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ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SKILL ACQUISITION IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR ERADICATING POVERTY AMONG YOUTHS IN SOUTH EAST ZONE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the effectiveness of skill acquisition in language education as a strategy for eradicating poverty among youths in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the contributions of communication/public speaking, translation /interpretation, digital content creation and entrepreneurial language-based training toward youth empowerment and self-reliance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The target population comprised language education graduates, language educators, and curriculum planners across the zone. Using the Yamane formula and simple random sampling techniques, a sample size of 400 respondents was selected from four states in the region: Enugu, Abia, Anambra, and Imo States. Data collection was executed using a validated, 4-point Likert scale structured questionnaire titled "Skill Acquisition in Language Education and Poverty Eradication Questionnaire (SALEPEQ)". The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding an internal consistency coefficient above the 0.70 threshold. Data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean scores, and standard deviations against a criterion mean benchmark of 2.50. The findings revealed that while functional linguistic

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competencies such as oral communication, digital content writing, freelance translation, and language-based business setups possess immensely high income-generating potential for poverty reduction, their implementation is severely undermined by institutional bottlenecks. These constraints include a lack of modern speech training facilities, an absence of hands-on translation incubation, a lack of structured digital media literacy in language curricula, and severe regional digital infrastructure deficits. Based on these findings, it was concluded that transforming language education from a purely theoretical discipline into a functional, skills-driven platform is crucial for mitigating youth unemployment.

Introduction

In recent years, the discourse on youth empowerment and poverty eradication has gained renewed momentum in Nigeria especially in the context of addressing persistent socio-economic challenges. One of the most pressing issues confronting the South East zone of Nigeria is youth unemployment which contributes to the high rate of poverty, crime and social unrest in the region (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Consequently, the need to equip young people with marketable skills that are both relevant and sustainable has become a national priority. Among the many strategies proposed, skill acquisition through language education has emerged as a potentially transformative tool for empowering youths and reducing poverty. Language education, traditionally seen as a medium of communication has evolved into a platform for teaching life skills, vocational abilities and entrepreneurial competence. In the 21st century, the integration of skill acquisition programmes into language curricula in secondary and tertiary institutions has become an innovative approach to bridge the gap between education and employment (Okoye & Eze, 2022). This pedagogical shift emphasises not only the development of linguistic proficiency but also functional competencies such as translation, interpretation, language tutoring, media and communication, publishing, digital marketing and content creation all of which have income generating potential in a knowledge-driven economy.

Indeed, the South East zone of Nigeria is known for its vibrant youth population and strong entrepreneurial spirit. However, the economic potentials of this population are often undermined by a mismatch between education and employment opportunities. While many youths possess academic qualifications, they often lack practical skills that are required in the job market. This disconnect has led to rising youth unemployment and underemployment (Ezeani & Ozioko, 2021). Language education, when restructured to include skill acquisition components can serve as a strategic vehicle for addressing these problems. Skill acquisition in language education involves the deliberate teaching of productive and employable skills such as creative writing, editing, speech making,

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podcasting, digital literacy, language-based software development and even entrepreneurial ventures such as running language training centers or offering freelance translation services online. These competencies empower learners to create employment opportunities for themselves and others. The advancement of digital technologies and the global demand for multilingual services further expand the economic relevance of language skills in today's job market (UNESCO, 2022).

Also, educational policies in Nigeria have begun to recognize the importance of skills-based education. The National Policy on Education (2020) emphasises the importance of functional education and the need for integrating skill acquisition across all subjects including languages. This policy shift is aimed at reducing dependency on white-collar jobs by equipping students with practical skills that enable self-reliance and entrepreneurial development. In alignment with this, language education is no longer confined to grammar and literature but is now viewed as a springboard for economic participation and innovation among youths (Nwachukwu & Ihediwa, 2023). Despite these promising developments, there is a growing need to empirically assess the effectiveness of these initiatives, especially in the context of the South East. Questions remain about the extent to which language education programmes incorporate skill acquisition, the relevance of these skills to the local and global economy and the measurable impact on youth empowerment and poverty reduction. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of skill acquisition in language education as a strategy for eradicating poverty among youths in the South East zone of Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Unemployment and poverty among youths continue to pose developmental threat in the South East zone of Nigeria. Despite the increasing number of graduates from language education programmes, a large proportion of these young individuals remain economically inactive, lacking the practical skills needed to secure gainful employment or create self-sustaining ventures. This situation suggests a disconnect between academic training in language education and the economic realities faced by the youth. Language education has traditionally focused on theoretical and literary aspects with limited integration of skill acquisition components that are essential for real-world employability. In today's dynamic economy, language-related skills such as communication management, digital content creation, interpretation and translation can serve as powerful tools for income generation. However, many language education programmes do not adequately equip learners with these relevant competencies. This gap between education and economic empowerment has contributed to the high rate of youth poverty and social discontent. Without deliberate efforts to incorporate skill acquisition into language education curricula, the potential of such programmes to address

unemployment and poverty may remain unrealized. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of skill acquisition in language education as a strategy for eradicating poverty among youths in the South East zone of Nigeria.

