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ASSESSMENT OF DIGITAL SKILLS FOR DEVELOPING YOUTHS TOWARDS SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND JOB SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed digital skills for developing the youths towards self-employment and job sustainability. It was carried out in Anambra State using survey research design. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study was 35,000 youths participating in digital skills training programmes in Anambra State. A sample size of 380 youths was selected using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table for sample size determination Closed and open-ended questionnaires validated by experts in the field of Business Administration and Measurement and Evaluation were used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using Pearson product moment correlation formula and reliability coefficient of.89 was obtained. Frequency, percentages and t-test were used to analyze data collected using SPSS version 23.0. Findings showed that all the respondents 369(100%) indicated that they have participated in digital skills training programmes in Anambra State, Nigeria, majority 161(43.6%) of the respondents indicated that digital entrepreneurship skills are most critical for developing the youths towards self-employment, and majority 78(21.1%) of respondents indicated that digital communication and collaboration skills are the most critical skills for ensuring their job sustainability. It was also revealed that majority 260(70.5%) of the respondents indicated that acquisition of digital skills has significantly improved their ability to start and sustain their own small-scale businesses in Anambra State, and majority of the respondents 341(92.4%) indicated

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that digital skills training programmes are effective in developing youths towards self-employment and job sustainability. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that; digital skills provide a strong basis for developing youths towards self-employment and job sustainability in Nigeria. It was recommended among others that; the Nigerian governments and educational institutions should scale up digital entrepreneurship skills training programmes to equip more youths with the skills needed to start and manage their own businesses effectively.

Keywords: Assessment, Digital Skills, Self-Employment, Job Sustainability

Introduction

In today's society, digital skills are becoming more and more important globally since they support self-employment and job sustainability. The acquisition and development of digital skills can have a substantial positive impact on the employment and entrepreneurship prospects of youths. In view of the importance, the world's most technologically advanced nations such as USA, China, Canada, Germany and Japan have continued to set motions in place to ensure that their youths constantly update current and emerging digital skills required to fit into the modern society (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2020). However, as technological innovation gains momentum, digital skills gap has widened in many developing nations (especially Africa), hindering economic growth and slowing down innovations (Matthess & Kunkel, 2020). Digital skills can be referred to as the wide range of skills required to successfully navigate, use and create in the digital environment. Okeji, Nwankwo, Anene and Olorunfemi (2020) defined digital skills as set of abilities required to perform office duties efficiently using modern digital technologies. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2019) pointed out that digital skills include the ability to successfully, critically and ethically utilize digital technologies for study, work and participate in 21st century society.

Digital skills can be the foundation for addressing challenges such as youths' unemployment and job unsustainability. Digital skills, particularly in today's digital age, can play an important role in increasing self-employment prospects for youths. Of course, digital skills can enable youths to participate in the online digital economy, which provides flexibility, higher compensation and opportunity to work independently. This is especially useful in areas with little local job possibilities, as digital platforms provide access to global markets (World Bank, 2020). Similarly, with digital skills, youths can start and run their own online businesses, whether through e-commerce platforms, freelance work or digital marketing. Website building, social media management and online advertising are essential skills for starting and maintaining an online business (International

Trade Centre, 2021). Digital skills cover, digital content and processing skills, social system and digital problem-solving skills, resource management skills and technical skills (World Economic Forum, 2018). They also include operational data skills, digital information, digital data management, digital marketing, digital accounting, data management and digital safety skills (Gui & Argentin, 2016). Others are basic digital literacy, technical and coding skills, digital communication, data analysis and visualization, cybersecurity skills**,** creative digital**,** e-commerce**.** Similarly, the European Union (2018) listed digital skills as information and data literacy, digital communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), and intellectual property skills.

