166 (43.2%)	42 (10.9%)	19 (4.9%)	9 (2.3%)
Skills acquisition training improves youth confidence to start businesses.	171 (44.5%)	151 (39.3%)	33 (8.6%)	19 (4.9%)	10 (2.6%)
The training received by beneficiaries helps them become self-employed.	143 (37.2%)	169 (44.0%)	44 (11.5%)	18 (4.7%)	10 (2.6%)

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 4.1 shows that respondents generally agreed with the items under this variable, as the combined strongly agree and agree responses were higher than the undecided and disagreement responses.

Table 4.2: Start-up Grants/Loans

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
Access to government grants helps youths establish businesses.	139 (36.2%)	160 (41.7%)	46 (12.0%)	25 (6.5%)	14 (3.6%)
Government loans improve the ability of youths to expand enterprises.	132 (34.4%)	158 (41.1%)	52 (13.5%)	28 (7.3%)	14 (3.6%)
Lack of start-up capital limits youth entrepreneurship development.	174 (45.3%)	150 (39.1%)	31 (8.1%)	18 (4.7%)	11 (2.9%)
Financial support improves the survival of youth-owned businesses.	147 (38.3%)	158 (41.1%)	43 (11.2%)	22 (5.7%)	14 (3.6%)

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 4.2 shows that respondents generally agreed with the items under this variable, as the combined strongly agree and agree responses were higher than the undecided and disagreement responses.

Table 4.3: Business Mentoring and Advisory Support

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
Mentoring helps youths manage their businesses effectively.	136 (35.4%)	159 (41.4%)	50 (13.0%)	25 (6.5%)	14 (3.6%)
Advisory support improves business decisions of young entrepreneurs.	141 (36.7%)	150 (39.1%)	53 (13.8%)	24 (6.3%)	16 (4.2%)
Mentoring helps youths understand marketing and customer relations.	149 (38.8%)	148 (38.5%)	46 (12.0%)	25 (6.5%)	16 (4.2%)
Continuous mentoring is necessary after empowerment training.	165 (43.0%)	142 (37.0%)	39 (10.2%)	24 (6.3%)	14 (3.6%)

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 4.3 shows that respondents generally agreed with the items under this variable, as the combined strongly agree and agree responses were higher than the undecided and disagreement responses.

Table 4.4: Entrepreneurship Development

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
Government empowerment programmes encourage business creation among youths.	151 (39.3%)	159 (41.4%)	38 (9.9%)	22 (5.7%)	14 (3.6%)
Empowerment programmes improve self-employment among youths.	148 (38.5%)	162 (42.2%)	40 (10.4%)	21 (5.5%)	13 (3.4%)
Youth-owned businesses grow better when beneficiaries receive training and support.	166 (43.2%)	145 (37.8%)	37 (9.6%)	23 (6.0%)	13 (3.4%)
Government empowerment programmes contribute to job creation in Akwa Ibom State.	142 (37.0%)	164 (42.7%)	43 (11.2%)	22 (5.7%)	13 (3.4%)

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 4.4 shows that respondents generally agreed with the items under this variable, as the combined strongly agree and agree responses were higher than the undecided and disagreement responses.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Skills Acquisition Training	384	4.1406	.54821	-.842	.411
Start-up Grants/Loans	384	3.9823	.61208	-.618	.205
Business Mentoring/Advisory Support	384	3.9049	.63752	-.522	.144
Entrepreneurship Development	384	4.0781	.53144	-.701	.318

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

The descriptive statistics in Table 4.5 indicates that all the variables recorded mean values above the benchmark mean of 3.00 on the five-point scale. Skills acquisition training recorded a mean of 4.1406, start-up grants/loans recorded a mean of 3.9823, and business mentoring or advisory support recorded a mean of 3.9049, while

entrepreneurship development recorded a mean of 4.0781. The standard deviations are moderate, indicating that respondents' opinions were not widely dispersed. The negative skewness values show that responses were concentrated toward agreement, while the kurtosis values indicate acceptable distribution patterns for survey data.

Table 4.6: Correlation Analysis

Variables	SAT	SGL	BMS	ENTD
Skills Acquisition Training (SAT)	1			
Start-up Grants/Loans (SGL)	.472**	1		
Business Mentoring Support (BMS)	.438**	.451**	1	
Entrepreneurship Development (ENTD)	.621**	.548**	.506**	1

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

The correlation matrix in Table 4.6 shows positive relationships among the study variables. Skills acquisition training has a strong positive relationship with entrepreneurship development ($r = .621$, $p < .01$), start-up grants/loans have a moderate positive relationship with entrepreneurship development ($r = .548$, $p < .01$), and business mentoring/advisory support also has a moderate positive relationship with entrepreneurship development ($r = .506$, $p < .01$). The positive correlations suggest that improvements in the empowerment programme variables are associated with improvements in entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4.7a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.621	.386	.384	.41729

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 7b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	42.071	1	42.071	241.578	.000
Residual	66.543	382	.174		
Total	108.614	383			

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 7c: Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.611	.161		10.006	.000
SAT	.596	.038	.621	15.543	.000

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

The result shows that skills acquisition training has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development. The model recorded $R = .621$ and $R^2 = .386$, indicating that skills acquisition training explains 38.6 percent of the variation in entrepreneurship development. The ANOVA result is significant ($F = 241.578$, $p = .000$), while the coefficient is positive and significant ($B = .596$, $t = 15.543$, $p = .000$). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, H_{01} is rejected.