Literature Review

This literature review will critically examines empirical works on the subject of skill acquisition in language education and its potential role in addressing youth poverty in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Skill acquisition refers to the process of gaining practical competencies that can be applied to real-world tasks, especially for economic self-reliance. In educational contexts, it involves embedding vocational, entrepreneurial and communicative skills into the learning process (Paiko, 2020). Language education, traditionally seen as a field aimed at improving literacy and communication, is now being viewed more broadly. It can serve as a platform for acquiring practical, income-generating skills such as translation, interpretation, content creation, online tutoring, editing, and public speaking. Recent shifts in global education have prompted scholars to advocate for a more functional approach to language education. According to Ojo and Bello (2019), the 21st century language classroom should not only develop communicative competence but also prepare learners for the demands of the digital and entrepreneurial economy.

Skill Acquisition and Youth Empowerment

Several studies have emphasised the effectiveness of skill acquisition in empowering youths and reducing poverty. Eze (2023) investigated the impact of vocational skill acquisition in Ebonyi State and found a significant correlation between skill acquisition and improved youth employment outcomes. The study revealed that young people who participated in skill training programmes were more likely to start small businesses or secure jobs compared to those who did not. Similarly, Itodo, Amosun, and Morohunmubo (2023) conducted a study in Ondo State and observed that government-sponsored skill acquisition centers had a measurable impact on job creation. These findings are relevant to language education, where skill-based modules can be tailored to local and global market needs, enabling learners to monetize their communication abilities through writing, teaching and media production. In support of this, Ibe and Omeje (2021) argue that skill acquisition in language education helps students bridge the gap between theory and practice by equipping them with real-world competencies, thereby making them more employable.

Language Education as a Medium for Skill Development

Language education offers a unique platform for integrating both cognitive and practical skills. The teaching of public speaking, digital storytelling, academic writing, and creative writing fosters critical thinking and expression while also providing monetizable skills (Ajayi, 2021). For example, fluency in local and foreign languages can lead to opportunities in translation and interpretation, which are in high demand in Nigeria's multilingual society and the global freelance market. Furthermore, the rise of social media and digital content platforms has opened new avenues for employment. Language learners who acquire skills in blogging, podcasting, and video scripting can generate income online. According to Adepoju and Ojo (2022), digital literacy and creative language use have become essential for the modern job market, and their inclusion in language education can contribute meaningfully to youth empowerment and poverty eradication.

Communication and Public Speaking Skills and Their Contribution to Poverty Eradication

Communication and public speaking are foundational language skills with high economic value in today's world. Scholars have long emphasized the significance of oral communication proficiency as a key employability skill. According to Ojo and Bello (2019), youths who acquire public speaking skills are more confident, persuasive, and effective in leadership roles-traits that increase their chances of self-employment, political engagement, and participation in entrepreneurial ventures. In the context of poverty eradication, public speaking enables youths to serve as radio presenters, public advocates, motivational speakers and trainers. Ajayi (2021) stresses that when integrated into the language curriculum, public speaking helps students develop articulation, audience management, and persuasive discourse skills that are monetizable in fields such as marketing, event management, and broadcasting. In a study conducted in Anambra and Enugu States, Okonkwo and Chukwuma (2022) found that graduates with strong public communication skills had higher chances of securing jobs in the media and educational sectors. These roles provided them with stable income and reduced dependence on scarce government jobs. However, challenges such as lack of facilities for speech training and limited emphasis on oral language in secondary schools hinder the widespread acquisition of public speaking skills (Ibe & Omeje, 2021). There is a growing call for curriculum reform to prioritize practical communication activities in language classrooms.