Digital skills enable youths in rural or underdeveloped regions to overcome geographic constraints by connecting them to a larger market. This lowers the need for youths to relocate to cities for work and allows them to stay in local villages while generating a steady income (Malesev & Cherry, 2021). Additionally, digital skills stimulate creativity and originality, enabling youths to build one-of-a-kind products or services that will stand out in the competitive online marketplace. Furthermore, graphic design, video production, and content creation skills are especially useful for establishing a strong online presence. Online temporary work and digital entrepreneurship can give more predictable income than traditional informal sector occupations (University of Bolton, 2023). This financial stability is critical for youths trying to sustain themselves and their families, particularly in areas where traditional employment is limited (International Trade Centre, 2021).

Digital skills can range from basic skills to highly developed technical skills, and are critical for job creation. The current trends underscore the continuous evolution of digital skills requirements among youths due to swift technology progress and digital skill gaps. For the purpose of preparing the Nigerian youths for self-reliant by starting their own small-scale businesses, it is imperative to guarantee the youths a universal access to digital resources and knowledge. Self-employment refers to the situation where an individual works for themselves instead of being employed by an organization (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020). This can include freelancers, entrepreneurs, gig workers and small business owners. In recent years, self-employment has gained popularity due to various factors such as technological advancements, the rise of the digital economy, and changing work preferences. Self-employed youths often have the freedom to set their own hours and work conditions; they also have more control over their work and decision-making processes, and can potentially earn more than traditional employees. Job sustainability on the other hand is the ability of jobs to be maintained over the long term without causing detrimental effects on employees, the

environment or the economy. Sustainable jobs are those jobs that provide fair wages, safe working conditions and opportunities for growth while minimizing environmental impact.

In Nigeria, digital skills are vital for youths' professional and personal development. Currently, the theoretical delivery method of education that Nigerian youths are exposed to has been regarded insufficient in preparing them for self-employment and job sustainability. As noted by Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020), the Nigerian government and other stakeholders are concerned about the high rate of youth/graduate unemployment caused by a digital skill mismatch between youths and technologically driven workplace. The Nigeria's youth/graduate's unemployment rate has reached new heights and tackling it has become governments' primary priority. To support this claim, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) claimed in 2020 that approximately 50 million Nigerian youths are unemployed, with 25 million of them graduates of various higher institutions. Similarly, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Nigeria gives extensive data on unemployment rates for youths aged 15 to 24 from 2021 to 2023. In 2021, the unemployment rate was estimated to be between 30 and 40%. In 2022, it was roughly 33%, and in 2023, the youth unemployment rate in the first quarter was 6.9%, 7.2% in the second quarter, and 8.6% in the third quarter.

The Nigerian governments are recognizing the need to empower youths with digital skills to make them job creators and reduce youth/graduate unemployment. The Nigerian government are partnering with ICT companies such as Google, Coursera and Microsoft companies to train many youths on digital skills (Onuah, 2023). Similarly, Ranjan (2024) reported that the Nigerian government, in collaboration with WEMA Bank, has launched the FGN/ALAT Digital and SkillNnovation Hub centers aim to train one million youths in software engineering, product management, cloud computing, and more. Additionally, they will provide mentorship and upskilling for 500,000 SMEs. These collaborations aim to enhance the digital capabilities of Nigerian youths and support the government's goal of creating one million digital jobs. Digital skills gap among Nigerian youths negatively affects their self-employment drive and job sustainability. According to Sunday (2021), the majority of Nigerian youths lack digital skills to contribute to the growth of Nigerian economy. The World Economic Forum (2020) revealed that Nigeria ranked 122nd out of 140 countries in youth digital skills development. UNESCO (2018) posited that there are major inequalities in digital skills in Nigeria along socio-economic status such as gender, age and educational background.

