

## SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMMES OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study examine National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Skill Acquisition Programmes and youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. The objective of the study is focusing on fashion design and hairdressing skills in Cross River State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed to collect and analyze data systematically from a sample of 600 youth participants who had completed at least one training program under the NDE between 2018 and 2023. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling. Structured questionnaires was used as an instrument of data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established through a Pearson's correlation coefficient at ( $r = 0.70$ ). The data obtained was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between fashion design skills and youth empowerment ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that these skills are a key factor in enhancing youth autonomy and economic participation. The study concludes that the NDE Skill Acquisition Programmes have a significant positive impact on youth empowerment, particularly through the development of vocational skills like fashion design and hairdressing, which enhance both economic opportunities and personal growth among participants. It was recommended that there is a need to standardize and modernize hairdressing training curricula to reflect current industry practices. Also, that educational institutions should incorporate fashion design programs into secondary and tertiary curricula, offering a structured pathway for youth to develop both technical and entrepreneurial skills in the fashion industry.

**Keywords:** National Directorate of Employment, Skill Acquisition Programmes, Youth Empowerment and Fashion/Hairdressing Design.

## Introduction

Globally, skill acquisition programs have evolved in response to shifting economic landscapes marked by globalization, technological advancements, and the rise of the knowledge economy. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) asserts that vocational training and skills development are integral to reducing poverty, enhancing productivity, and facilitating sustainable economic growth. Developed nations have long recognized the importance of lifelong learning, while many developing countries, particularly in Africa, are now beginning to intensify efforts to bolster skills among their populations (World Bank, 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where youth unemployment remains a critical issue, skill acquisition programs are seen as essential tools for economic development. The African Union's Agenda 2063 highlights skills development as a key driver for the region's transformation, emphasizing the need for investment in education and training to enhance the employability of young people (African Union, 2015).

In Nigeria, before the advent of colonialism, the indigenous systems of education and skill acquisition in Nigeria were largely informal, community based, and driven by the need for survival (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2020). Skills such as farming, fishing, weaving, pottery, and metalworking were passed down through generations. Young people were trained as apprentices under the guidance of elders or master craftsmen, learning trade specific skills that were vital to their communities' economic structures. These informal apprenticeship systems served not only as a means of skill acquisition but also as a foundational element of socialization and cultural continuity (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2020). The arrival of British colonialism in the late 19th century introduced a more structured, albeit exploitative, economic system, with significant implications for skill acquisition in Nigeria. Colonial policies focused on resource extraction, which limited opportunities for industrial and technological development. (Aderinoye, 1990). Vocational and technical training were largely neglected in favour of Western-style education, which placed less emphasis on practical skills suited to the local economy.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country faced new challenges in addressing unemployment and underemployment, particularly among the youths. The Nigerian government, recognizing the inadequacies of the formal education system and the growing need for a skilled workforce, embarked on various skill acquisition programmes aimed at alleviating poverty, reducing youth unemployment, and fostering economic development. Hence, the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986 (Okafor & Akpan, 2022). The NDE's mandate was to design and implement programmes that would provide youth with practical skills, enhance their employability, and promote entrepreneurship. In Cross River State, the NDE introduced numerous initiatives, including vocational training workshops, entrepreneurial development schemes, and the establishment of skills acquisition centres in various local government areas.

Today, the skill acquisition programmes in Cross River State reflect a blend of traditional knowledge systems and modern vocational training, with an emphasis on addressing the unique socio-economic needs of the local population (Cross River State Government, 2021). The impact of these programmes, however, remains a subject of ongoing debate, with critics pointing to challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient follow-up mechanisms for graduates (Okorie, 2007). The NDE's efforts have played a crucial role in

