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SKILLS ACQUISITION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH: EVIDENCE FROM YENAGOA METROPOLIS, BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Skills acquisition has become an indispensable strategy for promoting economic growth, reducing unemployment, alleviating poverty, and fostering entrepreneurship in developing economies. In Nigeria, where youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent challenges, vocational and technical skills development has been recognized as a viable approach for improving employability and stimulating local economic development. This study examines the relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigates the influence of vocational skills acquisition on employment generation, assesses its contribution to income generation and entrepreneurial development, and examines its overall impact on economic growth within the study area. A descriptive survey research design was adopted using a structured questionnaire administered to selected beneficiaries of vocational training centres, artisans, small business owners, and unemployed youths in Yenagoa Metropolis. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and multiple linear regression. The findings revealed that skills acquisition significantly enhanced employment opportunities, increased household income, promoted entrepreneurship, and contributed positively to local economic growth. The study recommends increased government investment in vocational education, improved funding of skills acquisition centres, stronger public-private partnerships, and enhanced access to entrepreneurial financing for graduates of vocational programmes. The findings are expected to contribute to policy formulation aimed at achieving sustainable economic growth through human capital development in Bayelsa State and Nigeria as a whole.

Keywords: Skills acquisition, economic growth, entrepreneurship, vocational education, employment generation, human capital development, Bayelsa State.

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Introduction

Economic growth remains a major objective of developing countries because of its implications for poverty reduction, employment generation, improved living standards, and sustainable development. Human capital development, particularly through skills acquisition, is an important pathway for achieving these outcomes. Skills acquisition involves the development of practical, technical, vocational, entrepreneurial, and managerial competencies that enhance individuals' productivity and capacity to participate effectively in the labour market or establish self-employment ventures. Unlike conventional academic education, skills acquisition emphasizes competency-based learning and practical knowledge that can improve economic productivity and self-reliance (Becker, 1993). Human Capital Theory similarly posits that investments in education and training enhance workers' productivity and earnings, while endogenous growth theory recognizes knowledge, innovation, and human capital as important determinants of long-term economic growth (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993; Romer, 1990).

In Nigeria, the importance of skills acquisition has increased in response to population growth, youth unemployment, technological change, and changing labour-market requirements. Formal education alone has not always provided graduates and other job seekers with the practical competencies required for productive employment and entrepreneurship. In response, the government has established and supported several initiatives, including the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), and Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), alongside state-level vocational and youth empowerment programmes. These initiatives provide training in areas such as tailoring, welding, information and communication technology (ICT), catering, agriculture, fish farming, electrical installation, fashion design, and business management, with the broader objective of improving employability, entrepreneurship, household income, and productivity (Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2022; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024).

The need for effective skills acquisition is particularly relevant in Bayelsa State, where economic activities have historically been strongly associated with the petroleum sector. In Yenagoa Metropolis, government agencies, private organizations, faith-based institutions, and non-governmental organizations have established or supported vocational training programmes designed to provide practical skills for youths and other economically active groups. Training opportunities in areas such as fashion design, ICT services, automobile repairs, catering, welding, photography, and creative arts have contributed to the development of small-scale enterprises and alternative livelihood activities. However, the persistence of economic vulnerability in the area raises questions about whether skills acquisition programmes are translating into sustained employment, increased income, and entrepreneurial development.

Although existing literature has established the importance of human capital and vocational training for productivity and economic development, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which skills acquisition programmes contribute to economic growth at the local level in Yenagoa Metropolis. Much of the broader discourse focuses on unemployment, employability, or the general role of vocational education, with less attention to measurable outcomes such as employment generation, income creation, and entrepreneurial development within specific urban contexts. This study therefore examines the contribution of skills acquisition to economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on its implications for employment generation, income creation, and entrepreneurial development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the proliferation of skills acquisition and vocational training programmes in Nigeria, there remains insufficient empirical evidence on the extent to which participation in these programmes translates into measurable economic outcomes at the local level. Existing interventions provide training in various vocational, technical, entrepreneurial, and service-oriented skills, but participation in training does not necessarily guarantee improved employment opportunities, increased income, or successful enterprise creation. The effectiveness of skills acquisition may depend on the quality and relevance of training, access to finance and productive resources, availability of markets, mentoring, and post-training institutional support.

This concern is particularly relevant in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, where various government agencies, private organizations, and non-governmental organizations provide skills acquisition and vocational training opportunities. Although these programmes are intended to enhance participants' economic productivity and promote self-employment, there is limited evidence on their actual outcomes among beneficiaries in the metropolis. In particular, it is unclear whether skills acquisition has resulted in meaningful improvements in employment generation, income creation, and entrepreneurial development, which are important dimensions of local economic growth.

Furthermore, the available literature provides limited location-specific evidence on the relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth in Bayelsa State. Studies conducted in other parts of Nigeria have reported varying outcomes, reflecting differences in programme design, implementation, institutional support, access to productive resources, and local economic conditions. Consequently, findings from other geographical settings may not adequately explain the outcomes of skills acquisition programmes in Yenagoa Metropolis.

The specific gap this study addresses is the lack of empirical evidence on the extent to which skills acquisition contributes to employment generation, income creation, and entrepreneurial development among beneficiaries in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of skills acquisition programmes on employment generation among residents of Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.
2. Assess the contribution of skills acquisition to income generation and entrepreneurial development in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.
3. Determine the effect of skills acquisition on economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, using the regression coefficient (β) and its statistical significance.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What changes in employment status are associated with participation in skills acquisition programmes among residents of Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State?
2. How does participation in skills acquisition programmes influence participants' income levels and entrepreneurial activities in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State?
3. What is the strength and direction of the statistical relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: Skills acquisition has no significant effect on economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.

H_{02}: Employment generation has no significant effect on economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.

H_{03}: Income generation has no significant effect on economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.

Literature Review

Concept of Skills Acquisition

Skills acquisition refers to the systematic process through which individuals develop practical knowledge, technical competencies, entrepreneurial abilities, and vocational expertise needed for productive employment, self-employment, and socioeconomic participation. Unlike conventional education, which may place greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge, skills acquisition focuses on practical and competency-based learning that enables individuals to perform specific occupational tasks. It may occur through formal institutions, non-formal training centres, apprenticeships, workplace learning, or informal channels. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) similarly views skills

development as encompassing technical, vocational, cognitive, and interpersonal competencies that improve employability, productivity, and adaptability in changing labour markets.

The concept is particularly relevant in developing economies where educational expansion has not always been accompanied by corresponding growth in employment opportunities. From a human capital perspective, education and training increase the productive capabilities of individuals and can therefore generate economic returns (Becker, 1964). However, this perspective assumes that acquired skills are relevant to available economic opportunities. In practice, the possession of vocational skills does not automatically result in employment or higher income. The outcome may depend on the quality of training, labour-market demand, access to finance and productive assets, infrastructure, and the institutional environment. Thus, skills acquisition should not be viewed simply as the accumulation of competencies but as a process whose economic value depends on how effectively those competencies can be converted into productive activities.