Anambra State is aggressively tackling the lack of digital skills among youths by means of a number of programmes led by the state administration and backed by different partners. Governor Chukwuma Soludo has stressed the need to establish Anambra as a prominent hub for digital skills

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in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria. Five thousand youths have already graduated from his administration's "One Youth, Two Skills" programme, which aims to produce intelligent entrepreneurs with a variety of skills to promote job creation and economic development. Furthermore, the Solution Innovation District (SID) has played a crucial role in this change (Solution Innovation District (SID, 2023). The "Level-Up Anambra" programme, developed by SID in collaboration with Microsoft and the Wootlab Foundation, aims to teach 20,000 youths a variety of digital skills, including digital marketing, graphic design, web design, and digital entrepreneurship. Based on this background, the study assessed the contribution of digital skills for developing youths towards self-employment and ob sustainability in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria, particularly Anambra State, has encountered major issues in recent years with regard to youth unemployment and the sustainability of jobs. The country has made steps to improve digital skill development, but many youths still have difficulty landing good jobs or building long-term careers. Anambra state's overall quality of life, social stability and economic progress are all impacted by youths' digital skill gap. With the growth of the digital economy comes a special chance to solve these issues by giving youths the digital skills they need to support self-employment and job sustainability. There is still a significant disparity in the availability and accessibility of digital skills among the youths in Nigeria particularly Anambra State, despite the fact that these skills are becoming more and more acknowledged as necessary for participation in the modern workplaces and entrepreneurial endeavours. In Anambra State, A number of programmes have been started to close this skills gap among youths including the "Level-Up Anambra" project and the "One Youth, Two Skills" programme. Nonetheless, a thorough evaluation of how well these initiatives enable youths to pursue self-employment and guarantee job sustainability is required. For the purpose of understanding how digital skill training affects youths' economic prospects and to guide future policy decisions and programme implementations, this study assessed the impact of digital skill development programmes on youth self-employment and job sustainability in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to assess digital skills for developing youths towards self-employment and job sustainability. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Identify specific digital skills that are critical for youths to succeed in self-employment and ensure job sustainability in Anambra State, Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of current digital skills training programmes in Anambra State in developing youths

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towards self-employment and job sustainability.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study;

1. What are the specific digital skills critical for youths to succeed in self-employment and ensure job sustainability in Anambra State, Nigeria?
2. How effective are current digital skills training programmes in Anambra State in developing the youths towards self-employment and job sustainability?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance;

H_{01}: Digital skills training programmes in Anambra State have no significant impact on the development of youths towards self-employment.

H_{02}: Digital skills training programmes in Anambra State do not significantly contribute to job sustainability of youths.

Methods

This study adopted survey research design. It was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all the youths participating in Code Anambra programme, One Youth, Two Skills programme, and Level-Up Anambra programme. Information obtained from the Anambra State Ministry of Youth Development, Awka as 13th August, 2024 revealed that there are about 35,000 youths participating in the different digital skills programmes in Anambra State. The sample size of 380 youths was selected using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table for sample size determination. Questionnaires designed using closed and open-ended questions were used to collect data for the study. Section A of questionnaire sought demographic information about the respondents such as gender and years of teaching experience while section B contained items on Assessment of Digital Skills for Developing Youths towards Self-Employment and Job Sustainability (ADSDYSJS). The instruments were validated using the opinions of three experts from the field of Business Administration and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using pilot testing method and data collected were calculated using Pearson product moment correlation formula and reliability coefficient of.89 was obtained. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the respondents in their respective training centers with the help of three research assistants adequately briefed on the modalities for administration and collection of the questionnaires. Out of the 380 copies of questionnaires distributed, 369 were correctly filled and returned giving a 97% return rate. The correctly returned copies were used for data analysis. Data collected were analyzed using frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation and t-test. A null hypothesis was accepted when the p-value is greater than the significant value while the null hypothesis was rejected

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where p-value is less than the significant value. The analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Results

Table 1: Participation in Digital skills Training Programmes

Participation in Digital Skills Training Programmes	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Yes	369	100
No	-	-
Total	**369**	**100**

Data in Table 1 show that 369(100%) of the youths surveyed indicated that they have participated in digital skills training programmes in Anambra. The findings imply that all the respondents 369(100%) sampled indicated that they have participated in digital skills training programmes in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Digital Skills Most Critical for Developing the Youths towards Self-employment

Specific Digital Skills	Frequency (F)	Percentage %
Digital marketing skills	45	12.2
E-commerce management skills	34	9.2
Data analysis skills	79	21.4
Cybersecurity skills	50	13.6
Digital entrepreneurship skills	161	43.6
Total	**369**	**100**

Table 2 shows that 34(9.2%) of the respondents rated e-commerce management skills critical for developing the youths towards self-employment, 45(12.2%) of the respondents rated digital marketing skills critical, 50(13.6%) of the respondents rated cybersecurity skills as critical, 79(21.4%) of the respondents rated data analysis as critical digital skills while 161(43.6%) of the respondents rated digital entrepreneurship skills as critical. This means that majority 161(43.6%) of the respondents indicated that digital entrepreneurship skills are most critical for developing the youths towards self-employment.

