

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INVESTIGATING THE PERCEPTION OF YOUTH ON EMPLOYMENT AND THE EFFECTS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History:

Received 12 December 2024
 Revised 29 January 2025
 Accepted 15 February 2025
 Available online 29 February 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the youth perceptions of employment and its effect on entrepreneurship development in Ondo State, Nigeria. Data on 216 youth from two local government areas, with 54 respondents randomly selected using a multistage sampling procedure from four communities in each area. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results showed that respondents' average monthly income was ₦20,062 with an average age of 27 years. About 58.1% of respondents were interested in additional experience. The perceptions of respondents towards employment revealed the respondents agreed that the current employment status had a negative impact on their situation ($\bar{x} = 4.43$), self-employment can overcome poverty ($\bar{x} = 4.22$), the government is impervious to their needs ($\bar{x} = 4.09$), and acquisition of skills could help them earn more ($\bar{x} = 4.03$). Financial restrictions were the most common barrier to work for respondents (37.2%). The study therefore concludes and recommends that youth participation in entrepreneurial development programs should be encouraged.

KEYWORDS

Entrepreneurship, perception, youth, sector, employment

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has been widely researched because of its vital role in producing jobs and driving economic progress. Researchers have emphasised its significance as a key pillar of economic growth (Kabo and Pelontle, 2018). The experiences of advanced economies highlight the transformational power of entrepreneurship, particularly in promoting growth in emerging markets (Ben and Richard, 2017). It has been properly defined as a "source of employment generation," considering its tremendous impact on improving economic stability and societal well-being (Onimole and Olaiya, 2018; Afonaso et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship has also been linked to economic success, unemployment reduction, and the empowerment of marginalised groups such as women, the poor, and young (Rogerson, 2018; Adams, 2017; Makhubo, 2015).


In Africa, cultivating an entrepreneurial attitude is dependent on education and training, which requires active engagement from the state, educators, and students (Apriana et al. 2019). Educational institutions have an important role in teaching entrepreneurial principles and abilities in students, allowing them to make educated career decisions (Gay, 2018; Adu et al., 2020; Abubakar et al., 2022). Recognising entrepreneurship's potential to combat graduate unemployment, regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) have integrated entrepreneurship education into tertiary institution curricula (Kiryowa, 2022). This project seeks to solve Nigeria's unemployment issue by making entrepreneurship education an obligatory subject for all post-secondary students, regardless of their field of study (Amadi-Echendu et al., 2006).

The significance of youth entrepreneurship in addressing unemployment and underdevelopment is well-documented in the literature (Rashid and Ratten, 2020; Khan, 2020; Carson et al., 2018; Karimi et al., 2017). With their energy and creativity, youths represent a vital resource for national

development (Korie, 2021). In Nigeria, youths constitute a significant proportion of the population, accounting for an estimated 53.73% in 2021 (Osayomi et al., 2021). However, challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and a lack of skills undermine their potential to contribute effectively to economic growth (Matthew, 2018). These issues are compounded by a mismatch between labor market demands and the skills of young job seekers, as well as entrenched perceptions about employment (Oyekunle, 2020; Walker, 2018).

Nigerian administrations have undertaken a variety of strategies to combat young unemployment since the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) era. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI) are initiatives aimed at producing agricultural jobs (Adinuba, 2017). Recent programs, such as the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN), and Osun State Youth Employment Scheme (O'YES), aim to promote entrepreneurship and skill development (Anagun 2020). Nigeria's international commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth demonstrates its commitment to addressing youth unemployment. Events like the 2019 Global Youth Employment Forum emphasise the importance of youth-centered policy reforms (Citaristi, 2020).

Despite these efforts, one critical barrier remains: youth perceptions of employment. Many young Nigerians see government jobs as the only viable employment option, believing that self-employment is insecure or impossible without significant resources and connections (King et al., 2016; Adewumi and Keyser, 2020). This mindset limits their ability and erodes their confidence to grasp entrepreneurial opportunities. Given the increased acceptance of entrepreneurship education as a driver of self-employment, regional development, and economic progress in a globalised world, it is critical to investigate how young people perceive work and self-employment (Afolabi et al., 2017). To navigate and create possibilities in a changing environment, the new generation must possess