In Nigeria, skills acquisition has become an important component of government efforts to address labour-market challenges and promote entrepreneurship. Institutions such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), together with state-level vocational centres, provide training in areas including welding, tailoring, catering, ICT, carpentry, plumbing, fish farming, fashion design, electrical installation, cosmetology, automobile repairs, and agricultural processing (Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2022). Although the breadth of these programmes indicates substantial policy attention, their economic effectiveness cannot be inferred from the number of programmes or trainees alone. What is more important is whether participation produces measurable improvements in employment, income, enterprise creation, and productivity.

Skills acquisition can also contribute to individual empowerment by expanding opportunities for employment and income generation. OECD (2021) emphasises the importance of relevant skills for employability and productivity in changing economies. Nevertheless, the benefits of training may be unevenly distributed. Individuals with access to credit, markets, technology, mentoring, and supportive institutions may be better positioned to utilise acquired skills than those without such resources. This distinction is important because it suggests that skills acquisition may be a necessary condition for economic participation but not, by itself, a sufficient condition for sustained economic advancement.

Economic Growth

Economic growth generally refers to a sustained increase in an economy's production of goods and services over time and is commonly assessed using indicators such as real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Income (GNI), and real per capita income (Todaro & Smith, 2021). Although growth is often associated with rising employment, incomes, investment, and living standards, these outcomes do not necessarily occur automatically. An economy may experience an increase in aggregate output without corresponding improvements in employment or equitable income distribution. Consequently, the distinction between economic growth and broader economic development is important when assessing the effects of human capital interventions.

Economic growth is influenced by several interconnected factors, including physical capital, human capital, technological progress, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, institutions, and government policies. Human capital is particularly important because skilled workers can improve production efficiency, facilitate innovation, and support the adoption of new technologies. Romer (1990), through endogenous growth theory, places knowledge and human capital at the centre of long-run growth by arguing that investments that generate

knowledge and technological advancement can produce persistent productivity gains. This position complements the human capital perspective but gives greater emphasis to knowledge creation and technological spillovers rather than focusing solely on individual productivity.

The relationship between skills and growth is therefore more complex than a simple assumption that more training automatically produces more economic growth. While investment in human capital can expand productive capacity, its effects depend on whether the economy can absorb and effectively utilise the skills produced. This is particularly relevant in developing economies where labour markets may be characterised by informality, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and weak industrial capacity. The World Bank (2024) consequently emphasises the importance of policies that connect human capital development with productive employment, enterprise development, and inclusive economic opportunities.

For Nigeria, this distinction has important implications. Skills acquisition programmes may generate private benefits for participants through improved employability or entrepreneurship without necessarily producing substantial economy-wide effects. Conversely, when training is aligned with market demand and supported by finance, infrastructure, technology, and appropriate institutions, individual productivity gains may accumulate into higher enterprise output, employment creation, and local economic activity. Economic growth should therefore be examined not simply as an expected consequence of training but as an outcome mediated by several complementary factors.

Skills Acquisition and Economic Growth

The theoretical connection between skills acquisition and economic growth is primarily explained through human capital and endogenous growth perspectives. Human capital theory suggests that investment in education and training enhances workers' productive capacity, thereby increasing earnings and output (Becker, 1964). Endogenous growth theory extends this argument by emphasising knowledge, innovation, and technological progress as mechanisms through which human capital can generate sustained increases in productivity (Romer, 1990). Taken together, the theories provide a strong basis for expecting a positive relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth, although they do not imply that the relationship is automatic or uniform across contexts.

One important mechanism is employment generation. Vocational and technical training can equip individuals with competencies that are directly applicable to occupations and small-scale enterprises. Where acquired skills correspond with labour-market demand, training may increase participants' probability of obtaining employment or becoming self-employed. Employment, in turn, provides income and increases participation in economic activity. However, the employment effect may be limited where training produces skills for which there is insufficient market demand. Therefore, the relevance and quality of training are as important as the quantity of training provided.

A second mechanism isincome generation. Skills that improve productivity can increase the earnings of employed workers and the revenues of self-employed individuals. Higher incomes may increase household consumption, savings, and investment, creating further economic activity. However, income effects may be constrained by limited access to start-up capital, inadequate equipment, weak market linkages, and low purchasing power. This indicates that skills acquisition should be viewed as part of a broader production system rather than as an isolated intervention.

A third mechanism is entrepreneurial development. Skills acquisition can provide individuals with both occupational competencies and business-management knowledge required to establish and operate micro and small enterprises. In Nigeria, MSMEs play an important role in employment and economic activity, making entrepreneurship an important channel through which vocational training may influence local economies (SMEDAN, 2023).

Nevertheless, entrepreneurship training alone does not guarantee enterprise survival. Business outcomes are also shaped by access to finance, infrastructure, markets, technology, managerial capability, and the wider regulatory environment. Thus, the contribution of skills acquisition to economic growth is likely to be stronger where training is accompanied by an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem.

A further mechanism is technology adoption and productivity improvement. Workers with relevant technical and digital competencies may be better able to operate modern equipment, adopt new production methods, and respond to technological changes. Digital skills can also expand access to online markets, remote employment, digital financial services, and technology-based entrepreneurship. These effects provide a link between individual skills and broader productivity growth. However, the benefits depend on access to electricity, internet connectivity, digital devices, and other complementary infrastructure.

In Bayelsa State, these mechanisms are particularly significant because skills acquisition is frequently presented as a means of supporting economic diversification beyond petroleum-related activities. Training in agriculture, ICT, fashion, catering, welding, creative industries, and small-scale manufacturing can potentially expand the range of productive activities available to residents. Nevertheless, the existence of such programmes does not establish their actual contribution to local economic growth. The central empirical issue is therefore whether participation in skills acquisition is associated with measurable improvements in employment, income, entrepreneurship, and ultimately economic growth in the study area.

Types of Skills Acquisition Programmes

Skills acquisition programmes vary according to the type of competency developed and the economic activities they target. The major categories relevant to this study include vocational, technical, entrepreneurial, and digital skills development.

Vocational Skills Training

Vocational training develops practical competencies for occupations such as tailoring, welding, plumbing, electrical installation, automobile repair, catering, fashion design, and fish farming. Its major strength is the direct connection between practical learning and occupational activities. This can facilitate immediate entry into employment or self-employment. However, the economic value of vocational training depends on whether the skills acquired remain relevant to market demand and whether graduates have access to the resources required to apply them.

Technical Skills Development

Technical training focuses more heavily on engineering, construction, manufacturing, electronics, ICT, renewable energy, and other technology-oriented activities. Such skills can contribute to productivity and industrial development by improving the ability of workers and enterprises to operate and maintain modern technologies. Compared with basic vocational training, technical skills may offer stronger links to technological upgrading, but they often require more specialised equipment, qualified instructors, and sustained investment in training facilities.

