



## **Assessment of Extent of Skill Acquisition for Self-Reliance by Students in Junior Secondary Schools in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The preparation of students for acquisition of skills for self-reliance is dependent on the acquisition of basic knowledge about employment opportunities and possession of marketable skills. The study sought to ascertain the extent of skill acquisition by junior secondary school students in terms of self-reliance through three key school subjects. The study is a descriptive survey carried out ex-post-facto. The population of the study consisted of 2,819 junior secondary school students in the 30 public secondary schools in Ohafia education zone of Abia State, Nigeria. Out of this population, a sample size of 564 students was drawn using simple random sampling technique. A questionnaire tagged "skill acquisition for self reliance (SASRQ)" was used to collect the data. The questionnaire items were validated and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistic. Four research questions were formulated for the study and were analyzed using percentages. The findings revealed that the extent of skill acquisition by students is relatively poor. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the government should provide enough funds for acquisition of materials and equipment for students' practical activities that will equip them adequately with skills and make them marketable in the labour market.

**Key words:** Skill acquisition, self-reliance, students, secondary school.

## Introduction

During the pre-colonial era that ended in the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, vocational skills such as crop and animal husbandry, tailoring, blacksmithing, carpentry and bricklaying were traditionally passed from parents to offspring as a means to keep the family name going (Daramola, 1995; Sulaiman, 2012; Ogundele, Oparinde and Moronfoye, 2013). At that time, the education of these vocational skills included a high degree of self-reliance among children. According to the National Policy on Education, one of the broad aims and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria is preparation for useful living within the society with its specific objectives among others to include: offering a diversified curriculum to cater to differences in talents, opportunities and future roles; providing technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development (FRN, 2013).

The key factor of the National policy on Education is the education of self-reliance. The national policies on education from 1981 through 2004 to 2013 laid a lot of emphasis on education for self-reliance. This National Policy provides in the curriculum of Junior Secondary School in Nigeria the teaching of pre-vocational practical subjects such as agriculture, home economics, music, business studies, introductory technology and fine arts. The focus was to expose students at that level of education to the world of work through exploration. Such exposure would enable them develop occupational skills that will help them to be productive citizens in the global society. Fafunwa (2002) pointed out that the specific objectives of the Junior Secondary School education are to develop the students manipulative skills, invention, respect for dignity of labour, including a healthy attitude towards technical advancement and use.

According to Oviawe (2010), secondary schools in Nigeria hardly prepare students for their roles as self-reliant citizens and workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, the structure of most of the schools appears to inhibit knowledge-based teaching and learning as they lack the necessary conditions needed for production of quality graduates for the labour market and subsequent employment. Lack of productive and marketable skills has been identified as the major cause of unemployment as many school leavers are not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy and cannot provide the services that can generate sustainable income (Yakubu, 2012; Akpan and Udo, 2014).

Bolt-Lee and Foster (2003) see skills as the art of possessing the ability to have power, authority or competency to do the task required of an individual on the job. Ezeani (2012) stated that skills are not a person's fundamental, innate capacities but must be developed through training, practice and experience. Skill acquisition is the process of acquiring or gaining effective and ready knowledge in developing one's aptitude and ability in a particular field (Kikechi, Owano, Ayodo and Ejakait, 2013). The preparation of students for skill acquisition in order to be self-reliant is dependent on the acquisition of basic knowledge about employment opportunities, requirements and trends as well as the possession of marketable skills. According to Ogundele, Oluwolara and Adegbelemi (2011) skills acquired by students would aid job creation, youth empowerment and poverty alleviation, which in turn has the capacity to solve various social problems. Mbionwu (2008) avers that students who acquire

adequate work-skills have better options to become entrepreneurs after graduation. In support of this, Kikechi *et.al.* (2013) maintain that skill acquisition provides a platform for technological excellence in the face of globalization of the world economy. Akpotowoh and Amahi (2006) confirm that the skills acquired through business related subjects promote training in entrepreneurship as well as equip students with the requisite skills to establish and run small businesses of their own.