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|  | <p>Website: www.mjhrm.com.my</p> | <p>DOI: 10.26480/mjhrm.02.2025.67.70</p> |

not just technical abilities, but also an entrepreneurial spirit, ingenuity, and flexibility. This study investigates youth perceptions of employment and how these perceptions influence self-employment initiatives, with a focus on identifying youth socioeconomic characteristics, identifying their career preferences, examining their employment interests, assessing their employment perceptions, and analysing the difficulties they face in finding work.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ondo State, Nigeria. It is situated between latitudes 5°45' and 7°52'N and longitudes 4°20' and 6°05'E (Potts, 2010). The state covers an area of approximately 15,500 square kilometres and is located in the south-western region of Nigeria. Ondo State comprises 18 local government areas (LGAs). The State has a tropical climate, with vegetation ranging from mangrove swamps in the riverine areas to tropical rainforests in the central parts of the state. This diverse vegetation supports a wide variety of plants and animals, resulting in multiple ecological zones. A multistage sampling technique was employed for the selection of respondents. In the first stage, two LGAs—Akure-South and Owo—were purposively selected. These LGAs were chosen due to their representation of a diverse mix of youth categories, ensuring robust data collection for the research. In the second stage, two communities were randomly selected from each LGA, resulting in four communities: FUTA South Gate and Shagari from Akure-South, and Oke Ogun and Emure from Owo. The third stage involved the random selection of 54 respondents from each of the four communities, yielding a total sample size of 216 respondents. Data for the research were collected using a validated interview schedule. The data collection instrument was subjected to face

and content validity by consulting experts, who reviewed the instruments and provided feedback, leading to necessary revisions.

2.1 Data analysis

The technique used for data analysis involved descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, tables, means, and standard deviation. A five-point Likert scale was also used to analyse the perceptions of the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Youths in the Study Areas

Table 1 presents the socioeconomic characteristics of youths in the study area. Over half (57.5%) of the respondents were female, aligning with the findings of most of researchers (Odimegun and Somefunm 2017; Oginni et al., 2017). The mean age of respondents was 27 years, with the majority (68%) being single, reflecting their youthful and reproductive age. Nearly half (44.4%) of the respondents had completed tertiary education, indicating a high level of formal education and significant exposure to entrepreneurship knowledge and skills. This aligns with studies by which highlight the creativity and potential of educated youth worldwide (Groh et al., 2012; Ball and Stanley, 2010). Notably, 28.8% of respondents were business owners/entrepreneurs, further attesting to their entrepreneurial capacity. Most respondents were young graduates with limited experience in employment and entrepreneurship development, with an average monthly income of ₦20,062, which falls below the national minimum wage. This may contribute to disillusionment among Nigerian youth regarding employment.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Socioeconomic Characteristics

| Characteristics | Categories | Percentage (%) | Mean (Years) |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Gender | Male | 42.5 | |
| | Female | 57.5 | |
| Marital Status | Single | 68.1 | |
| Age (Years) | 21-30 | 68.8 | 27 |
| Religion | Christianity | 78.8 | |
| Level of Education | Completed Tertiary Education | 44.4 | |
| Primary Occupation | Business Owner/Entrepreneur | 28.8 | |
| | Students | 18.8 | |
| | Farming | 16.3 | |
| | Public Service | 12.5 | |
| | Private Sector Work | 9.4 | |
| Years of Experience | Artisanship | 14.4 | |
| | ≤ 5 | 76.3 | 4 |
| Average Monthly Income | ≤ 20,000 | 40.6 | ₦20,062 |

Field survey, 2024

3.2 Factors that are Most Important to Youths when Considering Career Options

Table 2 identifies the important elements influencing young career choices, with an emphasis on expectations from possible jobs and employers. Long-term earning potential (18.1%) was the most important element, demonstrating that young people value financial stability and future security. This choice reinforces the reliance on traditional government positions, potentially suffocating entrepreneurship

development in Nigeria. Desirable work attributes include relevance to their subject of study (20%), task engagement (17.2%), and career advancement (16.1%). However, the divergence between education and work has resulted in disappointment, with many young people viewing formal education as a "scam," eroding trust in its worth and reducing the use of entrepreneurial talents. Employer expectations continue to affect career decisions, with youngsters emphasizing the need for recognition (25.6%), growth possibilities (25%).