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Table 3: Digital Skills Most Critical for Ensuring Job Sustainability of Youths

Most Critical Digital Skills for Job Sustainability	Frequency (F)	Percentage %
Digital marketing skills	32	8.7
E-commerce management skills	64	17.3
Data analysis skills	38	10.3
Digital accounting skills	33	8.9
Digital entrepreneurship skills	42	11.4
Digital content creation skills	27	7.3
Digital communication and collaboration skills	78	21.1
Digital information and data skills	55	14.9
Total	**369**	**100**

Table 3 show that 27(7.3%) of respondents indicated that digital content creation skills are most critical skills for ensuring job sustainability, 32(8.7%) of respondents rated digital marketing skills most critical, 33(8.9%) of the respondents rated digital accounting skills most critical, and 38(110.3%) of the respondents disclosed that digital analysis skills are most critical. Similarly, 42(11.4%) of the respondents rated digital entrepreneurship skills most critical, 55(14.9%) of the respondents indicated that digital information and data skills are the most critical skills, 64(17.3%) of the respondents disclosed that e-commerce management skills are the most critical skills and 78(21.1%) of the respondents rated digital communication and collaboration skills as the most critical skills for ensuring youth job sustainability. The findings imply that majority 78(21.1%) of respondents indicated that digital communication and collaboration skills are the most critical skills for ensuring their job sustainability.

Table 4: Impact of Acquisition of Digital Skills on Ability to Start or Sustain Small Scale Business

Impact of Acquisition of Digital Skills	Frequency (F)	Percentage %
Significantly improved	260	70.5
Somewhat improved	64	17.3
No change	25	6.8
Somewhat worsened	13	3.5
Significantly worsened	7	1.9
Total	**369**	**100**

Data in table 4 show that 7(1.9%) of the respondents indicated that acquisition of digital skills has significantly worsened their ability to start and sustain small scale businesses, 13(3.5%) of the respondents indicated that it has somewhat worsened their ability to start and sustain their own small scale businesses, 25(6.8%) of the respondents indicated no change in their ability to start and sustain their own businesses, 64(17.3%)

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of the respondents indicated somewhat improvement in their ability and 260(70.5%) of the respondents indicated that it has significantly improved their ability. This means that majority 260(70.5%) of the respondents indicated that acquisition of digital skills has significantly improved their ability to start and sustain their own small-scale businesses in Anambra State.

Table 5: Effectiveness of Digital Skills Training Programmes in Developing Youths towards Self-employment and Job Sustainability

Effectiveness of Digital Skills Training Programmes	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Effective	341	92.4
Not Effective	28	7.6
Total	**369**	**100**

Data in Table 5 show that 341(92.4%) of the respondents sampled indicated that digital skills training programmes exposed to are effective in developing their self-employment and job sustainability while 28(7.6%) of the respondents indicated that the training programmes received are not effective in this regard. This implies that majority of the respondents 341(92.4%) indicated that digital skills training programmes received in Anambra State are effective in developing youths towards self-employment and job sustainability.