Entrepreneurial Skills Development

Entrepreneurial training focuses on competencies such as business planning, financial management, marketing, innovation, record keeping, customer relations, and enterprise management. Its importance lies in helping individuals convert occupational skills into viable businesses. However, entrepreneurship training is unlikely to produce sustainable enterprises where participants lack access to finance, markets, infrastructure, and mentoring. This suggests that entrepreneurial skills are most effective when integrated with broader enterprise-support mechanisms.

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Digital Skills Acquisition

Digital skills have become increasingly important because technological transformation is changing the nature of work and business. Relevant competencies include computer applications, programming, web development, digital marketing, graphics design, data analytics, cybersecurity, and other ICT-related skills. Digital competencies can expand access to formal employment, online markets, remote work, and digital entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, digital inclusion requires complementary infrastructure, particularly reliable electricity, affordable internet access, digital devices, and adequate connectivity. Consequently, digital skills acquisition may have considerable growth potential, but its benefits are constrained where the technological ecosystem is weak.

Overall, the literature indicates that skills acquisition can influence economic outcomes through employment, income generation, entrepreneurship, and productivity improvement. However, the literature also shows that these effects are conditional rather than automatic. Differences in training quality, market relevance, access to productive resources, institutional support, and local economic conditions can produce different outcomes across locations.This reinforces the need for location-specific empirical evidence on whether and how skills acquisition translates into measurable economic outcomes in Yenagoa Metropolis, which the present study seeks to establish.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Human Capital Theory and Endogenous Growth Theory. The two theories provide a basis for explaining how investment in skills and knowledge can influence individual economic outcomes and, through productivity, employment, entrepreneurship, and income generation, contribute to broader economic growth.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was initially advanced by Schultz (1961) and subsequently developed extensively by Becker (1964). The theory views education, training, skills development, health, and other investments in human capabilities as forms of capital because they enhance an individual's productive capacity. Becker (1964) argues that investment in human capital can increase productivity, earnings, and economic efficiency, while Schultz (1961) emphasises the role of investment in human capabilities in improving economic productivity and development.

The theory assumes that individuals acquire education and skills partly because these investments improve their ability to perform productive activities. In the labour market, individuals with relevant skills are expected to have greater employability and productivity, which can translate into higher earnings. At the aggregate level, a more skilled workforce can increase the productive capacity of an economy through improved labour efficiency, innovation, and more effective utilisation of physical and technological resources.

By application to the present study, Human Capital Theory provides a direct explanation for the expected relationship between skills acquisition and employment generation. Skills acquired through vocational and technical training may increase individuals' ability to secure employment or become self-employed. Increased productivity and improved occupational competence may also enhance income generation, either through wages or returns from self-employment and enterprise activities. Similarly, entrepreneurial and technical skills may enable beneficiaries to establish and manage businesses, thereby contributing to entrepreneurial development. When these individual-level gains are aggregated through increased employment, income, enterprise creation, and productivity, they can contribute to economic growth in the study area. Thus, the theory supports the expectation that greater and more relevant skills acquisition should be associated with improved economic outcomes.

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Endogenous Growth Theory

Endogenous Growth Theory, particularly associated with Romer (1990), explains long-run economic growth in terms of factors generated within the economic system, especially knowledge accumulation, human capital, technological innovation, and research and development. In contrast to traditional growth models that treat technological progress largely as an external factor, endogenous growth theory argues that deliberate investment in knowledge and human capabilities can generate sustained productivity improvements.

Romer (1990) emphasises that knowledge and technological change can produce increasing returns and generate spillover effects throughout an economy. Consequently, investment in education, training, research, and innovation does not merely improve the productivity of individual workers; it can also enhance the productive capacity of firms and stimulate technological advancement. This makes human capital particularly important to the long-run growth process.

By application to the present study, Endogenous Growth Theory provides a broader explanation of how skills acquisition can translate into economic growththrough employment, income generation, entrepreneurship, and productivity. Acquired skills can improve workers' ability to adopt and use new technologies, while entrepreneurial competencies can facilitate business creation and innovation. Increased employment generationexpands the productive participation of the population, while higher income generationcan stimulate consumption, savings, and investment. The development of new enterprises and improved business productivity can further increase local output and economic activity. Therefore, the theory suggests that skills acquisition can serve as an internal source of economic growth when acquired competencies are effectively applied to productive activities.

Relevance of the Theories to the Study

The two theories are complementary but operate at different analytical levels. Human Capital Theory primarily explains the individual-level mechanism through which skills acquisition improves employability, productivity, income, and entrepreneurial capacity. Endogenous Growth Theory extends this explanation to the economy-wide level, showing how accumulated human capital, knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship can generate sustained increases in productivity and economic growth.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study assumes that skills acquisition is the primary explanatory variable, while employment generation, income generation, and entrepreneurial development represent important economic outcomes and mechanisms through which skills acquisition may influence economic growth. The framework therefore provides the theoretical basis for examining whether the acquisition of relevant skills is associated with measurable improvements in employment, income, entrepreneurship, and overall economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State.

Empirical Review

Empirical research on skills acquisition generally suggests that vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial training can improve employability, self-employment, income generation, and other economic outcomes. However, the evidence is not uniformly positive. Differences in training quality, access to productive resources, post-training support, and local economic conditions appear to influence whether acquired skills are translated into sustainable economic benefits. This distinction is particularly important in the Niger Delta, where skills acquisition programmes have often been implemented as part of broader efforts to promote youth empowerment and economic diversification.

Igbongidi (2017) examined entrepreneurship education for skill acquisition and job generation among Business Education students in Bayelsa State. The study adopted a survey research design and focused on 300- and 400-level Business Education students in the

Department of Vocational and Technology Education. A sample of 125 students, representing approximately 45% of the population, was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. The study found that entrepreneurship education and skill acquisition could support business creation and self-reliance and recommended stronger encouragement and institutional support for graduate entrepreneurship. The study is relevant because it provides Bayelsa-specific evidence linking skills development with job generation. However, its respondents were students rather than graduates or beneficiaries already operating enterprises, and its survey design limits the extent to which the findings can establish actual changes in employment or income.

Teibowei and Osusu (2017) investigated skills acquisition programmes in Bayelsa State and their implications for economic development. Using a descriptive survey design, the researchers purposively selected 460 youthsas respondents. Data were collected with the Skills Acquisition Assessment Scale, which recorded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.83, and were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The study found that the implementation and enrolment in skills acquisition programmes were relatively low and that the utilisation of acquired skills for self-sustenance and job creation was discouraging. The authors consequently recommended soft loans, adequate equipment, and permanent skills acquisition centres.