Table 2: Factors Considered by Respondents in Career Choice

| Factors | Categories | (%) |
|--|-------------------------------------|------|
| Factors influencing choice of employment/profession | Long term earning potential | 18.1 |
| | Task involved with job | 15.6 |
| | Starting salary | 14.4 |
| | Having a say in decision making | 14.4 |
| | Significance of the job | 20.4 |
| Desirable characteristics of a job | Task involved | 17.2 |
| | Growth and professional development | 16.1 |
| | Recognize my contribution | 25.6 |

| Table 2 (cont): Factors Considered by Respondents in Career Choice | | |
|--|-----------------|------|
| Most important characteristics when considering career options | To help me grow | 25.0 |
| | To trust me | 16.3 |

Source: Field survey, 2024

3.3 Sectors of Interest of Respondents as Regards Employment

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on sectors of their interests. The graph shows that 24% of the sample had interest in educational sector. Hence, education is the most preferred sector for employment, followed by agriculture (15%), while the least preferred

sector according to response is entertainment, accounting for 11.9% of the total sample. This suggests that a significant proportion of the youth in the study area are inclined towards education, potentially reflecting a preference for government employment. Additionally, the majority (72.5%) of respondents were employed.

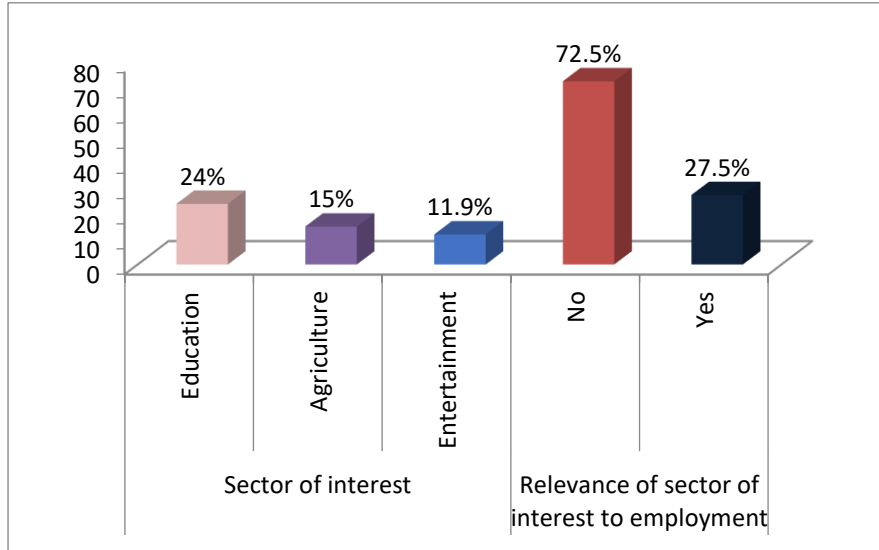


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Employment Sector of Interest (Source: Field survey, 2024)

3.4 Perception of Youths to Employment

Table 3 depicts the respondents' perspectives on employment. According to the findings, respondents strongly agreed with the following statements: "My standard of living will be higher than that of my parents with my current employment status (Mean = 4.43); if I am self-employed,

I can overcome poverty (Mean = 4.22); the government does not care about my needs and wants (Mean = 4.09); and they agree that they will be able to make as much money as they want if they learn a skill (Mean = 4.03). This suggests that respondents thought employment didn't totally ensure a high quality of life. Self-employment was seen as a way to live a better life.

| Table 3: Perception of Respondents to Employment | | | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|------|
| | SA | A | U | D | SD | Mean |
| | Freq.(%) | Freq.(%) | Freq.(%) | Freq.(%) | Freq.(%) | |
| My standard of living will be better than that of my parent, same as, or worse with my current employment status | 101 (63.1) | 42 (26.3) | 6 (3.8) | 6 (3.8) | 5 (3.1) | 4.43 |
| The government does not care about my needs and wants | 66 (41.3) | 64 (40.0) | 12 (7.5) | 14 (8.8) | 4 (2.5) | 4.09 |
| I will be able to make as much money as I want if I learn a skill | 50 (31.3) | 80 (50.0) | 20 (12.5) | 5 (3.1) | 5 (3.1) | 4.03 |
| If I am self-employed, I can overcome poverty | 80 (50.0) | 57 (35.6) | 8 (5.0) | 9 (5.6) | 6 (3.8) | 4.22 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

4. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that youths in Ondo State are highly educated but face significant challenges in traditional employment, earning below the minimum wage and frequently working in jobs unrelated to their fields of study. This disconnect fosters disillusionment, with many perceiving formal education as unproductive and viewing self-employment as a more viable pathway to improved living standards. Major factors influencing career choices include long-term earning potential job

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared that there is no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors appreciate the IBR TETFUND intervention, 2023/2024, for

financial assistance. We also appreciate all our enumerators for data collection.

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