

PERCEPTION OF YOUTH AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS PROGRAMME AND SKILL TRAINING ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME FOR JOB CREATION BY UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS IN DELTA STATE.

BY

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Abstract

This study sought to examine the perception of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) and Skill Training Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) as job creation schemes, by unemployed youths of Delta State. Three research questions were raised while three hypotheses were formulated. The population comprised of all unemployed youths of Delta North District and sample comprised of 230 randomly selected unemployed youths who applied for the 2016 YAGEP and STEP schemes. A structured questionnaire containing 42 items, grouped into three (3) clusters that sought to elicit the perception of respondents to the schemes, was administered. The instrument was validated by lecturers from three institutions in Delta State and it had a reliability coefficient of 0.82 (Cronbach alpha). Data generated by 219 respondents were analyzed using, means, standard deviation, and t-test analysis to obtain results. Findings revealed that respondents had positive perception of YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes, called for expansion of the YAGEP to cover more crops and more livestock, and agreed that they are viable and sustainable schemes which they could participate in to become entrepreneurs and job creators. T-test analysis of the hypotheses revealed that males and females had different levels of perception of YAGEP and STEP, had different positive ratings of the programmes, while ND/NCE and HND/B.Sc or B.A graduates' perceptions were influenced by their different levels of education. Recommendations included unemployed youths keying into properly managed empowerment programmes like YAGEP and STEP to become job creators, while governments were advised to always conduct studies on the perception of their programmes by the people to be served, so that they can happily participate in such programmes.

Key words: Perception, unemployed youths, entrepreneurs, job creation and empowerment.

Introduction

One of the major social issues ravaging Nigerian society today is youth unemployment. Unemployment is the state of someone having the necessary skill, knowledge and desire to fit into a job to earn a livelihood, but does not have access to that job or alternative source of earning livelihood. The International Labour Organization defines unemployment as the proportion of people in the labour force, aged fifteen (15) to sixty four (64) years, who are actively looking for work, but could not find work at least twenty (20) hours during the

reference period to the total currently active (labour force) population, while underemployment occurs if a person works less than full-time hours or works full-time but is engaged in an activity that under-utilizes his/her skills, time and educational qualifications (ILO, 2015, paraphrased by NBS, 2016). Thus, unemployment is measured as the percentage of the labour force that is either unemployed or under-employed. Unemployment rate has been on the increase in Nigeria over the years; it was 13.1 percent in

2000, rose to 14.8 percent in 2003 and 19.7 percent in 2009 (NBS, 2009).

According to Ijaiya (2007), with the proliferation of schools, colleges and universities, Nigeria has produced an army of unemployable and unemployed youths, resulting in the agitation for entrepreneurship education, as one of the ways of solving the problem of youth unemployment. Unemployment breeds poverty and the rising unemployment rates in the country prove that most government programmes, including educational programmes are not helping to address the challenge of unemployment. Having recognized the futility of previous approaches to the problem of youth unemployment, and its dire social consequences, Delta State Government in 2015 introduced the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) and Skill Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) as job creation platforms for youths, in order to reduce unemployment. These two programmes were designed to equip youths with agricultural and other occupational skills and entrepreneurship for them to cease to be employment seekers, become self-reliant and future employers of labour. Since these programmes were designed to engage the youths, and considering how youths had not fully embraced previous programmes of job creation by the government, it became necessary that while the success of the programmes cannot be assessed now, because they are still in their infancy, there is the need to determine the perception of these programmes by the youths for whom they are meant. Their perception of the programmes will reflect their willingness to accept and participate in the programmes, which will ultimately impact on the job creation scheme. As stated by Eboh (2015), the youth agricultural entrepreneurs programme (YAGEP) and skills training entrepreneurship programme (STEP)

are on a mission to harness the production potentials of youths in Delta State through an era of rapid and sustainable socio-economic development drive that would transform the State into the most peaceful and industrialized State in Nigeria. Vremudia (2012) stated that though there is a consensus that the youth population is a great asset for innovation and creativity in all societies, it could be counter-productive if their strengths are not properly harnessed. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2016), unemployment rate has risen consistently from quarter four (Q4) in 2014 to quarter two (Q2) in 2016. It also reported that the total youth labour force was 39.6 million, representing 49.5% of Nigeria's total labour force in Q2 of 2016. The need for government to exploit avenues for job creation cannot therefore be over-emphasized. Thus, in 2016, conditions for youth participation in YAGEP and STEP job creation schemes were set out in the SMART instruction document as follows:

Candidates must meet the following criteria;