The findings of Teibowei and Osusu (2017) are particularly important because they challenge the assumption that the mere existence of training programmes necessarily produces economic development. However, the study was primarily descriptive and did not estimate the statistical effect of skills acquisition on specific economic outcomes. Thus, while it demonstrates implementation and utilisation problems, it leaves unanswered the question of whether differences in skills acquisition are statistically associated with employment, income, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. This limitation is directly relevant to the present study.

Uranta and Nlerum (2017) provided further evidence from the Niger Delta by comparatively evaluating the skills acquisition programmes of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in Rivers and Bayelsa States. The researchers used amultistage sampling procedure, purposively selecting 22 out of 35 skills centres and randomly selecting programme participants. Although 300 questionnaires were initially administered, 271 valid responseswere retrieved and analysed. The study used descriptive statistics together with multiple regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results indicated that both programmes were generally perceived as effective, although SPDC recorded a higher effectiveness score (mean = 57.69) than NDDC (mean = 52.53). The study also reported that graduates of both programmes were able to earn a living from their acquired skills.

The strength of the Uranta and Nlerum (2017) study lies in its comparative design and inclusion of beneficiaries from Bayelsa and Rivers States. Nevertheless, its assessment focused mainly on programme effectiveness rather than directly estimating the contribution of skills acquisition to local economic growth. Furthermore, the study identified differences in training arrangements, including the use of professional organisations and NGOs by SPDC compared with more informal training arrangements under NDDC. This suggests that programme quality and institutional delivery mechanisms may condition the economic benefits of skills acquisition, rather than skills acquisition alone determining outcomes.

Jack, Eke, and Anele (2018) examined whether livelihood skills acquisition improved household income in six oil-producing communities across Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta States. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Questionnaires were administered to 610 respondents, while 72 additional respondents participated in interviews and focus group discussions. The study found that

opportunities for livelihood skills training were limited and that only a relatively small proportion of respondents had benefited from training. More importantly, the hypothesis test produced a non-significant relationship between participation in livelihood skills training and household income levels. The authors concluded that training alone did not necessarily translate into increased household income because the absence of starter packs, inadequate financing, the nature and duration of training, and infrastructural limitations constrained participants' ability to apply their acquired skills profitably.

The findings of Jack et al. (2018) provide an important counterpoint to studies that report positive effects of skills acquisition. Whereas skills training may improve employability or provide occupational competencies, the study demonstrates that these benefits may not translate into higher income when complementary resources are absent. Its inclusion of communities across three Niger Delta states also provides regional relevance, although its focus on rural oil-producing communities means that the findings may not fully represent the experience of beneficiaries in an urban setting such as Yenagoa Metropolis.

Wagbara and Berepugi (2023) investigated the relationship between technical skills acquisition and employability potential among Business Education undergraduates in Bayelsa State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and drew a sample of 217 students from a population of 499 undergraduates across three tertiary institutions using simple random sampling. Of the 217 questionnaires distributed, 213 were retrieved and used for analysis. The instrument had a reported reliability index of 0.787. The study provides evidence that technical skills acquisition is relevant to the employability potential of students in Bayelsa State.

Although Wagbara and Berepugi (2023) strengthens the Bayelsa-specific evidence base, its focus on undergraduates means that employability potential rather than actual employment, income, or enterprise performance was examined. Consequently, the findings support the human-capital argument that skills enhance employability but do not by themselves establish whether such skills generate measurable economic growth among residents or programme beneficiaries.

Similarly, Osemene and Suwari (2023) examined entrepreneurial skills acquired by agribusiness graduates in the management of small-scale agribusiness ventures in Bayelsa State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and involved 150 respondents, comprising 100 agribusiness graduates and 50 experienced farmers. Data were collected using a structured 64-item questionnaire. The study focused on the entrepreneurial competencies required for managing small-scale agribusiness ventures, thereby providing evidence of the importance of entrepreneurial skills in converting technical knowledge into productive enterprise activities.

The study is particularly relevant to the entrepreneurial-development dimension of the present research, but its descriptive orientation and specific focus on agribusiness limit its applicability to the broader range of skills acquisition programmes in Yenagoa Metropolis. More importantly, it does not directly establish the aggregate relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth. This leaves room for a broader empirical assessment incorporating employment, income, entrepreneurship, and economic growth as interconnected outcomes.

Additional evidence from the South-South region is provided by a study of vocational skills acquisition programmes involving youths in Bayelsa and Rivers States. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey design and selected 775 youths, comprising 386 respondents from Bayelsa and 389 from Rivers State, using purposive and simple random sampling. Of the questionnaires administered, 765 were retrieved. Data were analysed primarily using mean and standard deviation, with z-tests used for hypotheses. The study

examined the vocational skills available to youths and their perceived effects within the South-South region.

Taken together, the empirical evidence reveals three important patterns. First, studies conducted in Bayelsa State and the wider Niger Delta generally recognise skills acquisition as relevant to employability, self-employment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood improvement. Second, the evidence is not uniformly positive: Jack et al. (2018), for example, found no significant relationship between skills training participation and household income, indicating that training may fail to produce economic benefits where finance, starter resources, and infrastructure are inadequate. Third, much of the existing Bayelsa literature relies on descriptive survey designs and respondents such as students or youths, rather than beneficiaries across different skills acquisition programmes, and relatively few studies directly estimate the statistical relationship between skills acquisition and broader economic outcomes.

The existing literature therefore provides useful evidence on the availability, perceived effectiveness, employability implications, and entrepreneurial potential of skills acquisition programmes, but it leaves an important empirical gap. There is limited location-specific quantitative evidence that simultaneously examines skills acquisition, employment generation, income generation, entrepreneurial development, and their statistical relationship with economic growth among residents or beneficiaries in Yenagoa Metropolis.The present study addresses this gap by examining these relationships within Yenagoa Metropolis, thereby extending the existing Bayelsa and Niger Delta literature beyond programme description and perceived effectiveness to measurable economic outcomes.

Gap in Literature

The empirical literature reviewed indicates that skills acquisition has been associated with employment, income generation, employability, and entrepreneurship. However, the evidence remains fragmented, particularly in Bayelsa State and the wider Niger Delta. Existing studies have largely examined individual outcomes such as employability, programme effectiveness, or household income, while limited attention has been given to the combined relationship between skills acquisition, employment generation, income generation, entrepreneurial development, and economic growthwithin a specific urban setting.

A further gap concerns the analytical approach. Much of the existing Bayelsa-specific evidence is based on descriptive survey methods and does not adequately quantify the strength and direction of the relationships between skills acquisition and economic outcomes. In particular, there is limited empirical evidence from Yenagoa Metropolis that uses inferential analysis to determine whether skills acquisition, employment generation, and income generation significantly predict economic growth.