Table 4.8a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.548	.300	.298	.44523

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 8b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	32.584	1	32.584	164.337	.000
Residual	76.030	382	.199		
Total	108.614	383			

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 8c: Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.162	.152		14.223	.000
SAT	.481	.038	.548	12.819	.000

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

The result shows that access to government start-up grants/loans has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development. The model recorded $R = .548$ and $R^2 = .300$, indicating that start-up grants/loans explain 30.0 percent of the variation in entrepreneurship development. The ANOVA result is significant ($F = 164.337$, $p = .000$), while the coefficient is positive and significant ($B = .481$, $t = 12.819$, $p = .000$). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, H_{02} is rejected.

Table 4.9a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.506	.256	.254	.45903

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 9b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	27.807	1	27.807	131.970	.000
Residual	80.807	382	.212		
Total	108.614	383			

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Table 9c: Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.443	.145		16.848	.000
SAT	.419	.036	.506	11.488	.000

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

The result shows that business mentoring and advisory support has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development. The model recorded $R = .506$ and $R^2 = .256$, indicating that business mentoring/advisory support explains 25.6 percent of the variation in entrepreneurship development. The ANOVA result is significant ($F = 131.970$, $p = .000$), while the coefficient is positive and significant ($B = .419$, $t = 11.488$, $p = .000$). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, H_{03} is rejected.

4.3.1 Skills Acquisition Training and Entrepreneurship Development

The first finding revealed that skills acquisition training has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State ($B = .596$, $t = 15.543$, $p = .000$). This means that entrepreneurship development improves when youth empowerment programmes provide practical and market-relevant training. The R^2 value of .386 shows that skills acquisition training explains 38.6 percent of the variation in entrepreneurship development, making it the strongest predictor among the three empowerment variables tested. The finding is logical because youths who acquire practical skills are better positioned to create products, render services and identify income opportunities. This result agrees with Bashir (2025), who found that

entrepreneurship skill acquisition improved income generation, financial independence and self-employment among youths in Taraba State. It also supports Akinola *et al.* (2023), who reported that entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes promoted self-reliance among youths in Ondo State. Similarly, Fatoki (2019) found that skills acquisition programmes had positive implications for youth empowerment and development.

4.3.2 Start-up Grants/Loans and Entrepreneurship Development

The second finding showed that access to government start-up grants/loans has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State ($B = .481$, $t = 12.819$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .300 indicates that start-up grants/loans explain 30.0 percent of the variation in entrepreneurship development. This finding suggests that finance remains a major determinant of youth enterprise creation because many youths possess skills and business ideas but lack the capital required to begin operations. The finding agrees with Nnaeto and Nwambuko (2023), who found that N-Power had a positive impact on youth entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. It also supports Udia and Akpan (2025), who emphasized that empowerment programmes in Eket Senatorial District require consistent financial support and transition planning if beneficiaries are to move into sustainable livelihoods. Omeje *et al.* (2020) also showed that access to finance and other support variables contributed to entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria.

4.3.3 Business Mentoring and Advisory Support and Entrepreneurship Development

The third finding revealed that business mentoring and advisory support has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurship development among youths in Akwa Ibom State ($B = .419$, $t = 11.488$, $p = .000$). The R^2 value of .256 shows that business mentoring/advisory support explains 25.6 percent of the variation in entrepreneurship development. Although this effect is lower than that of skills acquisition training and start-up grants/loans, it remains important because mentoring helps beneficiaries sustain businesses after training and funding. Many youth-owned businesses fail because owners lack experience in pricing, customer relations, bookkeeping, savings, and reinvestment and competition management. The finding agrees with Obananya (2021), who found that business mentoring supported entrepreneurship development in Anambra State. It also supports Michael (2021), who reported that mentoring-related variables such as business internship, seminars, creativity and innovation influenced

entrepreneurial development in Cross River State. Anoke and Okafor (2023) also emphasized business mentoring as a strategy for entrepreneurship growth.

5.1 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that government youth empowerment programmes can contribute meaningfully to entrepreneurship development in Akwa Ibom State when the programmes are practical, properly funded and supported with mentoring. The findings indicate that skills acquisition training, start-up grants/loans and business mentoring/advisory support are all important, but their strongest value emerges when they are implemented together. Training gives youths the competence to produce and serve, finance gives them the means to begin, and mentoring helps them to survive and grow. Therefore, empowerment programmes should move beyond short-term political distribution and focus on sustainable enterprise development among beneficiaries.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

- i. Government should strengthen practical skills acquisition programmes by ensuring that training areas reflect real market opportunities in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. Start-up grants and soft loans should be transparent, adequate and tied to viable business proposals so that beneficiaries can use them for productive enterprise activities.
- iii. Government should introduce monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track whether beneficiaries actually establish, sustain or expand businesses after receiving empowerment support.

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International Journal of Finance and Management in Practice

Volume 11, Number 2, December 2026

ISSN: 2360-7459(Print) 2795-3084(Online)

Published By

International Centre for Integrated Development Research, Nigeria

In collaboration with

Copperstone University, Luanshya, Zambia

- Umeh, J. C., and Eze, F. O. (2024). Access to credit and survival of youth-owned small businesses in Nigeria. *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, 19(2), 101-119.
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