The development of the economy and the craving for self-reliance and sustainability is the key driving force for the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 and now the 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. This education system consist of six years of Primary School education, three years of Junior Secondary School (JSS) education, three years of Senior Secondary School education (SSS) and four years of ertiary education, depending on the course of study at the tertiary level since the minimum years of study of any course is two years in the polytechnic (for National Diploma), three years in the college of education (for Nigeria Certificate in Education) and four years in the university ( for B.A. or B.Sc). Junior Secondary School is a part of the education programme which lays the foundation for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies. In other words, skill acquisition is highly emphasized as the 6-3-3-4 scheme with self-reliance as its central theme. According to the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, students are to be taught a number of subjects such as home economics, introductory technology and business studies at the Junior Secondary School level which is designed to equip them with the prerequisite skills for self-reliance. After the completion of this level, those students who may not want to continue their education up to the senior secondary school and will be able to become self-reliant as a result of the skills they may learnt at the Junior Secondary School level. The problem of youth unemployment and the high degree of poverty is attributed to the theoretical nature and non-practical orientation that is a frequent outcome of the Nigerian educational system (Ogundele *et.al.*, 2013). Yakubu (2012) noted that many college graduates are not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy as they cannot provide services that can generate income.

Ada, Omalle and Okedi (2008) attributed the poor level of skill acquisition to the implementation of the different subject matter, or among other things such as poor infrastructural facilities. Suleiman (2002) observed that pre-vocational subjects like introductory technology were poorly implemented with obsolete and non-functional equipment. Also Uwameiye and Oviawe (2006) in Oviawe (2010) asserted that pre-vocational subjects should be taught through field trips and practical activities as is expected. However, due to a lack of materials, laboratories, equipment needed for exploratory activities, these subjects are taught in a traditional teacher-centered classroom while students copy input from the chalkboard. Hence, the scope of this study is on home economics, introductory technology and business studies as courses/subjects that are geared towards providing students with basic skills for self-reliance.

Employment requirements in most establishments have been changing as a result of technological impact, and as such educational institutions have a herculean task of ensuring that students acquire necessary marketable skills (Ottah, 2008).

## **Statement of the Problem**

The major reason for unemployment and the increase in social vices results from a lack of marketable skills on the part of most school graduates (Akpan & Udoh,2014). In Nigeria today, there is an increasing rate of poverty, unemployment and other social problems that had bedeviled the Nigerian society. This has become worrisome to both the government and the Nigerian public. The incidence of poverty and unemployment is high as the number of students graduating from various levels of the education system is increasing. This may have resulted from the lack of appropriate skill acquisition by graduates in the education system

In Abia State, the researchers have observed that there seem to be little or no impact of schooling on the quality of students output at the Junior Secondary School level of education as most graduates from this level of education, who could not proceed to the senior secondary level as prescribed in the 6-3-3-4 system of education are indecisive and unable to find employment.

It seems that Junior Secondary School teachers and the school administrators are not capable of redeeming the situation as a quick assessment of what is being taught reveals too much theory, with little or no practical experience being acquired by the students during their course of study. It is against this backdrop that this paper strives to find out the extent of skill acquisition for self-reliance by Junior Secondary School students in Abia State, Nigeria.

## **Research Questions**

To guide this study, the following research questions were formulated.

1. To what extent do students acquire skills for self-reliance through home economics?
2. To what extent do students acquire skills for self-reliance through introductory technology?
3. To what extent do students acquire skills for self-reliance through business studies?
4. What is the extent of skills acquired by students for self-reliance in Junior Secondary Schools in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria?

## **Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive survey design. It was done ex-post-facto. The population comprised of 2,819 former third year Junior Secondary School students in the 30 public secondary schools in Ohafia education zone of Abia State, who had completed their junior secondary education. The sample consist of 564 students drawn from the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected by means of the researcher constructed questionnaire titled “Skill Acquisition for Self- Reliance Questionnaire (SASRQ)”

The instrument (SASRQ) was subjected to face and content validation by experts in the department of educational administration and planning and measurement and evaluation of Abia State University, Uturu. The reliability of the instrument was tested on 20 individuals who were not selected as part of the sample

using test-retest method. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistic was implemented in order to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.82, which was considered adequate for the realization of the objectives of the study. The researchers personally administered the questionnaires along with the help of trained research assistants. The completed questionnaires from the respondents were collected through the same process. A 100% return rate was recorded. The results are calculated in percentage, which was used to analyze the research questions.

## Findings

The data from the former Junior Secondary School students on skill acquisition leading to self-reliance are presented in tables one to four respectively.

**Research Question one:** To what extent do student acquire skills for self-reliance through home economics?

Items 1-6 of the questionnaire represent the answers to the research question. The results are presented in Table 1.