Translation and Interpretation Skills and Economic Self-Reliance

Translation and interpretation are key skill sets in a multilingual society like Nigeria, where effective communication across languages is essential in commerce, governance, health, and diplomacy. Language education programmes that incorporate translation and

interpretation prepare students for roles as interpreters in courts, hospitals, religious settings, and conferences. Eze (2023) underscores the growing demand for translators and interpreters in Nigeria due to globalization and regional trade agreements. According to his research, youths with competencies in at least two languages (English and one local or foreign language) often find employment in publishing firms, embassies, NGOs, and media houses. This skill provides economic self-reliance, especially when freelance opportunities in translation services are exploited through platforms like Upwork or Fiverr. In a South East case study, Nwachukwu and Ugwu (2022) found that Igbo-English bilingual graduates with interpretation training were more likely to be self-employed in legal and religious settings. These youths reportedly earned regular income by offering simultaneous interpretation and document translation services, even without formal employment. Nevertheless, Omeje (2021) notes that most schools lack qualified instructors in translation theory and practice, and students are not usually exposed to real-time interpreting scenarios. Addressing these gaps would enhance the economic potential of translation and interpretation as poverty-reducing tools.

Digital Content Creation and Youth Income-Generating Capacity

The rise of digital technologies has opened new frontiers for monetizable skills in language education. Digital content creation which includes blogging, podcasting, video scripting, social media influencing, and online storytelling has become a major income-generating activity for tech-savvy youths. According to Adepoju and Ojo (2022), content creation empowers language learners to apply their linguistic competence in creative ways that attract financial rewards. Youths who can craft compelling messages, write scripts, or produce engaging videos can become YouTubers, TikTok influencers, or ghostwriters professions that require no formal employment but generate significant income. In a survey of language education graduates in Imo and Abia States, Ikenna and Uzochukwu (2023) found that 37% of the respondents were earning income through freelance writing, content marketing, and YouTube monetization. These individuals attributed their success to skills they developed in creative writing and multimedia communication as part of their language education. However, a key challenge lies in the digital divide. Many rural youths lack access to ICT tools, internet connectivity, and digital literacy training. Omeh (2021) warns that unless these barriers are addressed, only a privileged few will benefit from digital content creation despite its vast potential in poverty reduction.

Entrepreneurial Language-Based Training and Poverty Reduction

Language education with embedded entrepreneurship content equips learners with the mindset and competencies for business innovation and income generation.

Entrepreneurial language training involves teaching students how to market language-based services, write business proposals, develop language-learning apps, offer freelance editing, and start tutorial centers. According to Itodo et al. (2023), entrepreneurial training in the language curriculum enhances students' capacity to turn their communication skills into businesses. This includes opening language coaching classes, starting podcast businesses, and developing educational content for schools and e-learning platforms. Such training fosters self-employment and reduces youth dependency on saturated formal job markets. Eme and Ugwoke (2021) argue that language-based entrepreneurship bridges the gap between academic knowledge and practical utility. Their study in the South East showed that language graduates who took entrepreneurship courses were more likely to launch small businesses such as publishing outfits and communication consultancies. Nevertheless, curriculum planners often treat entrepreneurship education as a peripheral activity. Adeyemi (2022) laments that language departments in many colleges do not provide hands-on business training, which limits the applicability of students' skills after graduation. There is a need for collaboration between language educators and business development experts to create robust, market-relevant entrepreneurship modules.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at assessing the effectiveness of skill acquisition in language education for eradicating poverty among youths in South East zone of Nigeria. The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the extent to which communication and public speaking skills acquired through language education contribute to poverty eradication among youths in the South East zone of Nigeria.
2. To assess the effectiveness of translation and interpretation skills provided in language education programmes in enhancing the economic self-reliance of youths in the South East zone.
3. To evaluate the influence of digital content creation skills acquired in language education on the income-generating capabilities of youths in the South East zone.
4. To determine the impact of entrepreneurial language-based training on poverty reduction among youths who have completed language education programmes in the South East zone of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do communication and public speaking skills acquired through language education contribute to poverty eradication among youths in the South East zone of Nigeria?

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2. How effective are translation and interpretation skills taught in language education programmes in enhancing the economic self-reliance of youths in the South East?
3. In what ways does digital content creation as a component of language education influence the income-generating capabilities of youths in the South East zone?
4. What is the impact of entrepreneurial language-based training on poverty reduction among youths who graduate from language education programmes in the South East zone of Nigeria?

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was appropriate as it enabled the researchers to gather detailed and factual information from a large population regarding the effectiveness of skill acquisition in language education as a strategy for poverty eradication among youths. The population of this study comprised all youths who had undergone formal or informal language education programmes in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. These included graduates of language-related courses from Colleges of Education, Universities, language centres, and vocational institutions. Language educators and curriculum planners within the zone also formed part of the target population. To determine the sample size for this study, the Yamane formula was used. Simple random sampling techniques were utilized to select 400 respondents from four states in the South East zone of Nigeria (namely Enugu, Abia, Anambra, and Imo States).

