IMPACT OF DIGITAL SKILLS ACQUISITION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION ON EMPLOYABILITY OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN BWARI AREA COUNCIL, FCT, ABUJA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of digital skills acquisition and entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja. The study had two objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses. Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised 50 randomly selected young men and women, comprising of digital tradesmen/women in Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja. A set of carefully self-structured questionnaires of 10 items derived from the research questions was developed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) to elicit opinions from the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while chi-square statistics was used to test null hypotheses 1 and 2 and were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the analyses revealed that digital skills acquisition had significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja as well as entrepreneurship education had positive influence on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja. It was thus recommended among others that government authorities and stakeholders should emphasize more on the establishment of vocational training centers and sponsorship of out-of-school children to promote the acquisition of relevant skills that empower employability in Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja.

Keywords: Digital Skills Acquisition, Entrepreneurship Education, Out-Of-School Children.

Introduction

Education forms the fundamental foundation on which all aspects of development stand on to flourish in terms of human, physical, social, political, environmental, and economy development. It is one of the best investments that a nation can make towards a successful, strong, healthy, fair and equitable nation. Kolawole, Akinbote, Ige, Adedoja and Aremu (2020) stated that less than seventy percent of the citizenry is literate, a nation cannot be defined to be a developed nation, and most of the countries in African continent are below these indices. Therefore, illiteracy is a cankerworm, which slows down the growth and development of the under-developed and developing countries and in fact a block in the road to prosperity. The deficiency of the educational standard in the country can be seen in the recent report by United Nations Childrens Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2024) according to which there are 18.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria who do not have access to the basic and qualitative education.

Out-of-school children are defined as absence of children of school-going age due to reasons that are well known (Ahmed, 2022). They are the children aged between 6-11 years that is the formal and official age of primary school and they are neither in schools nor attending any school, including pre-primary education, formal education or non-formal education program. These children have different levels of education with some of them having attended school in the past (pre-primary education) and dropped out, some attending sometime in the future and some never attending school (UNESCO, 2014). Moreover, the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has been worried that Nigeria accounts the highest number of out-of-school children in the world with only sixty three percent (63) attending primary school education on a regular basis. The UN organization bemoaned that in Nigeria, 10.5 million children of primary school going age and 8.1 million others of junior secondary going age are out of school. UNICEF also showed a strong concern towards the levels of out-of-school children, and poor learning performance in the country particularly in the North-East and North-West sub-regions (UNICEF, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Millions of children have been out of the school system even with several policies, Universal Basic Education (UBE), National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) and the National Policy on Education. The traditional education systems are too conservative, abstract, unreachable or irrelevant to real-life prospects, wherein out of school children have found it hard to languish in abject poverty with low standard of living and also as threats to the surrounding communities. In the meantime, digital skills and entrepreneurship learning have not been maximized because of insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, negative perception and disjointed execution. When combined with training, known certification, market connections, digital technologies provide alternative means of generating income (remote work, platform gigs, micro-SMEs) that, in turn, can be obtained by non-traditional learners. Nonetheless, the studies on the specific impact of digital skills programs on the out-of-school children in Nigeria on employability are sporadic and the programmatic barriers still exist. Based on the continuous increase in the number of out-of-school children (OOSC), there is therefore a strong necessity to have novel and practical methods and flexible solution to meet the needs of out-of-school children with respect to education and socio-economic backgrounds in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

i. Determine the impact of digital skills acquisition on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja.
ii. Determine the impact of entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja.

Research Questions

In line with the stated specific objectives the following research questions were formulated for the study:

i. What is the impact of digital skills acquisition on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja?
ii. What is the impact of entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja?

Research Hypothesis

i. Digital skills acquisition has no significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja.
ii. Entrepreneurship education has no significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja.

Review of Related Literature

In Nigeria, the concept of digital literacy is being identified as an important instrument in improving the out of school population and raising the employability levels of children in the country (Abdulkareem, 2019). Research indicated that digital literacy programs enhance accessibility, learning opportunities and critical thinking that are crucial in sustainable development and future employment opportunities. According to Adam, Adom, and Bediako, (2019), there are still serious obstacles, such as the problem of limited access to technologies, low internet access, and socioeconomic inequalities that intensify the digital divide and limit the advantages of learning digital skills to more privileged populations. Community digital hubs and mentorship programs have been determined as the effective measures to eliminate these gaps, particularly in rural regions.

Entrepreneurship education on the other hand is generally seen as a booster of youth empowerment and employability. The studies show that applied, industry-focused entrepreneurship programs, mentorship, and well-developed training centers have a strong impact on self-employment and economic growth in the group of Nigerian youth. It is advisable that, entrepreneurship education be integrated at all levels of learning including the non-formal ones with the aim of promoting innovation, resilience and business acumen. Nevertheless, some obstacles like lack of financial support, lack of practical training and access to teaching resources have remained and have curtailed the success of these programs.

Digital skills coupled with learning about entrepreneurship is a key ingredient to giving out-of-school children the ability to compete in the contemporary labor market. Digital innovation plays a major positive role in skill acquisition, which fills the gap between education and employability. The blended methods of learning and digital marketing capabilities are especially useful in preparing youth to be self-employed and adjust to the environment of the digital economy. However, the effect that entrepreneurship education has on the acquisition of skills can also be less pronounced with some studies showing a small or context-specific effect. Out-of-school children (OOSC) have been a thorn in the flesh in Nigeria with a figure of over 11 million out-of-school

children being estimated with more cases reported in rural places and among girls in certain places. This group is heterogeneous (was never enrolled, dropped out or was enrolled in alternative religious schools) and, consequently, has various obstacles to entry into the labor-market. Due to the lack of formal channels of schooling in such children, non-formal education, training in digital skills and entrepreneurship are often suggested as alternative ways of accessing employability and resiliency to livelihood.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised of 50 young men and women, comprising of digital tradesmen/women in Bwari Area Council Abuja purposively selected for this study. A set of carefully self-structured questionnaires of 10 items derived from the research questions was developed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) to elicit opinions from the respondents. Because of the manageable size of the sample, the whole population was used for the study.