This study addresses these specific gaps by empirically examining the relationships among skills acquisition and the identified economic outcomes in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State. The study therefore extends existing evidence by providing location-specific quantitative evidence on the statistical relationships between skills acquisition and measurable dimensions of economic growth.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect quantitative data from a representative sample of respondents in order to describe existing conditions and examine the relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth. It also facilitates the collection of information on the opinions, perceptions, and experiences of beneficiaries of skills acquisition programmes regarding employment generation, income improvement,

entrepreneurial development, and economic growth. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive survey research is suitable for studies that seek to describe characteristics of a population and examine relationships among variables without manipulating them.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Yenagoa is the capital city of Bayelsa State and serves as the state's commercial, educational, and administrative centre. The metropolis comprises Yenagoa Local Government Area and adjoining urban communities, including Ekeki, Amarata, Opolo, Kpansia, Biogbolo, Azikoro, Swali, Okaka, Akenfa, Agudama-Epie, and Etegwe.

Yenagoa has experienced urban growth and increasing demand for employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. The metropolis hosts government and privately owned vocational training centres, technical institutions, entrepreneurship development centres, and micro and small enterprises that provide skills acquisition and employment opportunities for youths and other residents. These characteristics make Yenagoa Metropolis an appropriate setting for examining the relationship between skills acquisition and economic outcomes.

Population of the Study

The target population consisted of beneficiaries of skills acquisition programmes, vocational trainees, artisans, owners of micro and small enterprises, graduates of vocational centres, and unemployed youths residing in Yenagoa Metropolis.

For the purpose of this study, the accessible population comprised 650 respondentsdrawn from selected government-owned vocational training centres, private skills acquisition centres, entrepreneurship development programmes, and registered artisan associations operating within Yenagoa Metropolis. The distribution of the accessible population is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Population Distribution of Respondents

Category	Population
Beneficiaries of Government Skills Acquisition Programmes	180
Graduates of Vocational Training Centres	150
Registered Artisans	120
Owners of Small and Medium Enterprises	100
Unemployed Youths Undergoing Skills Training	100
Total	**650**

Source: Field Survey Framework (2026).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 248 respondents was selected from the accessible population using the Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- (n) = Sample size
- (N) = Population size (650)
- (e) = Margin of error (Level of precision) (0.05)

$$n = \frac{650}{1 + 650(0.05)^2} = \frac{650}{2.625}$$

$$n = 247.62 \text{ (approx.: 250)}$$

Therefore, 248 respondents constituted the sample for the study.

A multistage sampling technique was employed. First, selected vocational training centres and entrepreneurship development institutions were purposively chosen because they actively conduct skills acquisition programmes. Thereafter, respondents were selected proportionately using simple random sampling to ensure that every eligible participant had an equal chance of being selected.

Table 2. Sample Distribution

Category	Population	Sample
Government Skills Acquisition Beneficiaries	180	69
Vocational Training Graduates	150	57
Registered Artisans	120	46
SME Owners	100	38
Youths Under Training	100	38
Total	**650**	**248**

Source: Computed from Field Survey Framework (2026).

Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through the administration of structured questionnaires to the selected respondents. Secondary data were sourced from textbooks, journal articles, conference proceedings, government publications, reports of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), World Bank reports, International Labour Organization (ILO) publications, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) reports, and other relevant academic literature.

Instrument for Data Collection

The principal instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire consisting of five key sections**:**

- **Section A:** Demographic characteristics of respondents.
- **Section B:** Skills acquisition programmes.
- **Section C:** Employment generation.
- **Section D:** Income generation and entrepreneurial development.
- **Section E:** Economic growth indicators.

The questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale**:** The responses and scores are indicated as follows:Strongly Agree (SA) – 5; Agree (A) – 4; Undecided (U) - 3; Disagree (D) – 2; Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using a pilot study involving 30 respondentsoutside the study area. Responses were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha**.**

Table 3 Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Skills Acquisition	8	0.86
Employment Generation	6	0.84
Income Generation	6	0.88
Entrepreneurial Development	6	0.82
Economic Growth	8	0.90
Overall Reliability	**34**	**0.86**

Since all coefficients exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), the instrument was considered reliable for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher, assisted by three trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaires to respondents. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires, and completed copies were retrieved immediately where possible. This approach enhanced the response rate and minimized missing data. Data collection process took an average period of 3 months, from March 2026.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27**.**

The following statistical tools were employed:

- Frequency counts and percentages to analyze respondents' demographic characteristics.
- Mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions.
- Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to determine the relationship between skills acquisition and economic growth.
- Multiple Linear Regression Analysis to determine the influence of skills acquisition on employment generation, income generation, and economic growth.

The regression model is specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Dependent (response) variable
- β_0= Intercept (constant term)
- β_1,β_2,β_3 = Regression coefficients for the independent variables
- X_1,X_2,X_3 = Independent (predictor) variables
- ε = Random error term (residual)

The regression model as applied in this study is specified as follows:

(Y) = Economic Growth; (X_1) = Skills Acquisition; (X_2) = Employment Generation; (X_3) = Income Generation/Entrepreneurial Development; β_0= Constant; β_1,β_2,β_3 = Regression coefficients ; and ε = Error term.

The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated p-value was less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) and retained where $p > 0.05$**.**

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the research before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of responses was assured. No identifying information was disclosed, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

Results

Table 4. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	137	55.2
Female	111	44.8
Age		
18–25 years	47	19.0
26–35 years	71	28.6
36–45 years	67	27.0
46–55 years	42	16.9

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Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
56 years and above	21	8.5
Educational Level		
No formal education	12	4.8
Primary education	35	14.1
Secondary education	107	43.1
Tertiary education	94	37.9
Marital Status		
Single	81	32.7
Married	131	52.8
Widowed	20	8.1
Divorced/Separated	16	6.5
Years of Participation/Experience		
Less than 5 years	53	21.4
5–10 years	85	34.3
11–15 years	64	25.8
More than 15 years	46	18.5
Total Respondents	**248**	**100.0**

Table 4 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 248 respondents used for the analysis. The gender distribution indicates that 137 respondents (55.2%) were male, while 111 (44.8%) were female. The distribution therefore shows that both male and female respondents were adequately represented, although males constituted a slightly higher proportion of the sample.

With respect to age, respondents aged 26–35 years constituted the largest group, accounting for 71 respondents (28.6%), followed by those aged 36–45 years with 67 respondents (27.0%). Respondents aged 18–25 years accounted for 47 (19.0%), while 42 (16.9%) were between 46 and 55 years and 21 (8.5%) were 56 years and above. The distribution indicates that most respondents were within the economically active age categories.

Regarding educational attainment, 107 respondents (43.1%) had secondary education, while 94 (37.9%) had tertiary education. Thirty-five respondents (14.1%) had primary education, whereas 12 (4.8%) had no formal education. Thus, the majority of respondents had at least secondary education, suggesting that most participants possessed basic educational qualifications that could facilitate participation in skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development activities.