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *"Skill Acquisition in Language Education and Poverty Eradication Questionnaire (SALEPEQ)"*. The items were constructed on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). To ensure its face and content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in linguistics and language education from a recognized Nigerian university (University of Nigeria, Nsukka). To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a trial test was conducted among 30 youths who had undergone language education training in a non-sampled state (Ebonyi State). The responses were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable. During the data collection phase, three (3) research assistants assisted with the field administration of the instrument. Data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, mean scores, and standard deviations, to answer the research questions.

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Result

Research Question 1: *To what extent do communication and public speaking skills acquired through language education contribute to poverty eradication among youths in the South East zone of Nigeria?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on Communication and Public Speaking Skills

S/N	Questionnaire Items (N=400)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision
1.	Public speaking skills acquired during studies increase confidence and readiness for self-employment.	3.24	0.81	Accept
2.	Graduates monetize oral proficiency by working as radio presenters, event anchors, or public advocates.	3.12	0.78	Accept
3.	Competency in persuasive communication increases employment opportunities in marketing and corporate broadcasting.	3.05	0.84	Accept
4.	Inadequate speech training facilities in institutions hinder the practical mastery of public speaking skills.	3.31	0.72	Accept
	Cluster Mean / Pooled Average	**3.18**	**0.79**	**Accept**

The data in Table 1 reveal that all four items scored above the criterion mean of 2.50. Item 4 recorded the highest mean score ($\bar{x}$=3.31,SD=0.72), indicating that a lack of speech facilities is a significant barrier. The overall cluster mean of 3.18 shows that communication and public speaking skills heavily contribute to poverty eradication, though institutional implementation faces structural challenges.

Research Question 2: *How effective are translation and interpretation skills taught in language education programmes in enhancing the economic self-reliance of youths in the South East?*

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on Translation and Interpretation Skills

S/N	Questionnaire Items (N=400)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision
5.	Bilingual graduates secure regular income by offering simultaneous interpretation services in legal and religious settings.	2.96	0.88	Accept

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S/N	Questionnaire Items (N=400)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision
6.	Translation competencies enable language graduates to gain economic self-reliance via global online freelance platforms (e.g., Upwork, Fiverr).	2.88	0.91	Accept
7.	Language education programmes provide adequate exposure to real-time interpretation scenarios during training.	2.14	1.05	Reject
8.	Most departments lack qualified instructors specialized in teaching translation theory and modern practice.	3.18	0.76	Accept
	Cluster Mean / Pooled Average	**2.79**	**0.90**	**Accept**

As shown in Table 2, items 5, 6, and 8 were accepted, whereas item 7 fell below the baseline threshold ($\bar{x}$=2.14,SD=1.05). This low score demonstrates that language education programmes do not expose students to sufficient real-world interpretation scenarios. However, the overall cluster mean of 2.79 confirms that translation skills are highly effective for driving self-reliance when properly developed.

Research Question 3: *In what ways does digital content creation as a component of language education influence the income-generating capabilities of youths in the South East zone?*

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on Digital Content Creation Skills

S/N	Questionnaire Items (N=400)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision
9.	Skills in blogging, podcasting, and scripting allow language graduates to generate independent income as digital creators.	3.42	0.69	Accept
10.	Creative writing training directly enhances a graduate's capacity to earn income as an online ghostwriter or content marketer.	3.29	0.73	Accept
11.	Language curricula adequately incorporate modern digital media literacy and multimedia production tools.	2.22	0.98	Reject
12.	Severe infrastructure deficits (e.g., lack of electricity and internet) restrict rural youths from maximizing digital language avenues.	3.51	0.62	Accept
	Cluster Mean / Pooled Average	**3.11**	**0.76**	**Accept**

The results in Table 3 indicate strong consensus that digital content creation expands income generation, as indicated by the cluster mean of 3.11. Item 12 achieved the highest individual mean score ($\bar{x}$=3.51,SD=0.62), underlining that the digital divide remains a

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structural hurdle. Conversely, item 11 was rejected ($\bar{x}$=2.22), illustrating that current curricula do not sufficiently cover modern digital tools.