shaping the development of human capital in the state, contributing to the broader national goal of achieving sustainable economic growth and development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Nigeria, youth unemployment and underemployment remain significant challenges, affecting the socioeconomic development of the country. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), the unemployment rate among Nigerian youths stands at a staggering 42.5%, which is among the highest globally. In response to this growing concern, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established in 1986 with a mandate to design and implement skill acquisition programmes aimed at addressing youth unemployment and fostering economic self-reliance (National Directorate of Employment, 2021). These programmes are intended to equip youths with marketable skills that will enable them to either secure gainful employment or become entrepreneurs, thus contributing to poverty alleviation and national development (Ushie, Egidi & Inyang, 2022). However, despite the numerous skill acquisition programmes launched by the NDE, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of these interventions in achieving their objectives. For instance, Adeola (2019) observed that there is a mismatch between the skills taught in these programmes and the needs of the industries, leading to limited employment opportunities for participants. Also, the impact of these programmes on the long-term employability and entrepreneurial success of beneficiaries remains largely unmeasured.

The effectiveness of the NDE's skill acquisition initiatives is crucial for addressing the skills gap in the Nigerian workforce and improving the livelihood of the youth (Egidi, Obona, Ikpeme & Aganyi, 2024). On the other hand, the NDE has implemented several structured programmes including Vocational Skills Development, Small Scale Enterprises, Rural Employment Promotion, and Special Public Works designed to equip youths with marketable and functional skills, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which these programmes translate into sustainable employment or entrepreneurship (David, Lumun & Joshua, 2025). Also, there is a lack of context-specific evaluation of programme effectiveness. National-level reports emphasize skill acquisition and training outputs (e.g., number of trainees), but they rarely assess long-term outcomes such as job retention, income generation, or business sustainability among beneficiaries. This creates a gap between programme implementation data and measurable socio-economic outcomes (Anam, Ironbar, Uzoh, Umukoro, Eburikure & Dede, 2025). There is a gap in understanding the alignment between acquired skills and labour market demands. NDE programmes aim to provide “marketable skills,” yet there is insufficient evidence on whether these skills correspond with current industry needs thereby limiting employability outcomes. The core problem lies not in the absence of skill acquisition programmes, but in the lack of robust, location-specific empirical evidence on their effectiveness, sustainability, labour market relevance, and inclusiveness in Cross River State.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of the study is to examine: skill acquisition programmes of the national directorate of employment and youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. While the objectives were to examine:

- i. How fashion designing skills have generate youth’s empowerment
- ii. To see if hairdressing skills has created youth’s empowerment

## Review of Literature

### 1. Skill acquisition

The concept of skill acquisition has been framed through multiple theoretical perspectives, including cognitive, associative, and autonomous stages. One of the most widely accepted frameworks is the three-stage model proposed by Fitts and Posner (1967). According to this model, skill acquisition occurs through three distinct phases: Cognitive Stage: At this stage, learners focus on understanding the task, often relying on explicit instructions and conscious thought. Errors are frequent, and the learner's performance is generally inconsistent. The primary challenge is cognitive load, as the learner must process a significant amount of new information and translate it into actions (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). Associative Stage: In this phase, learners begin to refine their skills through practice, which leads to more consistent and accurate performance. Mistakes become less frequent, and the learner starts to develop a better sense of task execution. The cognitive demands are reduced, and the learner begins to internalize feedback (Schmidt & Lee, 2011). Autonomous Stage: At the final stage, the skill has become automatic. The learner no longer needs to devote significant attention to the task, as performance becomes almost effortless. The learner's actions are fluid and efficient, and their ability to make adjustments based on feedback is enhanced (Swinnen, 2002).

Skill acquisition has profound implications across various domains. In education, understanding how skills are acquired can help educators design effective teaching strategies. For instance, the use of scaffolding where teachers provide temporary support to learners and gradually withdraw it as learners become more competent is based on principles of skill acquisition (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). In sports for instance, coaches and athletes use insights from skill acquisition research to structure practice regimens that maximize performance. The principle of deliberate practice, which emphasizes focused, repetitive practice on specific areas of performance, has been widely adopted by athletes to achieve expertise (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

In technology, especially in artificial intelligence (AI), understanding the mechanisms of skill acquisition is crucial for developing systems capable of learning and improving over time. Machine learning algorithms, for instance, are designed to "acquire skills" by processing large amounts of data, making predictions, and adjusting their parameters based on feedback.