1. The following categories of individuals are not eligible;
 - a. Persons who are employed
 - b. Person who are students
 - c. Graduates who are serving or a yet to serve NYSC.
2. Minimum of SSCE/NECO qualification
3. Age of candidate must be between 18-35 years.
4. YAGEP covers crop production and fishery only. The total number of participants should be shared between crop production (60%) and fishery (40%). There is no poultry or piggery etc.
5. In 2015 when YAGEP and STEP schemes were established, it was reported that over sixty three thousand (63,000) youths applied as candidates. Then, a clear understanding of the programmes was not in place, but after two batches have been

implemented, the 2016 schemes have been clearly defined, as indicated above. Presently, youths understand that the schemes are not government, employment platforms, but job creation schemes for skill acquisition and entrepreneurship training for self-reliance and wealth creation through youth agriculture and other skill-based occupations, so how do unemployed youth now perceive the programmes? Are they so keen to participate as many of them were before understanding that they are not employment schemes? Entrepreneurship competency refers to the sum of the entrepreneur's requisite attributes for successful and sustainable entrepreneurship. (Kiggundy, 2002) He identified these attributes to include attitudes, values, skills, beliefs, knowledge, mindset and behavioural tendencies. Egun and Tibi (2010), maintained that education affects the level of productivity of people.

6. The purpose of this paper was to assess youths' perception of YAGEP and STEP, as veritable job creation activities in Delta State. It was also to determine whether gender and educational qualifications influence their perception of youth cornering YAGEP and STEP as job creation activities.

Objective of the study: the general objective of this study was to determine the perception of YAGEP and STEP as job creation activities, by unemployed youths of Delta State. Specifically the study seeks to determine whether:

1. The youths see job opportunities in the scheme that they can fit into,
2. There are actual skills that they can acquire to enable them become entrepreneurs in such occupations
3. There is sincerity on the part of government in the implementation of the programmes

Emmanuel U.T., Cyril E.O. & Anthony A.K

4. These programmes are in line with their aspirations for employment and wealth generation and
5. These programmes serve as short-term or permanent engagements for the future

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to elicit responses from unemployed youths

1. What types of jobs do youths feel that can be created out of YAGEP and STEP schemes?
2. Do youths perceive YAGEP and STEP as satisfactory skill and entrepreneurship training schemes for job creation and poverty alleviation?
3. Do youths feel that YAGEP and STEP are viable and sustainable schemes for job creation in the present economy?

Hypotheses: The following research hypotheses were also formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean perception of male and female youths concerning job creation opportunities in YAGEP and STEP schemes.
2. There is no significant difference in youths with ND/NCE and HND/BSc or B.A qualifications in their mean perception of skills to be trained in, under the YAGEP and STEP schemes.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female youths of YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes.

Methodology

This was a survey design study which sought to determine the perception of youths concerning YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes. The population of the study comprised of all unemployed youths in Delta North Senatorial District that filled the YAGEP or STEP application forms for year 2016. These subjects comprised of WAEC or NECO graduates

National Diploma (ND), Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelors Degree (BSc/BA.) graduates. For the purpose of this study, only ND/NCE, HND and BSc/BA graduates were sampled i.e, three (3) categories.

The research instrument was a Likert scale questionnaire that sought to elicit responses from youth job seekers in Delta North Senatorial District (9 L.G.A.s). A random sampling of 230 respondents who had the aim of applying for the YAGEP and STEP schemes was done called perception of YAGEP and STEP job creation questionnaire (PYSJCQ). The questionnaire comprised of 42 items, in three clusters to address issues of types of jobs to be created from YAGEP and STEP, the skill that youths needed to be trained in, to become entrepreneurs and how effectively respondents felt that YAGEP and STEP were being

implemented and what prospect they held for unemployed youths. The questionnaire had a five item rating scale with weighted values of strongly agreed (5), agreed (4), undecided (3) disagreed (2) and strongly disagreed (1). Any item that was scored a mean of 3.00 and above, was rated agreed, while any item scored a mean of less than 3.00 was rated disagreed. It was validated by Vocational and Technical Education lecturers at College of Education, Agbor, Delta State Polytechnic Ogwashi-Uku and Delta State University Abraka. The questionnaire items were validated by using Cronbach alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was established. 219 respondents successfully filled out the questionnaire and returned them, comprising of 130 males and 89 females. Data collected were analyzed using means, standard deviation and t-test analysed to obtain results.

Results

Research Question 1: What types of job do youths feel that can be created out of YAGEP and STEP schemes?

Table 1: Responses to the question what types of job do youth feel that can be created out of YAGEP and STEP schemes?