In terms of marital status, 131 respondents (52.8%) were married, 81 (32.7%) were single, 20 (8.1%) were widowed and 16 (6.5%) were divorced or separated. With respect to years of participation or experience, 85 respondents (34.3%) had 5–10 years of experience, 64 (25.8%) had 11–15 years, 53 (21.4%) had less than five years, while 46 (18.5%) had more than 15 years of experience.

Overall, the demographic characteristics indicate that the respondents represented a relatively diverse population in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, marital status and experience.

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Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Major Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Skills Acquisition	4.18	0.62	High
Entrepreneurial Development	4.09	0.65	High
Employment Generation	4.05	0.71	High
Income Generation	3.98	0.68	High
Economic Growth	4.12	0.59	High

Decision criterion: Mean ≥ 3.00 = High.

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the major variables examined in the study. Skills acquisition recorded a mean score of 4.18 and a standard deviation of 0.62, indicating a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the contribution of skills acquisition to economic development. Entrepreneurial development recorded a mean of 4.09 with a standard deviation of 0.65, indicating that respondents generally agreed that entrepreneurial development was an important component of the intervention programmes examined in the study. Employment generation recorded a mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.71), while income generation recorded a mean of 3.98 (SD = 0.68). Economic growth recorded a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.59). Since all the mean scores exceeded the criterion mean of 3.00, respondents generally expressed positive perceptions concerning skills acquisition, entrepreneurial development, employment generation, income generation and economic growth. The inclusion of entrepreneurial development in Table 5 ensures consistency with the study's second objective and corresponding hypothesis.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Development on Economic Growth

Predictor	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Skills Acquisition	0.671	13.58	<0.001	Significant
Entrepreneurial Development	0.221	4.47	<0.001	Significant
Constant	—	2.94	0.004	Significant

Note: Dependent variable: Economic Growth

Table 6 presents the results of the revised multiple linear regression analysis with economic growth as the dependent variable and skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development as the explanatory variables. The result shows that skills acquisition had a positive and statistically significant influence on economic growth ($\beta = 0.671$, $t = 13.58$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of skills acquisition were associated with higher levels of economic growth. Skills acquisition was therefore the strongest explanatory variable in the model. Entrepreneurial development also exerted a positive and statistically significant influence on economic growth ($\beta = 0.221$, $t = 4.47$, $p < 0.001$). Although its standardized coefficient was smaller than that of skills acquisition, the result indicates that entrepreneurial development made an independent contribution to explaining variations in economic growth. The results therefore demonstrate that both skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development significantly influence economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis.

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Table 7a. Model Summary and Multicollinearity Diagnostics: Panel A: Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.811
R^2	0.658
Adjusted R^2	0.655
F-statistic	235.52
Significance (p)	<0.001
Sample size (N)	248

Table 7b. Model Summary and Multicollinearity Diagnostics: Panel B: Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Skills Acquisition	0.741	1.350
Entrepreneurial Development	0.741	1.350

Table 7a presents the model summary and multicollinearity diagnostics. The regression model produced an R-value of 0.811, indicating a strong positive relationship between the explanatory variables and economic growth. The R^2 value of 0.658 indicates that skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development jointly explained approximately 65.8% of the observed variation in economic growth, while the remaining 34.2% was attributable to other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R^2 of 0.655 indicates that the model retained substantial explanatory power after adjustment for the number of predictors and sample size. The F-statistic of 235.52 was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, demonstrating that the model as a whole significantly predicts economic growth. The multicollinearity diagnostics presented in Table 7b, show tolerance values of 0.741 and VIF values of 1.350 for both skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development. These values indicate a low level of collinearity between the two explanatory variables. Thus, the predictors are sufficiently distinct to be retained in the regression model. The model therefore provides a more theoretically consistent specification.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: Skills acquisition has no significant influence on economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis.

The regression analysis indicates that skills acquisition had a positive and statistically significant influence on economic growth ($\beta = 0.671$, $t = 13.58$, $p < 0.001$). Since the probability value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is **rejected**. The study therefore concludes that skills acquisition significantly influences economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: Entrepreneurial development has no significant influence on economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis.

The regression result indicates that entrepreneurial development had a positive and statistically significant influence on economic growth ($\beta = 0.221$, $t = 4.47$, $p < 0.001$). Since the probability value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is **rejected**. The study therefore concludes that entrepreneurial development significantly influences economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Linear Trend Graphs

The linear trend graphs were employed to depict the direction and strength of the relationships between skills acquisition and the key dependent variables. The trend

relationships between skills acquisition and employment generation, skills acquisition and income generation, and skills acquisition and economic growthare presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Employment Trend

The relationship between skills acquisition and employment is shown in Figure 1.