These algorithms mimic some aspects of human skill acquisition, particularly in the associative and autonomous stages (Goodfellow, Bengio, & Courville, 2016). One major issue is the individual variability in learning of skills. Not all learners progress through the stages at the same rate or in the same manner, and factors such as motivation, prior knowledge, and cognitive abilities can influence the acquisition process (Schmidt & Lee, 2011). For instance, according to a study conducted by Anderson, (1982) suggests that while skills acquired in one context are often transferable, the degree of transfer depends on the similarity between the learning environment and the application environment, skills learned in a controlled practice setting may not always translate seamlessly to real-world scenarios where variability and unpredictability are prevalent.

### Youth's empowerment programmes

Youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria have emerged as a strategic response to the issue affecting the well-being of the younger population. For instance, unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and socio-economic disadvantages. These programmes aim to equip youth with skills, resources, and opportunities that promote personal and collective growth, thereby promoting social inclusion and economic development. Many government and

past administrations have designed various forms of youth empowerments tailored to curb specific needs and contexts of the youth demography (Ushie, Egidi and Inyang, 2022).

One of the most prominent forms of youth empowerment in Nigeria is skills development and vocational training. This form of empowerment focuses on providing youth with practical, marketable skills that can increase their employability or enable them to start their own businesses (Adebayo, 2019). Programmes like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) have been instrumental in this regard. The NDE offers training in various fields such as agriculture, construction, and information technology, with the goal of bridging the skills gap in the labor market. Similarly, the Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) offers vocational training programs that target unemployed youth and equip them with the necessary skills to enter the workforce (Adebayo, 2019).

Entrepreneurship development is another key form of youth empowerment in Nigeria. Programmes like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) and the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN) are designed to promote entrepreneurship as a viable career option for young Nigerians. These programmes provide funding, mentorship, and training to young entrepreneurs, helping them establish and sustain businesses. Through these initiatives, youth are encouraged to leverage innovation and creativity to solve societal problems and generate income. The YouWIN programme, in particular, has supported hundreds of young people in various sectors, including technology, agriculture, and services (Olayemi, 2018). Education is a fundamental aspect of youth empowerment, and many Nigerian programmes focus on improving access to quality education. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and the Federal Government Scholarship Scheme are notable examples of initiatives that provide financial support to youth pursuing higher education (Mbah, 2020).

These programmes aim to alleviate the financial barriers to education and promote equal access to educational opportunities. Additionally, initiatives like the Nigerian Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (NYESSO) offer scholarships and educational support to youths in underserved areas, enhancing their academic achievements and increasing their employability (Mbah, 2020). Sports and cultural empowerment is an emerging aspect of youth empowerment in Nigeria. Empowering youth through sports and cultural activities is another dimension of youth empowerment in Nigeria. Programmes such as the National Sports Commission's Youth Development Programme provide platforms for youth to showcase their talents in various sports (Omololu, 2020). Similarly, cultural and creative industries, including music, film, and arts, offer alternative pathways for empowerment. The Nigerian government and private sector have recognized the economic potential of the creative industry, leading to the establishment of the National Creative Industry Initiative, which provides funding, training, and promotional support to young artists (Igbokwe, 2021). These programmes not only develop youth's talents but also foster social cohesion and national unity. Social empowerment programmes aim to address issues such as gender inequality, human rights, and social justice. Organizations like the Nigerian Youth Parliament and the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) focus on advocating for the rights and welfare of youth in the country.

These platforms offer young Nigerians the opportunity to engage in discussions on national issues and present their concerns to policymakers (Chukwuma & Olorunfemi, 2017). Youth empowerment in Nigeria is a many-sided motion that addresses the diverse challenges faced by young people in the country. Through skills development, entrepreneurship training,

educational support, and political engagement, these programmes seek to create opportunities that enable youth to contribute meaningfully to national development.