S/N		SD	$\bar{X}$	DECISION
I	Jobs can be created:			
a.	Through annual crops cultivation	.474	1.34	Disagreed
b.	Staple and cash crops cultivation	.498	1.45	Disagreed
c.	Crop cultivation under collectivization	1.334	3.30	Agreed
d.	Personal ownership of crop farm plots	1.103	3.80	Agreed
e.	Only fishery farming	1.293	3.61	Agreed
f.	With poultry and piggery	.908	4.05	Agreed
III	Skills youths need to be trained in are:			
a.	Mechanized land preparation	1.561	2.87	Disagreed
b.	Mechanized rice, maize and cassava cultivation	1.615	3.17	Agreed
c.	Mechanized fertilizer application	.969	4.16	Agreed

d.	Chemical weed control practice	.824	4.24	Agreed
e.	Mechanized harvesting/processing of rice and maize	1.015	3.97	Agreed
f.	Mechanized processing/storage of cassava	.842	4.26	Agreed
g.	Marketing and distribution of farm inputs	.771	4.43	Agreed
h.	Cottage industries/marketing of farm produce/products	1.075	4.00	Agreed

Emmanuel U.T., Cyril E.O. & Anthony A.K

On annual crops cultivation ($\bar{x} = 1.34$) and staple and cash crops cultivation only ($\bar{x} = 1.045$), youth disagreed, but on collectivization, ($\bar{x} = 3.30$), ownership of farm plots ($\bar{x} = 3.80$) only fishery ($\bar{x} = 3.61$) and poultry and piggery ($\bar{x} = 4.05$), they agreed that jobs could be created out of such enterprises. On skills that youths feel they would be trained in to make them gainfully engaged through YAGEP and STEP, respondents disagreed with mechanized land preparation ($\bar{x} = 2.87$), but agreed with

mechanized crops cultivation ($\bar{x} = 3.17$), mechanized fertilizer application ($\bar{x} = 4.16$), herbicide use ($\bar{x} = 4.24$), mechanized harvesting/processing. ($\bar{x} = 3.97$), mechanized processing/storage of cassava ($\bar{x} = 4.43$), marketing and distribution of farm inputs ($\bar{x} = 4.43$) and cottage industries/marketing of farm produce/products ($\bar{x} = 4.00$) as skills in which they can acquire through YAGEP and STEP.

Research Question 2: Do youths perceive YAGEP and STEP as satisfactory skill and entrepreneurship training schemes for wealth creation and poverty alleviation?

Table 2: Responses to the question do youths perceive YAGEP and STEP as satisfactory skill and entrepreneurship training schemes for wealth creation and poverty alleviation?

S/N		SD	$\bar{X}$	DECISION
II.	Skill training and entrepreneurship as perceived:			
a.	Skill training occurs in real enterprises only	1.349	3.17	Agreed
b.	Skill training should be under formal educational settings	1.082	3.91	Agreed
c.	Skill training occurs only in privately-run major enterprises	1.365	2.97	Disagreed
d.	Skill training is accompanied with strong entrepreneurial inputs.	1.231	3.94	Agreed
e.	Only educationally qualified persons are selected for relevant skills training.	1.346	2.63	Disagreed
f.	Educationally qualified youths should be empowered without further skill-training.	1.110	3.93	Agreed
V	Do youths feel that:			
a.	YAGEP and STEP are sincere job creation programmes?	1.136	3.73	Agreed
b.	YAGEP and STEP are political gestures to fulfill campaign promises?	1.271	3.46	Agreed
c.	YAGEP and Step are being managed successfully?	1.123	3.99	Agreed
d.	YAGEP and STEP appeal to youths' quest for entrepreneurship and wealth creation?	1.192	3.65	Agreed

e.	YAGEP and STEP are being operated apolitically?	1.252	3.74	Agreed
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Respondents agreed that skill training occurs in real enterprise only ($\bar{x} = 3.17$), and should be done under formal education ($\bar{x} = 3.91$), but disagreed that skill training occurs only in privately-run major enterprises ($\bar{x} = 2.87$). While they agreed that skill training should

involve entrepreneurial inputs ($\bar{x} = 3.94$), they disagreed that only educationally qualified youths should be chosen for skill training ($\bar{x} = 2.63$). However, they agreed that educationally qualified youths should be empowered without further skill training ($\bar{x} = 3.93$)

Research Question 3: Do youths feel that YAGEP and STEP are viable and sustainable schemes for job creation in the present economy?

Table 3: Responses to the question: do youths feel that YAGEP and STEP are viable and sustainable schemes for job creation in the present economy?