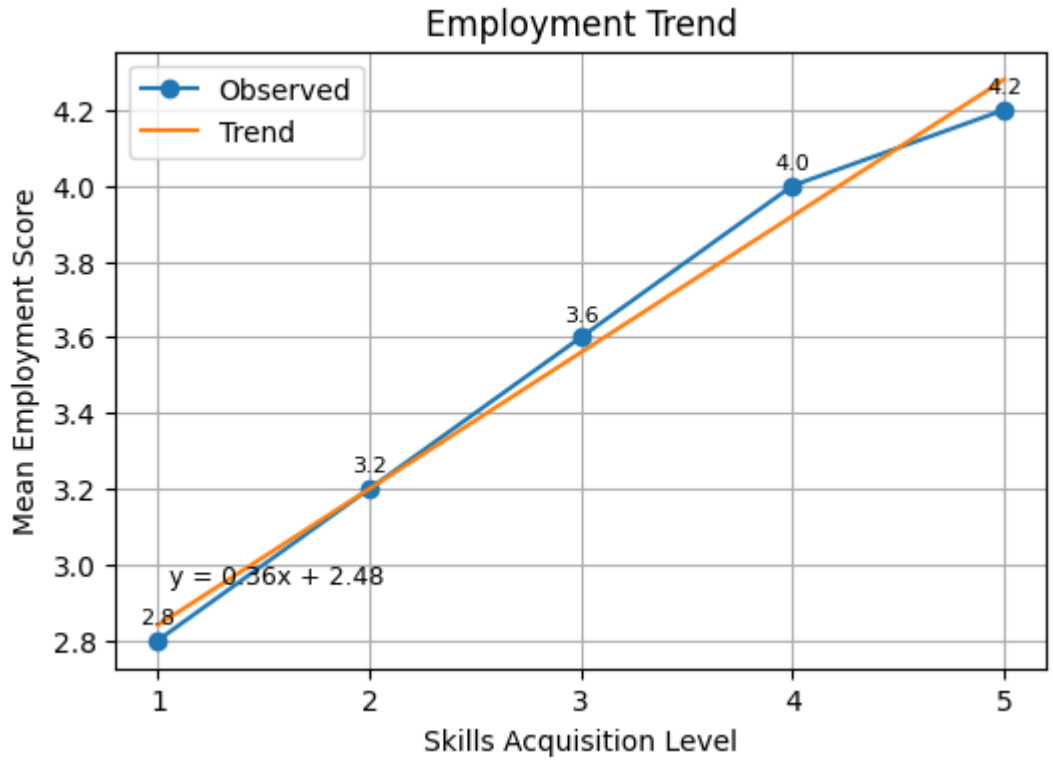


Figure 1, Skills acquisition and employment

The employment trend graph, shown in Figure 1, indicates a consistent upward linear relationship between the level of skills acquisition and employment generation among respondents in Yenagoa Metropolis. As the level of participation in skills acquisition programmes increases, the mean employment score rises steadily from 2.8 at the lowest skill acquisition level to approximately 4.2 at the highest level. This positive trend indicates that vocational and entrepreneurial training significantly enhances the employability of beneficiaries by equipping them with practical competencies that meet labour market demands.

The findings suggest that individuals who acquire marketable skills are more likely to secure wage employment or establish self-employed ventures than those without vocational competencies. This outcome supports the argument that practical skills reduce dependence on scarce white-collar jobs by creating alternative employment opportunities in sectors such as tailoring, information and communication technology (ICT), welding, catering, fish farming, fashion design, electrical installation, and automobile repairs. The increasing trend further demonstrates that continuous investment in skills acquisition programmes can substantially reduce unemployment, particularly among youths in Yenagoa Metropolis.

The observed trend is consistent with the Human Capital Theory, which posits that investment in education and vocational training increases workers' productivity and employment opportunities (Becker, 1993). It also corroborates the findings of the International Labour Organization (2022), which reported that countries with strong technical

and vocational education systems generally experience lower unemployment rates and improved labour market outcomes. Therefore, expanding access to quality skills acquisition programmes can serve as an effective strategy for addressing unemployment and promoting inclusive economic development in Bayelsa State.

Income Trend

The relationship between skills acquisition and income is shown in Figure 2.

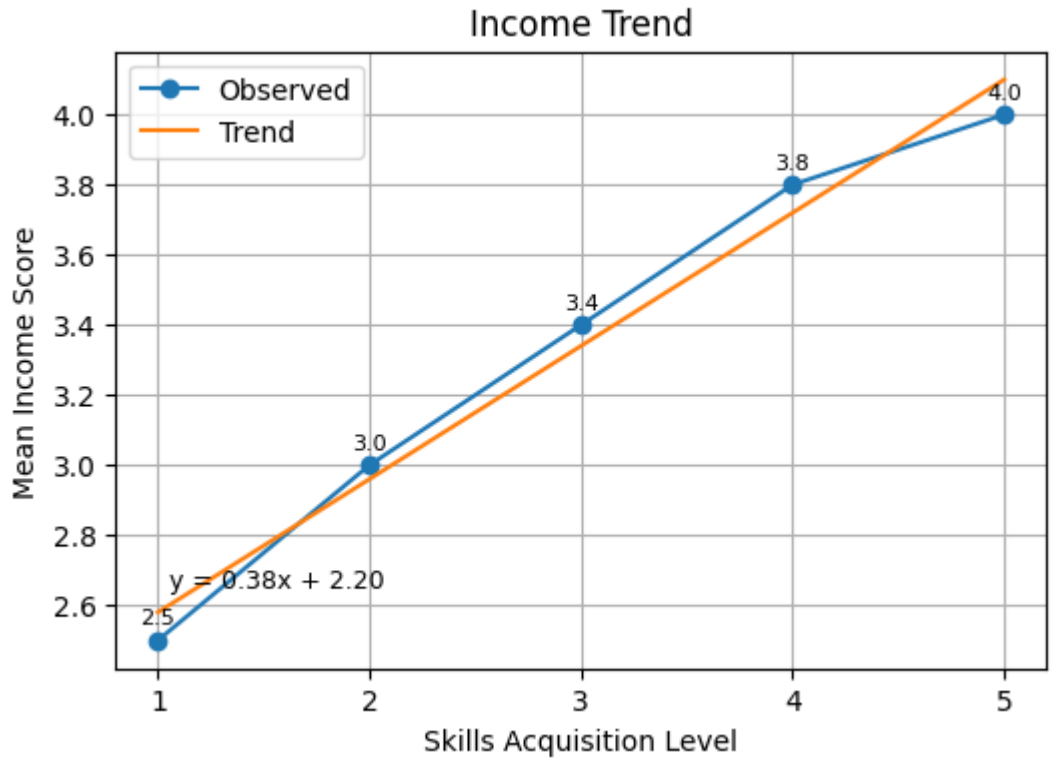


Figure 2, Skills acquisition and income generation

As indicated in Figure 2, the income trend graph reveals a positive and steady increase in income generation as the level of skills acquisition improves. The graph indicates that the mean income score increases progressively from 2.5 to 4.0, suggesting that individuals possessing higher vocational and entrepreneurial skills tend to earn higher incomes than those with limited practical competencies. This trend reflects the economic benefits associated with skills acquisition, as trained individuals are able to establish micro-enterprises, expand existing businesses, improve productivity, and diversify their sources of income. Skills acquired through vocational programmes enable beneficiaries to offer specialized services, produce marketable goods, and compete more effectively within local and regional markets. Consequently, increased income contributes to improved household welfare, higher purchasing power, poverty reduction, and enhanced standards of living. The findings also demonstrate that entrepreneurship resulting from skills acquisition contributes to wealth creation and employment generation by encouraging business expansion and the recruitment of additional workers. This aligns with the view that vocational education is not merely an employment strategy but also an important instrument for stimulating local economic activities and improving livelihoods. The positive income trend supports previous studies that identified entrepreneurial skills as major determinants of income growth and poverty alleviation in developing economies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development [OECD], 2021; Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria [SMEDAN], 2023). Furthermore, the gradual increase shown in the graph suggests that the economic benefits of skills acquisition accumulate over time as individuals gain experience, improve business management skills, and build stronger customer networks. The implication is that sustained support through access to finance, mentorship, and market linkages can further enhance the income-generating potential of vocational training programmes in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Economic Growth Trend

The relationship between skills acquisition and perceived economic growth is shown in Figure 3.