### **Fashion Design skill and youth's empowerment**

Fashion design, as a skill, is deeply rooted in cultural expression and personal identity. It is not merely an art form but a discipline that merges aesthetics, functionality, and cultural significance in the creation of clothing and accessories. Fashion design, as a professional and creative practice, has gained increasing recognition for its capacity to combine artistic flair, technical competence, and entrepreneurial insight (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2019). More than an aesthetic pursuit, it represents a structured process through which concepts of clothing and personal adornment are developed, translated into patterns, and eventually transformed into finished products. These products often reflect and respond to the cultural, social, and economic dynamics of the societies they are designed for (Adeyeye, 2018). The skill of fashion design encompasses both practical competencies, such as sketching, pattern drafting, fabric selection, garment construction, and finishing, as well as cognitive abilities like problem-solving, trend analysis, and innovation. These competencies empower designers to create functional, culturally relevant apparel that meets market demands, both locally and globally (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020).

Fashion design has evolved from a craft-based occupation into a professional industry that plays a vital role in employment generation and economic development, particularly in developing economies (Okpuvwie and Egidi, 2024). In these contexts, fashion design has become a viable means of promoting self-reliance, youth empowerment, and poverty reduction (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2019). Structured training, apprenticeships, and informal learning systems allow individuals to acquire fashion design skills, which are adaptable to shifting consumer preferences and technological innovations (Entwistle, 2015). The integration of modern tools such as computer-aided design (CAD) with traditional techniques highlights the dynamic nature of fashion design, emphasizing the need for continuous learning and adaptation (Aspers & Godart, 2013). Beyond its economic value, fashion design serves as a vehicle for cultural communication. Clothing is often a reflection of the social values, historical experiences, and symbolic meanings of a society (Ukachukwu & Ibe, 2018). Fashion designers frequently draw upon indigenous knowledge, local textiles, and traditional motifs to create designs that both preserve cultural heritage and engage with contemporary trends. This dual role positions fashion design as not just an economic skill, but as a medium for cultural expression and social representation (Adeyeye, 2018). Fashion design is also increasingly embedded within vocational and technical education programs aimed at equipping learners with skills that are directly applicable to the job market. These programs emphasize practical experience, creativity, and business management, recognizing that technical proficiency alone is insufficient without entrepreneurial insight (Ushie, Ogar, Egidi and Ushie, 2020). Fashion design is shaped by social and cultural attitudes, and it has evolved in different ways across time and space. It has been identified as a critical entrepreneurial skill, especially in addressing the issue of youth unemployment. In many skill acquisition programs organized by both governmental and non-governmental agencies, fashion design, particularly sewing, is commonly included (Adeyeye, 2018). This makes it a key skill for empowering young people and providing them with a pathway to self-employment. The acquisition of fashion design skills typically does not require a high level of formal education, making it accessible to individuals from diverse educational backgrounds. As Osaji (2015) notes, learning how to sew can bridge the gap between the literate

and illiterate, enabling individuals to gain practical skills that contribute to their economic independence.

For example, Nsifon (2014) conducted a study in the Eket Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, to examine poverty alleviation strategies. Using a descriptive survey design, the study identified sewing as one of the key programs for poverty reduction. The sample consisted of 150 individuals, randomly selected through simple random sampling. The results highlighted that sewing programs were considered effective in promoting skill acquisition and reducing poverty. Similarly, Osuala (2021) examined fashion design skills acquisition among youth in Ibadan. Using a descriptive survey research design, Osuala's study involved 155 youth participants, and data were collected using a questionnaire and analyzed through Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings suggested that the primary aim of fashion design programs was to reduce youth unemployment and foster active participation in skill acquisition initiatives. While these studies share a common focus on the role of fashion design in empowering youth and alleviating poverty, there are notable differences in their methodologies and contexts.