S/N	Item Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	There seems to have been enough funds which was provided by the school authorities and by parents for home economics practical in our school	141	25	423	75
2	There were regular home economics practical classes as a result of availability of raw materials and equipment	169	30	395	70
3	As a result of teachers commitment to duties, students were taught skills in baking and other catering services and interior decoration	310	55	254	45
4	My teachers ensured that particular periods meant for home economics practical's in the time-table were adequately utilized	141	25	423	75
5	The effort and zeal by our home economics teachers enabled us to acquire skills in catering and decoration services	141	25	423	75
6	Our home economics teacher was adequately skilled and professionally qualified	338	60	226	40
	<b>Aggregate percentage</b>		<b>37%</b>		<b>63%</b>

Table 1: Percentage Analysis of Perceived Responses of Skill Acquisition by Former Junior Secondary School Three Students through Home Economics

Table 1 shows the opinion of Junior Secondary School students regarding the extent of skills which they acquired for self-reliance through home economics. Items 1 – 6 of the questionnaire revealed that 37% of the respondents agreed that enough skills for self-reliance were acquired through the teaching of home economics, while the students who disagreed represented 63%. A breakdown of the table showed that 25% agreed that there seems to have been enough funds provided by the school

and parents for home economics practical experiences while 75% disagreed. 30% agreed that there were regular home economics practical classes due to enough provision of materials and equipment while 70% disagreed. 55% agreed that as a result of teacher commitment to duties, students were taught skills in baking and other catering services while 45% disagreed. 25% of the students agreed that specific periods for practicals allocated in the time-table were adequately utilized through the teacher's commitment while 75% disagreed. Also, 25% agreed that the efforts and zeal by home economics teachers enable them to acquire skills in catering and decoration services while 75% disagreed. 60% of the respondents agreed that teachers employed to teach home economics were adequately skilled and professionally qualified with 40% disagreeing.

**Research Question Two:** To What Extent do Students Acquire Skills for Self-Reliance through Introductory technology?

Items 7-11 in the instrument were used to answer this research question. The result is presented on table 2.

S/N	Item Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
7	There was an adequate, skilled and qualified introductory technology teacher in my school	395	70	169	30
8	There were adequate instructional technology facilities, tools and equipment for teaching introductory technology in my school	56	10	508	90
9	There was regular supply of electricity to power introductory technology machines in my school	0	0	564	100
10	Practical experiences were taught more than theoretical experiences in my school for introductory technology	85	15	479	85
11	There was a functional introductory technology laboratory in my school	85	15	479	85
	<b>Aggregate percentage</b>		<b>22%</b>		<b>78%</b>

Table 2: Percentage Analysis of Perceived Responses of Skill Acquisition by Former Junior Secondary School Three Students through Introductory Technology

The item responses to questions 7-11 of the questionnaire indicate that overall 78% of the respondents disagreed that the teaching of introductory technology provided skills required for self-reliance, while 22% agreed. An analysis of each of the items shows that 70% of the respondents agreed that skilled and qualified teachers were provided to teach the subject, while 30% disagreed. 10% agreed that there was adequate provision of instructional facilities, tools and equipment for the teaching of introductory technology, while 90% disagreed. 100% of the respondents disagreed on the supply of electricity for the powering of the

machines. 15% agreed that they had more practical experiences than theoretical experiences while 85% did not agree. Finally, 15% agreed that there was functional introductory technology laboratory in their schools while 85% disagreed.

**Research Question three:** To what extent do students acquire skills for self-reliance through Business studies?

In answering this question, items 12-16 of the instrument were used. The results are presented in table 3.

S/N	Item Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
12	There was adequate provision of time for practices in typing, accounting and book keeping skills	197	35	367	65
13	A qualified teacher handle the teaching of business studies in my school	423	75	141	25
14	The interest and commitment of our teacher in teaching business studies greatly enhanced our understanding of the subject	479	85	85	15
15	I acquired enough knowledge through the teaching of business studies in petty business skills	395	70	169	30
16	Our school business studies class/unit was well equipped to enhance the teaching of the subject	56	10	508	90
	<b>Aggregate percentage</b>		<b>55%</b>		<b>45%</b>

Table 3: Percentage analysis of perceived responses of skill acquisition by former Junior Secondary School three students through Business Studies

Table 3 shows the responses of Junior Secondary School students regarding the extent of skill acquisition through the teaching and learning of business studies that should enable them to be self-reliant. The aggregate percentage of items 12 – 16 of the questionnaire indicate that 55% of the respondents agreed that they acquired skills that will enable them to be self-reliant through business studies, while 45% disagreed. In each of the items, 65% of the students disagreed with the adequate provision of time for practical lessons, while 35% agreed; 75% of the students agreed that qualified teachers taught business studies in their school, while 25% disagreed. 85% of the students agreed that their teachers' interest in teaching the subject was high, while 15% disagreed. However, 70% agreed that they acquired knowledge in business skills of which 30% did not agree. Also, 10% agreed that their school business studies unit/class was well equipped, while 90% disagreed.