Table 6: Summary of t-test Analysis of Significant Impact of Digital skills Training Programmes in Developing the Youths towards Self-employment

Variables	X	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Digital Skills Training Programmes	**2.76**	.58				
			367	.31	.01	Significant
Development of Self-employment	2.57	.51				

Table 6 shows that the t-value of.31 with 367 degree of freedom has p-value of.01 which is less than the alpha level of.05 (P-value =.01 < .05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the digital skills training programmes in Anambra State have significant impact on the development of youths towards self-employment**.**

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Table 7: Summary of t-test Analysis of Significant Contributions of Digital Skills Training Programmes on Job Sustainability of Youths

Variables	X	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Digital Skills Training Programmes	**2.59**	.73				
			367	1.01	.04	Significant
Job Sustainability of Youths		3.17	.65			

Table 7 reveals that the t-value of.101 with 367 degree of freedom has p-value of.04 which is less than the alpha level of.05 (P-value =.04 < .05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the digital skills training programmes in Anambra State significantly contributes to job sustainability of youths.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents indicated that digital entrepreneurship skills are critical for developing the youths towards self-employment. Findings of the study agree with that of Apeh et al. (2023) which revealed that digital entrepreneurship significantly enhances youth empowerment and self-employment opportunities. In agreement, Alao and Brink (2023) reported that digital skills are essential for creating self-employment opportunities for Nigerian youths. Malesev and Cherry (2021) earlier reported that digital skills enable youths in rural or underdeveloped regions to overcome geographic constraints by connecting them to a larger market. This lowers the need for youths to relocate to cities for work and allows them to stay in local villages while generating a steady income. It was also found that the digital skills training programmes in Anambra State significant impacted on the development of youths towards self-employment**.** This finding concurs with those Hoang et al. (2024) which revealed that specific digital skills significantly impacted the development of self-employment among youths. Hoang et al specifically found that digital social skills correlated with a higher likelihood of pursuing self-employment.

Findings of the study also revealed that majority of the youths sampled indicated that digital communication and collaboration skills are the most critical skills for ensuring job sustainability. In agreement, a study by Apeh et al. (2023) revealed that digital communication skills enable smooth interaction with international teams, enabling remote work and collaboration, which is critical for job sustainability in an increasingly digital economy; the skills aid in helping youths adapt to changing digital tools and platforms, ensuring their continued relevance and competitiveness in the labor market; and successful digital collaboration boosts productivity and efficiency. In a similar vein, Haleema et al. (2022) claimed that project management, file sharing, and real-time communication are all made easier by having digital communication and collaboration skills. Youths who acquire these abilities are more likely to advance in

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their careers and keep their positions. The findings of the study further revealed that digital skills training programmes in Anambra State significantly contributes to job sustainability of youths. The fact that digital skills training programs give youths the skills they need to adapt to quickly evolving technological environments is one way in which they greatly contribute to the sustainability of jobs. This flexibility is essential for keeping a job since youths who are proficient with digital skills and keep up with technology developments are more likely to be valued by employers and achieve stable employment over the long run.

Conclusion

The findings of this study lead the researcher to conclude that digital entrepreneurship skills are vital for enabling youths to pursue self-employment because they give them the capacity to start and run their own businesses; additionally, digital communication and collaboration skills are determined to be the most important for guaranteeing job sustainability because they allow youths to participate in the contemporary, global workforce in an efficient manner, which secures long-term employment and professional development. Taken as a whole, digital skills provide a strong basis for developing youths towards self-employment and job sustainability in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. The Nigerian governments and educational institutions should scale up digital entrepreneurship skills training programmes to equip more youths with the skills needed to start and manage their own businesses effectively.
2. Schools and vocational training programmes in Nigeria should incorporate digital communication and collaboration skills into their curricula to ensure that youths are prepared for the demands of the modern workforce.
3. The Nigerian government should implement policies that support access to digital tools and infrastructure, ensuring that all youths can develop and utilize these critical skills for self-employment and job sustainability.
4. The Nigerian government in collaboration with private sectors should provide continuous support through mentorship programmes, access to digital tools and funding opportunities. This will help youths not only acquire these digital skills, but also, effectively apply them to start, sustain and grow their small businesses leading to greater economic development in the country and states.
5. Digital skills training programmes should be expanded and made more accessible to a broader range of youths especially to youths living in rural areas across Nigeria. This can be achieved through partnerships with local businesses,

NGOs, and educational institutions, ensuring that more youths can benefit from effective training that enhances their self-employment opportunities and job sustainability.

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