Emmanuel U.T., Cyril E.O. & Anthony A.K

VI	Do youths perceive YAGEP and STEP:			
a.	As viable job creation schemes?	1.215	3.92	Agreed
b.	As profitable enterprises that are sustainable?	1.136	3.27	Agreed
c.	As alternatives to public or private sector employment?	1.234	4.07	Agreed
d.	As engagements that receive their family support?	1.058	3.97	Agreed
e.	As avenues for becoming employers of labour?	1.012	4.17	Agreed
f.	As avenues for becoming self-reliant?	.972	4.03	Agreed
VII	Do youths regards YAGEP and STEP:			
a.	As enterprises that they can build their life career on?	.763	4.21	Agreed
b.	As engagements that are in tandem with their educational status?	1.036	4.16	Agreed
c.	As engagements that can make them live happily anywhere within Delta State and beyond?	1.194	4.03	Agreed
d.	As enterprises they can grow in and encourage others to join?	.997	3.67	Agreed

Youth (respondents) perceive YAGEP and STEP as viable ($\bar{x} = 3.92$), sustainable ($\bar{x} = 3.27$), and as alternatives to paid employment ($\bar{x} = 4.07$), which would receive family support ($\bar{x} = 3.97$) and serve as avenues for becoming self-reliant ($\bar{x} = 4.03$), and emerging as employers of labour ($\bar{x} = 4.17$). Youths also agreed that YAGEP and STEP schemes are

enterprises that they can build careers on ($\bar{x} = 4.21$) and are in line with their educational status ($\bar{x} = 4.16$). they further agreed that they can make a living from YAGEP and STEP ($\bar{x} = 4.03$) as well as grow in their and mentor others to join ($\bar{x} = 3.67$)

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean perception of male and female youths concerning job creation opportunities in YAGEP and STEP schemes.

Table 4: The t-test analysis of responses on hypothesis one

Variable	N	X	Sd	Df	T	p	Decision
Male	130	2.8538	.44655	217	-2.890	.003	Rejected
female	89	3.0243	.36631		-3.092	.002	

The t-test analysis in table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value (-2.89) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96), therefore the null hypothesis, H_{01} is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant different in youth with ND/NCE and HND/B.Sc/B.A qualifications in their perception of skills to be trained in under YAGEP and STEP for entrepreneurial success.

Table 5: The t-test analysis of responses on hypothesis two

Variable	N	X	Sd	Df	T	p	Decision
ND/NCE	155	2.8249	.44655	217	-2.256	.025	Rejected
HND/B.Sc	64	3.0089	.36631		-2.524	.013	

For H_{02} The t-test analysis in table 5 above showed that the calculated t-value (-2.26) as greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) was rejected.

Hypothesis 3 (H_{03}): There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female youths of YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes

Table 6: The t-test analysis of responses of the respondents

Variable	N	X	Sd	Df	T	p	Decision
Male	130	3.9942	.44655	217	-2.715	0.007	Rejected
Female	89	4.1699	.36631		-2.683	0.008	

Emmanuel U.T., Cyril E.O. & Anthony A.K

The t-test analysis in table 6 above reveals that the calculated t-value (-2.72) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96); therefore the null hypothesis (H_{03}) was hereby rejected.

Discussion of Results

From the analysis of research question one, the respondents affirmed that jobs could not only be created through the cultivation of annual crops or cash and staple crops only, through the YAGEP scheme but agreed that through crop cultivation under collectivization, personal ownership of crop farm plots, jobs could be created by youths in agriculture. The youths thus believed that diversification of agricultural practices under the YAGEP scheme could lead to more job creation than the limited scope of cultivation of rice and cassava only.

Diversification of the informal sector of the Nigerian economy is crucial at this stage, since according to Arosanyin, Olowosulu and Oyeyemi (2011) the sources of livelihood for most Nigerians in the formal sector are threatened due to power crises, recession, poor policy guidelines, low capacity utilization in the manufacturing sector etc. Respondents also admitted that engaging in fish farming only could lead to job creation that would appeal to them, while they also agreed that more jobs could be created if YAGEP was expanded to include poultry and piggery farming. Respondents did not accept mechanized land preparation as a skill they could be trained in, but agreed that all other skills such as mechanized rice, maize and cassava cultivation, mechanized fertilizer and herbicide application,

mechanized processing of crops, cottage industries as well as distribution and marketing of agricultural produce/products were desirable job creation skills that they could be trained in. As stated by UNESCO (2008), entrepreneurial education is made up of all kinds of experiences that give students the ability and vision of how to access and transform opportunities of different kinds; it goes beyond business creation; it is about increasing youths ability to anticipate and respond to societal changes.