**Research Question 4:** What is the Extent of Skills Acquired by Students for Self-Reliance in Junior Secondary Schools in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria?

In answering this question, the information from the respondents on the extent of skill acquisition is presented in table 4 below.

Item specification	Percentage Agreed	Percentage Disagreed
Home Economics	37%	63%
Introductory Technology	22%	78%
Business Studies	55%	45%
<b>Aggregate percentage</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>62%</b>

Table 4: Percentage analysis of skill acquisition by students for self-reliance in Junior Secondary Schools in the Ohafia Education Zone.

The above table shows that 62% of the students did not agree that they were able to acquire skills needed for self-reliance by the time they completed Junior Secondary School. Only 38% agreed that skills for self-reliance were actually acquired during this time of their schooling at that particular level of education. This then provides additional evidence that Nigerian students who complete their Junior Secondary School education may not possess appropriate and marketable skills needed for self-reliance.

### Discussion

The findings of this study as presented in tables 1 – 4 show that the teaching approach in secondary schools may not be meeting the objectives set by of National Policy on Education in terms of self-reliance. The perception of a poor level of skill acquisition as exhibited by Junior Secondary School students for self-reliance resulting from the teaching of the relevant subjects is an indication that public secondary schools have not been able to achieve what is expected of them at the Junior Secondary School level in the Nigeria educational system.

The findings of table one shows that the level of skill acquisition for self-reliance through home economics is poor with a percentage of 37%. This is evidence of the inability of the system in achieving one of the objectives of the National Policy on Education, which should put emphasis on skill acquisition for self-reliance. The findings of the study are thus in alignment with Ogundele et. al. (2013), who noted that the degree of unemployment and poverty could be attributed to the theoretical nature and non-practical orientation that appears to be a common feature of the education system. It also supports the view of Akpan and Udo (2014), who aver that the inability of Junior Secondary School graduates to become self-reliant results from a lack of productive and marketable skills that should have been learnt by the students during their time at school.

The data presented in table two shows that Junior Secondary School graduates may not have possessed the required skills for self-reliance through introductory technology with a percentage of 22%. This suggests that the level of skills acquired through introductory technology for self-reliance is still not



encouraging. This finding is consistent with that of Ada et.al. (2008) who attributed the poor level of skills to result from poor infrastructural facilities. It also corroborates with the work by Yakubu (2012) who noted that school graduates were not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy as they cannot provide services needed to generate income.

Results from table 3 indicate that skills acquired through business studies are high with 55%. This shows that efforts are being made to equip the students with knowledge and skills to become useful in the society after schooling. This supports the findings of Ezeani (2012) that skills acquisition does not depend on person's innate abilities but must be developed through training and practice. It also corroborates with the findings of Ogundele, *et. al.* (2011) who claims that skill acquisition will aid job creation, youth empowerment and poverty alleviation.

Results from table 4 show that the extent of skill acquisition by Junior Secondary School students needed for self-reliance is poor with an aggregate percentage of 62% disagreeing. This shows that the effort of all the stakeholders in the education system to see to the realization of curbing youth unemployment has not yielded much, and may occur when students do not acquire the requisite skills for self-reliance while in school.

### **Recommendations:**

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

1. The government should ensure that enough funds are injected into the education system, and especially for secondary education. These funds should be used for the purchasing of materials and equipment required for practical learning activities that relate to self-reliance. This should aid students with the acquisition of practical and marketable
2. Teachers should be encouraged to update their knowledge and skills through seminars and workshops as their experiences and abilities may have become obsolete.
3. Students should be encouraged to develop more interest in vocational subjects so as to acquire practical skills which can help them become self-reliant.
4. There should be an establishment of functional laboratories in subject areas that require practical experience.
5. Electricity supply should be provided in schools in order to power machines meant for the teaching of practical experience.

### **Conclusion**

The achievement of self-reliance will continue to be a mirage if there is no attitudinal change by all the stakeholders of education in ensuring that the subjects meant to equip the learners with the needed skills are adequately taught.

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