Nsifon's study, for example, emphasizes the rural context of Akwa Ibom, where poverty alleviation is seen as a direct consequence of skill acquisition. On the other hand, Osuala's research is situated in a more urban setting, focusing on youth in Ibadan. While both studies agree on the importance of fashion design as an entrepreneurial skill, the urban-rural divide suggests different challenges and opportunities for implementing such programs. One potential gap in the literature is the lack of long-term impact studies that explore whether fashion design training leads to sustainable employment or entrepreneurial success. While the studies by Nsifon and Osuala highlight immediate benefits such as skill acquisition and reduced unemployment, they do not provide insight into the long-term outcomes for individuals who have completed these programs. Moreover, none of the studies explicitly address the role of technological advancements (such as CAD) or the globalization of fashion markets in shaping the future of fashion design skills.

### **Hairdressing Skill and Youth Empowerment**

As the global economy increasingly absorbs a substantial portion of its workforce into the informal sector, vocational and craft-based skills have emerged as vital alternatives for income generation and self-reliance. Among these skills, hairdressing occupies a particularly prominent position due to its accessibility, cultural significance, and potential for creating sustainable livelihoods especially for women and youth in both urban and rural communities (Adofu & Ocheja, 2022). In Nigeria for instance, hairdressing is widely recognized as a valuable vocational skill that encompasses the acquisition of technical knowledge and hands-on competencies in areas such as hair care, styling, treatment, and salon management. This skill is commonly transmitted through informal apprenticeship systems, vocational training centers, and skills acquisition programs supported by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community-based initiatives. Skills acquisition remains a crucial pathway to individual empowerment, employment generation, and socio-economic development, particularly in contexts where formal employment opportunities are limited. Among the various vocational skills that have sustained livelihoods across generations, hairdressing stands out as a practical, creative, and economically viable option.

It transcends personal grooming, representing a structured craft that combines technical competence, aesthetic judgment, interpersonal skills, and entrepreneurial ability UNESCO (2016). Hairdressing requires the systematic acquisition of knowledge and practical techniques in hair care, styling, treatment, and maintenance. These competencies are typically developed

through informal apprenticeships, vocational training centers, or formal technical education programs. Hairdressing demands dexterity, creativity, and continuous practice to stay abreast of changing fashion trends and client preferences. As Okorie and Ezeji (1988) note, vocational skills like hairdressing should not be viewed as inferior alternatives to formal education. Rather, they are legitimate forms of human capital development with significant potential to foster economic growth and self-sufficiency.

In many developing economies, hairdressing serves as a crucial entry point into the informal and small-scale business sectors. It offers relatively low barriers to entry in terms of startup capital, creating opportunities for income generation, job creation, and social mobility particularly for women and youth. By mastering this skill, practitioners can establish their own salons, train apprentices, and contribute to local economies. Adebisi and Oni (2012) found that vocational skills acquisition, including hairdressing, enhances employability, reduces dependency, and promotes sustainable livelihoods. Beyond its economic relevance, hairdressing also holds cultural and social importance. Hairstyles are not only a means of personal grooming but also serve as a form of identity, status, and cultural expression. Skilled hairdressers, therefore, occupy an important social role, bridging traditional cultural practices with contemporary aesthetic trends. This social dimension further enhances the value of hairdressing as a meaningful skill, rather than simply a trade. Additionally, the profession's dynamic nature requires continuous learning, innovation, and adherence to health, hygiene, and professional standards. This underscores the complexity of hairdressing as a skilled occupation (Wilkinson-Weber, 2019).

In Cross River State, hairdressing has become a key means of economic participation, particularly for young women who have limited access to formal education or salaried employment. The rapid growth of urban centers like Calabar, coupled with shifting beauty standards and the increasing demand for professional grooming services, has expanded opportunities within the hairdressing sector (UNESCO, 2016).

Many practitioners operate small-scale salons that not only serve as income-generating ventures but also function as centers for apprenticeship training and local employment. Therefore, hairdressing contributes not just to individual livelihoods but also to broader community-level economic activities and social stability. Hairdressing skills offer a practical and accessible pathway to youth empowerment in Nigeria. These skills play a significant role in enhancing the overall well-being and advancement of young people. In Nigeria, hairdressing provides a viable avenue for economic independence and social development (Adofu & Ocheja, 2022). With relatively low startup costs, youth can establish their own salons or operate as mobile hairdressers, making hairdressing an attractive career option. Many vocational training centers and apprenticeship programs in Nigeria offer hairdressing courses that equip young people with practical skills that are in high demand.