Research Question 4: *What is the impact of entrepreneurial language-based training on poverty reduction among youths who graduate from language education programmes in the South East zone of Nigeria?*

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on Entrepreneurial Language-Based Training

S/N	Questionnaire Items (N=400)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision
13.	Embedded entrepreneurial training motivates language graduates to establish personal business ventures like tutorial centers or editing firms.	3.08	0.83	Accept
14.	Entrepreneurship courses reduce dependent job-seeking behavior by fostering self-reliance mindsets among language graduates.	3.15	0.79	Accept
15.	Language departments provide hands-on, practical business incubation alongside theoretical lectures.	1.98	1.12	Reject
16.	Collaboration between language educators and business experts is needed to build functional language business modules.	3.46	0.65	Accept
	Cluster Mean / Pooled Average	**2.92**	**0.85**	**Accept**

The data displayed in Table 4 shows a cluster mean score of 2.92, verifying that entrepreneurial language training has an overall positive impact on poverty reduction. Item 15 was rejected with a mean score of 1.98, confirming an absence of hands-on business incubation centers within colleges. Respondents strongly agreed (item 16, $\bar{x}$=3.46) that cross-disciplinary collaboration is needed to improve the curriculum.

Findings

The findings of this study establish that skill acquisition within language education is a viable strategy for poverty reduction, although structural limitations curb its execution.

Table one indicated the cluster mean score of 3.18 aligns with the assertions of Ojo and Bello (2019), who observed that oral expression proficiency sharpens graduate self-employment readiness. However, as noted by Ibe and Omeje (2021), a lack of training labs undermines optimal skill performance.

The study in Table two demonstrates that translation competence leads to self-reliance, supporting Eze's (2023) research regarding high market demand for bilingual services.

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The low score on scenario exposure ($\bar{x}$=2.14) confirms Omeje's (2021) warning that translation programs remain overly theoretical.

Table three shows that digital competencies yielded a strong response ($\bar{x}$=3.11), matching the findings of Ikenna and Uzochukwu (2023), who discovered a high percentage of language graduates monetizing creative writing online. This potential remains bounded by the digital infrastructure gaps highlighted by Omeh (2021).

Table four shows that fostering business skills directly decreases dependent job-hunting habits ($\bar{x}$=3.15). This mirrors the conclusions drawn by Eme and Ugwoke (2021). The clear deficit in practical incubation units ($\bar{x}$=1.98) validates Adeyemi's (2022) argument that entrepreneurship is frequently relegated to a secondary status within humanities departments.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings and subsequent analysis of this study, it is concluded that skill acquisition embedded within language education serves as a highly transformative, yet underutilized, strategy for eradicating youth poverty in the South East zone of Nigeria. The contemporary global economy demands functional, monetizable competencies, and language education possesses the innate capacity to supply these through specialized tracks such as public speaking, bilingual translation services, online content creation, and language consultancy. However, a critical disconnect persists between the theoretical provisions of the curriculum and the practical, entrepreneurial demands of the labor market. While youths acknowledge the massive economic self-reliance potentials of digital writing, podcasting, or media communication, their training institutions remain constrained by structural deficits. The persistent lack of specialized speech laboratories, minimal exposure to real-time simultaneous interpretation scenarios, and the marginalization of practical business incubation modules collectively restrict language graduates from seamlessly transitioning into self-employment. Ultimately, until language education curricula undergo systematic, deliberate pedagogical reforms that aggressively integrate digital literacy and cross-disciplinary market modules, its capacity to serve as a structural tool for poverty eradication and macro-economic self-reliance will remain heavily constrained.

Recommendations

To fully harness the potential of language education as an active vehicle for youth economic empowerment and poverty reduction in South East Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward based on the findings of this study:

- The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in collaboration with National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Commission

for Colleges of Education (NCCE), should restructure the language education curriculum. The focus should shift away from purely structural grammar and literary theory toward functional language tracks, including mandatory modules in digital content writing, professional editing, and media communication.

- Tertiary institutions within the South East zone must prioritize the funding and setting up of modern, ICT-driven language and speech clinics. Students should be given mandatory, hands-on exposure to real-time simultaneous interpretation equipment, multimedia podcast setups, and translation software to prepare them for competitive global freelance markets (such as Upwork, Fiverr, and remote corporate jobs).
- Language departments should actively collaborate with Business Administration and Entrepreneurship Centers to design practical, hands-on language-based business modules. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as a peripheral, abstract elective, students should be trained on how to write business proposals, set up and market private tutorial centers, publish materials, and monetize language apps.
- Government agencies, private educational stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must work together to improve internet connectivity and power supply across higher institutions, particularly targeting campuses with high rural representation. Providing subsidized digital literacy workshops and accessible technical facilities will ensure that disadvantaged youths are not excluded from the digital language economy.

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