The study also revealed that skill training occurs in real enterprises, should take place under formal educational settings and should be accompanied with strong entrepreneurial inputs; they however disagreed that skill training occurs only in privately-run major enterprises or that only educationally qualified persons should be trained in YAGEP or STEP skills. The study thus revealed that useful and useable skills can be acquired from small and medium enterprises (SMES), the informal sector of the economy and that youths with limited education can also fit into the YAGEP and STEP schemes. Shane (2009) had opined that personal development through domestic skills builds confidence, boosts morale, encourages progress and strengthens the entrepreneur's mindset and fosters a desire to achieve and inspires action. Respondents however expressed the view that educationally qualified youths should be empowered without further skill training, While this view aligns with the statement by Egun and Tibi (2010) that education affects the level of productivity of people, Abelega (2009) observed that poor entrepreneurship education in the curriculum of existing vocational courses has made students graduating from courses in agriculture, business, home economics and technical education without the slightest knowledge of how they could be gainfully employed. Thus all educationally qualified youths need further YAGEP and STEP training, in order to be

employed, become entrepreneurs or become instruments of job creation.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the respondents perceived YAGEP and STEP as viable, sustainable job creation schemes, regarded them as alternative choices to paid public or private sector employment and as engagements that their families could support. They also asserted that participants in YAGEP and STEP schemes could become self-employed, self-reliant and even employers of labour. These findings are supported by Aremu (2011) who stated that small and medium enterprises have been considered as the engine room of economic growth and for the promotion of equitable development. Respondents also saw YAGEP and STEP as schemes through which enterprises they could build their careers on, and as engagements that are fitting to their educational status, and which they would be happy to earn livelihood and cast their future on. They also agreed that they could become successful in such enterprises and encourage others to key into through their mentorship. YAGEP and STEP schemes were perceived by youths as veritable training for employment generation, entrepreneurship and job creation Paul (2005), while supporting the view above, stated that entrepreneurship education (training) is aimed at achieving functional education among SME owners to enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant.

The rejection of hypothesis one (H_{01}) in the study confirmed that while all respondents perceived YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes, there were different levels of the perceptions between males and females. Apparently, this was so because of the gender difference in the identified job opportunities and types of training skills required for the two schemes. According to Gabriel and Schmitz (2007), traditional blue-collar occupations such

as operatives and craft continue to be male dominated, while women remain concentrated in service and clerical occupations. As noted by Parker, Stratton, Gale, Rodd and Sealey (2013), students' aspirations reveal their future preference (e.g. for higher education, career, lifestyle, etc) and they reflect socio-cultural judgments about the relative merits of imagined future.

Baker and Cornelson (2016) stated that research from a number of fields suggests that males and females differ, on average, in a number of sensory, motor and spatial aptitudes that are potentially important for occupational choice. So gender features prominently in the choice of occupations that people have preference for, International Labour organization (ILO, 2015) reported that overall, women continue to suffer from higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of employment, are less likely to participate in the labour force and face higher rates of vulnerable employment, i.e. being self-employed or as contributing family worker. While males would prefer domestic, operational and craft jobs, women would prefer service and clerical occupations in YAGEP and STEP schemes.

The findings of this study also indicated that there was a significant difference in the perception of youths with ND/NCE and HND/B.Sc or BA. of the skills that youths need to be trained in. This may be as a result of the different levels of educational exposure between the two groups, which may have influenced their perception of the jobs and skills embedded in YAGEP and STEP schemes. The ND/NCE and HND/B.Sc or BA. graduates may have been influenced by their different levels of aspiration for higher education, career choice, lifestyle preferences, peer and parental pressures to have different perceptions according to their educational levels. Basil (2015) stated that most SMES in Nigeria died

within the first five years of existence because of poor management system. So no matter the level of education, a youth has, he/she needs skill and entrepreneurial training to succeed in business and industry.

Conclusion

Judging from the outcomes of this study, it has become clear that youths have positive perceptions of YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes. The youths identified farm practices and skills which they said that they were ready to train in; they also agreed that they would accept training as provided in the YAGEP and STEP schemes, accepted that the schemes were being operated sincerely and described them as viable and sustainable schemes. This study equally revealed that males and females desire different job types and rate skills training differently according to gender preferences. Level of education was also shown to influence how youths perceived YAGEP and STEP as job creation schemes.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Unemployed youths should key into YAGEP and STEP schemes or similar youth empowerment schemes in Nigeria in order to receive skills and entrepreneurial training, to enable them become job creators and not job seekers.
2. Various governments should initiate research to assess youths' perception of the empowerment programmes they wish to put in place for them, before initiating such programmes, so that such youths can accept to key into such programmes.

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