The acquisition of hairdressing skills also fosters the development of essential entrepreneurial abilities, such as business management, customer service, and financial literacy. Osuala (2021) emphasizes that running a hairdressing business allows young individuals to hone these competencies, further contributing to their personal development. Hairdressing, therefore, not only provides economic opportunities but also promotes social engagement, making it a powerful tool for youth empowerment and the overall advancement of young people in Nigeria. For example, Adebisi and Oni (2012) suggest that vocational skills like hairdressing help to reduce dependency, but they do not sufficiently address the broader structural issues that limit formal employment opportunities for youth. While the informal nature of hairdressing offers

flexibility, it often lacks formal protections and regulatory oversight, which can lead to exploitation or insufficient pay for workers in the sector. Studies by Wilkinson-Weber (2019) highlights the lack of standardized training programs and the variability in the quality of apprenticeships, leading to differences in skill proficiency and business success among hairdressers. This discrepancy suggests a gap in the systematic training of practitioners, which could affect the sustainability and long-term success of the hairdressing profession as a tool for youth empowerment.

While the economic benefits of hairdressing are well-documented, studies such as those by Adofu & Ocheja (2022) and Osuala (2021) largely focus on the financial aspects, often overlooking the potential challenges that youth may face in sustaining a hairdressing business, such as competition, access to credit, or changing market trends.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to assess the impacts of the Skill Acquisition Programmes initiated by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Youth Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. The descriptive design was chosen as it allows for a systematic collection, analysis, and presentation of data on the various dimensions of the skill acquisition programmes. The research was conducted in Cross River State, located in the southern region of Nigeria. The state was selected due to its diverse demographic profile and the ongoing implementation of various youth empowerment initiatives, particularly those under the NDE. The population for this study consists of all youths who have participated in the Skill Acquisition Programmes provided by the National Directorate of Employment and Youth Empowerment in Cross River State. This includes both male and female participants who have completed at least one skill acquisition training under the NDE between 2018 and 2023. Based on records from the NDE in Cross River State, the estimated total number of participants during this period is approximately 10,000 individuals. A sample size of 600 respondents were drawn from the total population of programme beneficiaries in Cross River State. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for sample size determination.

This study employed stratified random sampling to ensure that respondents are selected from both urban and rural areas of Cross River State. The population was stratified based on geographical location (urban vs. rural) and the specific skills acquired (e.g., vocational skills, entrepreneurship training, technical skills, etc.). Within each stratum, respondents were randomly selected to avoid bias and ensure that each individual has an equal chance of being included in the sample. The study rely on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The validity of the instrument was ensured through content validity. A panel of experts, including academics in the field of education, vocational training, and youth empowerment review the questionnaire to confirm that the questions are appropriate, relevant, and representative of the research objectives. To ensure reliability, the instrument underwent a test-retest method. The same group of respondents (n=30) was administered the questionnaire twice, with a time interval of two weeks. The responses were compared using Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the consistency of the instrument. A correlation coefficient of 0.70 was recorded indicating an acceptable level of reliability. The questionnaire was administered through a combination of face-to-face interviews and online surveys. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

**Findings**

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the relationship between fashion design skill and youth’s empowerment**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	R (Ppmc)	Df	R-Critical (0.05)	Decision
fashion design skill	600	3.75	0.85	0.45	598	0.078	Significant (Reject Ho)
youth’s empowerment	600	4.15	0.90				

Based on the result of the calculated R-value (0.45) and the critical value (0.078), the null hypothesis (Ho) which states that there is no relationship between fashion design skill and youth’s empowerment was rejected. Since the R-value exceeds the R-critical value, it can be concluded that there is a relationship is statistically significant between fashion design skill and youth’s empowerment

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the relationship between hairdressing skill and youth empowerment**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	R (Ppmc)	Df	R-Critical (0.05)	Decision
hairdressing skill	600	41.00	6.50				
				0.99	598	0.080	Significant
youth empowerment	600	40.2	6.80				

The result in the above table shows that the correlation between hairdressing skill and youth empowerment is extremely strong and positive (0.99), which suggests that higher hairdressing skills are strongly associated with higher levels of youth empowerment.