The instrument used to collect data for the study was Digital Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Education Survey (DSAEES). The researcher ensured that all procedures, processes and confidentiality were maintained with regards to filling the instrument and also ensured that each respondents' choice was scored based on the instruments' scoring guide. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Chi-square statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Any item with a mean rating of 2.50 or above was regarded as accepted while mean rating less than 2.50 was regarded as rejected. The null hypotheses were rejected if the calculated chi-score is greater than the critical value at 0.05 level of significance, while it was accepted if the calculated value is less than the critical value at 0.05 level of significance.

Data Presentation

The two research questions were answered as follows:

Research Question 1: What What is the impact of digital skills acquisition on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the impact of digital skills acquisition on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja

S/N	DIGITAL SKILLS ACQUISITION	Mean	Std
1	Digital skills training has improved my ability to use a computer or mobile device effectively	2.94	1.22
2	I can now perform basic digital tasks such as typing, browsing, and sending emails.	2.96	1.12
3	I am able to use productivity software (e.g., MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint) after the training.	3.33	0.58
4	The training has exposed me to online safety practices and responsible digital behaviour	3.04	0.50
5	Digital skills training has improved my ability to communicate effectively through digital platforms	3.10	0.97
6	The training helped me learn how to use digital tools for basic content creation (e.g., photos, videos).		
	Grand Mean	**3.1**	**0.88**

***Source**:* Field Work 2025

Research Question 2: What is the impact of entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the impact of entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council in FCT Abuja

S/N	ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION	Mean	Std
1	Entrepreneurship education has increased my awareness of business opportunities in my environment	2.94	0.56
2	Entrepreneurship training improved my skills in planning and organizing business activities	2.69	0.96
3	The entrepreneurship training has helped me develop problem-solving abilities	2.90	1.05
4	I have learned how to manage money and keep simple financial records.	3.69	0.51
5	The skills gained from entrepreneurship training have improved my chances of being employed or self-reliant	3.50	0.58
	Grand Mean	**3.14**	**0.73**

***Source**:* Field Work 2025

Test of Hypotheses

Results of test of the two null hypotheses were presented in Tables 3 to 4.

Hypothesis One: Digital skills acquisition has no significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja

Table 3: Chi-square Statistics on the impact on digital skills acquisition on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Digital skills training has improved my ability to use a computer or mobile device effectively	20	12	11	07	50
2	I can now perform basic digital tasks such as typing, browsing, and sending emails.	20	18	04	08	50
3	I am able to use productivity software (e.g., MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint) after the training.	23	21	05	01	50
4	The training has exposed me to online safety practices and responsible digital behaviour	19	21	05	05	50
5	Digital skills training has improved my ability to communicate effectively through digital platforms	22	15	09	04	50
	Grand Mean	**104**	**87**	**34**	**25**	**250**

Critical value of chi-square at 12 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. = 20.06

Null Hypothesis Two: Entrepreneurship education has no significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja

Table 4: Chi-square Statistics on the impact on entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Entrepreneurship education has increased my awareness of business opportunities in my environment	11	30	06	03	50
2	Entrepreneurship training improved my skills in planning and organizing business activities	10	23	09	08	50
3	The entrepreneurship training has helped me develop problem-solving abilities	16	20	07	07	50
4	I have learned how to manage money and keep simple financial records.	38	09	01	02	50
5	The skills gained from entrepreneurship training have improved my chances of being employed or self-reliant	28	19	02	01	50
	Grand Mean	**103**	**101**	**25**	**25**	**250**

Critical value of chi-square at 12 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. = 20.30

Discussion of Findings

From the above analysis, the following findings were derived:

Table 1 above revealed the mean ratings on the impact of digital skills acquisition on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja with a grand mean of 3.1 and a standard deviation of 0.88, indicating the accepted mean rating of 2.50 and above that, practical skills acquisition positively impacts employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja.

Table 2 above shows the mean ratings on the influence of entrepreneurship education on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja with a grand mean of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 0.73 indicating the accepted mean rating of 2.50 and above that, entrepreneurship education positively impacts the employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja.

Table 3 revealed that practical skill acquisition has significant influence on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja with the calculated chi-square score of 37.7 which is higher than the critical value of 21.03 measured at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that digital skills acquisition has no significant impact on employability of out-of-school children is hereby rejected.

Table 4 also revealed that Entrepreneurship education had significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja with a chi-square score of 56.12 which is greater than the critical value of 21.03. Therefore, the null hypotheses which stated that entrepreneurship education has no significant impact on employability of out-of-school children in Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja is hereby rejected.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provided useful insights into the vast importance of digital skills acquisition and intensive training for out-of-school children as well as the need to intensify efforts towards a more robust vocational system to alleviate the current menace associated

with out-of-school children on rampage in the streets of Bwari Area Council FCT Abuja. Similarly, the study exposed the benefits of entrepreneurship education in shaping the the minds of out-of-school children, their attitudes and skills in understanding management and finance sourcing and leadership.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

i. The Federal, State and local governments should establish more functional vocational and technical centres in all underserved communities to train and equip out-of-school children with the requisite digital skills by increasing funding for infrastructure, tools and ICT facilities for employability and self-sufficiency.
ii. Awareness campaigns should be carried out to improve the perception of entrepreneurship education and skills acquisition as well as institutionalized public–private partnerships to strengthen apprenticeship systems with extensive special interventions targeting Almajiri, nomadic, street and displaced children.

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