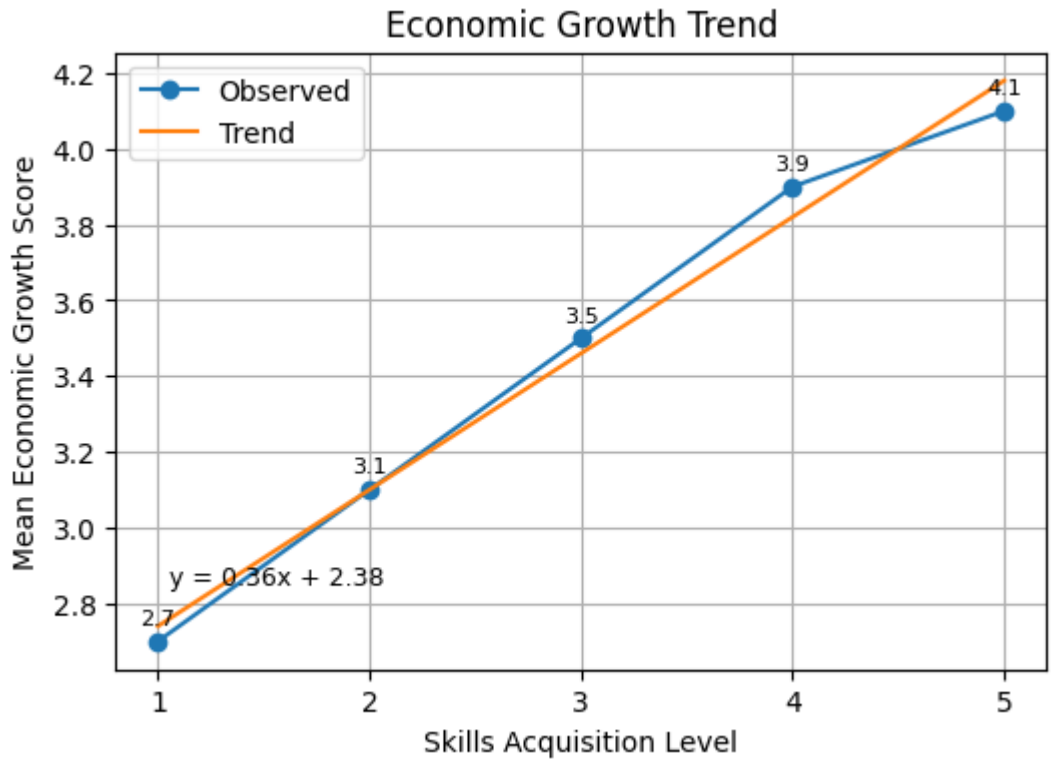


Figure 3, Skills acquisition and perceived economic growth

As indicated in Figure 3, the economic growth trend graph demonstrates a strong positive linear relationship between skills acquisition and perceived economic growth. The trend shows that the mean economic growth score rises steadily from 2.7 at the lowest level of skills acquisition to approximately 4.1 at the highest level, indicating that increased investment in vocational education and entrepreneurial development contributes significantly to economic expansion within Yenagoa Metropolis.

The graph suggests that as more individuals acquire productive skills, local economic activities increase through higher labour productivity, business creation, innovation, and increased production of goods and services. The expansion of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) established by skilled individuals contributes to employment creation, increased household income, improved tax revenues, and greater circulation of income within the local economy. These factors collectively stimulate economic growth and promote sustainable community development.

The upward trend further indicates that skills acquisition strengthens the productive capacity of the labour force by improving technical efficiency, encouraging innovation, and

facilitating the adoption of modern production techniques. As more residents become economically productive, dependence on government employment declines while private-sector participation expands, leading to broader economic diversification beyond the petroleum industry that traditionally dominates Bayelsa State's economy.

The findings strongly support the Endogenous Growth Theory proposed by Romer (1990), which argues that investments in human capital, knowledge, innovation, and technological advancement constitute major drivers of long-run economic growth. Similarly, the World Bank (2024) emphasizes that economies with higher levels of human capital development generally achieve stronger productivity growth and improved economic resilience. Therefore, strengthening skills acquisition programmes through increased funding, improved infrastructure, curriculum modernization, and stronger collaboration between training institutions and industries will enhance sustainable economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis and Bayelsa State as a whole.

Collectively, the three linear trend graphs provide compelling visual evidence that skills acquisition positively influences employment generation, income generation, and economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State. The consistently upward trends across all three indicators demonstrate that investment in vocational and entrepreneurial skills development yields broad socioeconomic benefits. As individuals acquire relevant and market-oriented skills, they become more employable, generate higher incomes, establish sustainable enterprises, and contribute more effectively to local and regional economic development. These findings reinforce the study's regression results, which showed that skills acquisition is a statistically significant predictor of economic growth. The evidence therefore underscores the importance of expanding access to quality technical and vocational education, strengthening entrepreneurship support programmes, and promoting public-private partnerships to maximize the developmental impact of skills acquisition initiatives in Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

The study established that skills acquisition has a positive and significant contribution to economic development in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State. Specifically, the major findings corresponding to the study objectives were as follows:

i. Skills acquisition significantly improves employment generation**,** by enhancing beneficiaries' employability and capacity for self-employment.

ii. Skills acquisition significantly contributes to income generation and entrepreneurial development**,** enabling beneficiaries to improve their earning capacity and engage in productive business activities.

iii. Skills acquisition has a significant positive relationship with economic growth, indicating that improved vocational competencies contribute to broader economic development through employment creation, increased income and enhanced productivity.

Overall, the findings indicate that skills acquisition is an important instrument for strengthening human capital and promoting sustainable local economic development in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Conclusion

This study concludes that skills acquisition is a significant driver of economic growth in Yenagoa Metropolis**,** with its contribution extending beyond individual employment and income outcomes to broader economic productivity and development. The evidence demonstrates that strengthening vocational and entrepreneurial competencies can enhance the productive capacity of the local workforce and support a more diversified and resilient economy. Thus, sustained investment in skills development is critical to reducing dependence on traditional economic sectors and advancing inclusive and sustainable economic development in Bayelsa State. Overall, skills acquisition should be regarded as a strategic

economic policy instrument capable of accelerating economic transformation and achieving sustainable development in Yenagoa Metropolis and Nigeria as a whole.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Government should strengthen and adequately fund skills acquisition programmes by providing appropriate training facilities, equipment, qualified instructors, and relevant practical training, given the study's finding that skills acquisition significantly improves employment generation.

ii. Skills acquisition programmes should place greater emphasis on practical entrepreneurship training and business development**,** since the study established that vocational skills significantly contribute to income generation and entrepreneurial development.

iii. Graduates of skills acquisition programmes should be provided with accessible post-training business support**,** including start-up grants, soft loans and business advisory services, to enable them to translate acquired skills into sustainable income-generating enterprises.

iv. Stronger linkages should be established between vocational training institutions and employers**,** through apprenticeship, industrial attachment and employment-placement arrangements, to improve the transition from skills acquisition to gainful employment.

v. Government should regularly monitor and evaluate skills acquisition programmes to ensure that training remains relevant to employment and enterprise opportunities and that programme resources produce measurable economic benefits.

vi. Further studies should examine the long-term economic outcomes of skills acquisition programmes across other communities and states in the Niger Delta, thereby providing evidence for improving skills-development policies and programmes.

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