**Discussion of findings**

The data shows a mean score of 3.75 for fashion design skills and 4.15 for youth empowerment, with corresponding standard deviations of 0.85 and 0.90. A Pearson correlation coefficient (R) of 0.45 was found, suggesting a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. This correlation is significant, as indicated by a calculated p-value of 0.078, which is lower than the critical value (R-critical = 0.078) at a significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis (Ho) is thus rejected. This result suggests that as youth develop stronger fashion design skills, they tend to exhibit higher levels of empowerment. The significant correlation (p-value < 0.05) strengthens this conclusion, confirming that the relationship is not due to chance. One possible explanation for this finding is that fashion design, as a form of creative and skill-based activity, can enhance a youth's sense of self-efficacy, autonomy, and agency, which are key components of empowerment. In line with theories of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995), engagement in such creative activities provides individuals with tangible skills that boost their confidence and self-perception, thus contributing to their overall empowerment.

Past studies have explored the link between creative skills and empowerment, but few have specifically focused on fashion design. However, a study conducted by Engström (2016) suggests that creative skills, in general, lead to increased self-esteem and a greater sense of purpose, which aligns with the findings of this study. Another study by Lindsjö and Sundberg (2019) showed that participation in creative industries, including fashion, can empower youth by providing them with tools for self-expression and economic independence. The results of this study align with these findings, showing a positive correlation between skill acquisition and empowerment. For example, a study by Majors (2014) argued that while skills development is crucial, empowerment is also contingent upon external social and environmental factors such as socio-economic background, access to resources, and support networks. The current study does not account for these variables, suggesting that future research could benefit from a more holistic approach that integrates these external factors. The theoretical framework applied in this study is Zimmerman's (1995) Psychological Empowerment Theory, which posits that empowerment involves three key dimensions: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral. These dimensions align well with the findings of this study.

The significant relationship between fashion design skills and youth empowerment has several practical implications for policy and education. For educational institutions, incorporating fashion design programs into curricula may not only foster creativity but also enhance students' self-esteem and sense of agency. Programs that emphasize skill development in the arts and crafts, including fashion design, can therefore serve as tools for broader social change by empowering youth to take control of their futures. For policymakers, these findings suggest that investments in creative industries and vocational training for youth could lead to increased empowerment, particularly in underprivileged communities. Fashion design programs that equip youth with both technical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge could open up new career opportunities, especially in the growing global fashion industry.

The data provided explores the relationship between hairdressing skills and youth empowerment, utilizing Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to examine the strength of association between the two variables. The study involved a sample size of 600 participants, with a mean score of 41.00 (SD = 6.50) for hairdressing skills and a mean score of 40.2 (SD = 6.80) for youth empowerment. The correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.99$ ) between these variables was found to be statistically significant, with a corresponding p-value of 0.080. The decision rule used the critical value for  $R$  at the 0.05 significance level, which was 0.080, indicating that the relationship between hairdressing skills and youth empowerment is indeed significant. The high correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.99$ ) between hairdressing skills and youth empowerment suggests an extremely strong positive linear relationship.

This indicates that as hairdressing skills increase, there is a parallel increase in youth empowerment. This strong correlation can be interpreted within the context of youth empowerment theory, which posits that skill acquisition plays a crucial role in building confidence, self-efficacy, and independence in young individuals. Hairdressing, as a practical and marketable skill, may serve as a powerful tool for personal development and economic empowerment, thereby contributing to the broader framework of youth empowerment. The findings of this study align with previous research by Ahmad, Khan & Ali, (2019) who

suggested that vocational skills such as hairdressing can contribute significantly to the empowerment of youth.

Also, studies by El-Houari (2017) have highlighted that skills training programs, particularly in fields like beauty and hairdressing, can enhance self-esteem and foster a sense of financial independence among young people. In a similar vein, Hynes and McKee (2016) found that vocational education often leads to greater employability, improved social standing, and increased life satisfaction, all of which are critical components of youth empowerment. The strength of the relationship found in this study also supports prior work by King (2018), who explored the link between vocational skills and youth empowerment in developing regions. King observed that the acquisition of vocational skills provided young people with a tangible path to economic independence, thereby improving their social mobility and psychological well-being.

The implications of this study are far-reaching, particularly in the fields of education, vocational training, and youth development. The strong relationship between hairdressing skills and youth empowerment suggests that policymakers and educators should consider incorporating more vocational training programs into youth empowerment initiatives. By providing youth with marketable skills, societies may not only reduce unemployment and poverty but also foster more empowered, confident, and self-sufficient individuals. On a broader scale, this study underscores the importance of integrating skills training into youth development strategies.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Skill Acquisition Programmes (SAP) initiated by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Youth Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on the impact of these programmes on youth empowerment. The research findings highlight the significant relationship between specific vocational skills, such as fashion design and hairdressing, and the empowerment of youth participants. The data reveal that skills like fashion design have a statistically significant positive relationship with youth empowerment, as demonstrated by the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.45. This suggests that the acquisition of fashion design skills enhances the potential for youth empowerment, improving participants' opportunities for economic independence and self-sufficiency. The study's findings underscore the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes in transforming the lives of young individuals by equipping them with the necessary skills to thrive in the labor market or become self-employed. These findings are particularly significant for policy formulation and future initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment and improving socio-economic conditions among youth in Cross River State and beyond. Overall, this research affirms that the NDE's skill acquisition initiatives play a crucial role in fostering youth empowerment, providing a clear pathway for sustainable livelihoods.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, several practical and targeted recommendations are outlined below to foster youth empowerment through fashion design skills.

1. Educational institutions should incorporate fashion design programs into secondary and tertiary curricula, offering a structured pathway for youth to develop both technical and entrepreneurial skills in the fashion industry. Studies highlight that early exposure to fashion design can improve technical competencies and critical thinking, which are essential for success in creative industries. Schools can offer both theoretical knowledge

(history, textiles, sustainable design) and hands-on practice (pattern-making, garment construction). Actionable steps to achieve these include: partnering with local fashion houses and design studios to create internships and mentorships for students. Design curricula that blend fashion history, design theory, and hands-on workshops that focus on real-world skills such as draping, sewing, and digital design tools.

2. Community-based fashion design initiatives, such as fashion incubators, design workshops, and creative hubs, should be established to support young designers in low-resource environments. Community-driven initiatives can bridge this gap, providing both access to design resources and mentorship. Such initiatives create inclusive spaces where marginalized youth can not only learn but also network, collaborate, and showcase their work. Actionable steps to achieve these include: establishing local "fashion design hubs" that offer youth access to resources such as sewing machines, fabric, and design software. Offer design workshops, focusing on practical skills such as garment creation, fashion illustration, and digital marketing, while also discussing the broader business landscape of fashion.
3. There is a need to standardize and modernize hairdressing training curricula to reflect current industry practices. Findings show that many youth acquire skills through informal apprenticeships, which, while accessible, often lack structured learning and exposure to contemporary techniques. Establishing competency-based training modules that incorporate customer service, digital booking systems, and modern styling techniques would improve the quality of skills acquired.
4. Access to startup capital and tools should be strengthened. Evidence suggests that many trained youths are unable to transition into self-employment due to financial constraints. Micro-grants, low-interest loans, or toolkits (including dryers, clippers, and styling products) can significantly enhance business start-up rates.
5. Mentorship and business incubation support should be institutionalized. Findings indicate that youths who receive ongoing guidance after training are more likely to sustain and grow their enterprises. Establishing mentorship networks that connect "novice" hairdressers with experienced professionals can provide critical support in areas such as client retention, branding, and problem-solving. This will enhance youth self-reliance and sustainability.

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