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## **Contextualizing Women Empowerment: A Capability-Based Analysis of Challenges and Training Needs in Skills Acquisition Programmes in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Skills acquisition programmes represent a critical pathway for women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction. However, despite government and stakeholders' investments in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), women continue to face substantial barriers that limit their participation and success in these programmes. This study explored the challenges women encountered during their skills acquisition programmes and training needs. The phenomenological qualitative approach was employed as a research design. The sample size consisted of 40 purposively sampled women participants from eight (8) skills acquisition centers across Zamfara State. Data were collected through focus group discussions and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings from the study revealed that challenges encountered by women participants include inadequate training and preparation, inadequate training facilities, more emphasis on theory than practical, time constraint, among others. The study found out that women needed practical experiences and exposure; specialized skills, provision of resources and support, mentorship and startup kits or funds. This finding implied that to achieve sustainable women empowerment, policymakers and practitioners must consider the importance of combining skills acquisition with infrastructural support, financial access, and mentorship. This study concluded that women are keen on gaining more experience, financial support and continuous guidance if their training needs were met. The study recommended, among others, that much emphasis should be placed on practical (hands-on) learning in all skills acquisition centers through internships, apprenticeship programmes and simulation-based learning.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, Women Empowerment, Skills Acquisition, Training Needs

### **Introduction**

Education and vocational training are widely recognised as foundational levers for economic mobility and social inclusion. Human capital on the other hand expands women's access to income, assets, decision-making, and public life, ultimately improving household welfare and community resilience. Women are the adult girls or females who occupy the positions of mothers, sisters, aunts, or female cousins (Emenalo, 2017). The concept of women empowerment has become a crucial tool for promoting inclusive development, reducing poverty, and advancing gender equality worldwide in recent decades. Mazumber and Ahmed (2015) affirmed that adequate women's skills acquisition provides them with a change in attitude, increased mobility, training, professionalism, self-recognition, various amenities, general growth among others. The interdependence of women empowerment, skills acquisition, and training needs is both intricate and significant. According to Mazumber and Ahmed (2015), adequate women's acquisition of entrepreneurial skills provides them with a change in attitude, increased mobility, training, professionalism, self-recognition, various amenities, general growth among others. Although, the use of skills acquisition programmes has become widespread in addressing socio-economic issues, as the programmes equip women with practical abilities that contribute to their job prospects, entrepreneurial spirit, and independence but the transformative potential of these programmes' is often compromised by various challenges and unsatisfactory training requirements as women in Nigeria continue to experience significant barriers to their economic and social progress due to structural inequalities, limited access to education, and socio-cultural challenges. World Education (2016) corroborated that world-wide, majority of women lack the empowerment tools of education and skills that can empower them to improve their lives and that of others in communities. Women in Northern Nigeria, for instance, face



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interlocking constraints: high poverty, limited access to post-basic education and finance, mobility restrictions, exposure to gender-based violence, and - critically - insecurity that disrupts schooling, markets, and public services (Yusuf, 2018). In Zamfara and neighbouring states, school closures and fear of travel have amplified existing barriers; families often withdraw girls from school or delay transitions to training and work. These dynamics depress women's human capital accumulation and erode confidence to start or grow enterprises. Skills acquisition programmes - from traditional trades (tailoring, catering, hairdressing, leather work) to digital skills and enterprise development - serve as pragmatic pathways to earnings, savings, and voice. Vocational skill acquisition programmes provide a viable answer to these issues by providing women with practical skills in various vocations such as tailoring, catering, cosmetology, and agriculture (Ogunlade & Afolayan, 2020).

Effective skills acquisition programmes do more than teach a trade: they embed business skills, market linkages, mentoring, access to tools/inputs, and, where possible, child-care or transport support. Zamfara State and partners have launched a stream of initiatives - ranging from sizeable state investments in vocational and micro-enterprise support to targeted digital-skills schemes (for example, Oracle-ZITDA) aimed at youth and women - signalling policy recognition that employability and entrepreneurship are central to recovery and inclusion. Despite the implementation of various skills acquisition initiatives in Gusau, there is limited evidence of significant improvement in the economic empowerment and social status of women in the area. Many women still struggle to access and sustain the benefits of these programmes due to factors such as cultural barriers, inadequate program design, poor funding, and lack of follow-up support systems. Women tends to perform jobs that have minimal skills requirements, and they encounter few opportunities for learning and advancement due to institutional, societal and structural barriers, all of which generates a gender gap in skills development and worsen gender inequalities (Chinen et al., 2018). Numerous studies identify key barriers that hinder women from accessing vocational training. Suleiman et al. (2023) reported that 68% of women consider cultural norms as significant obstacles, while Kadir et al. (2023) found that 72% cited financial limitations as prohibitive. Further, Abdullahi and Ahmed (2022) noted the societal stigma associated with traditionally male dominated trades, limiting women's participation. Inadequate infrastructure, as evidenced by Musa et al. (2022), affects 61% of vocational institutes, while health concerns, including safety in training venues, were reported by 47% of women (Aliyu and Jibril, 2022). However, empowerment is not solely about acquiring skills, but also about using them in meaningful ways within supportive environments. Mela and Yakubu (2023) argues that empowerment must be understood in terms of the transformation of power relations, rather than simply the acquisition of new skills or resources. Mediating factors for determining whether skill acquisition becomes actual empowerment include access to startup capital, mentorship, flexible learning schedules, and adequate facilities. If these needs are not met, the programmes could become more symbolic than practical and strengthen existing inequalities rather than dismantle them. Research has been carried out in Nigeria on various topics related to women's empowerment and vocational education. Afolabi (2019) analyzed the impact of entrepreneurship training on rural women's economic involvement, while Okonkwo and Ibrahim (2021) focused on the shortcomings of government-funded empowerment initiatives in addressing real-world skill gaps. Although these studies are valuable, they often consider empowerment and training as isolated issues, without considering the challenges faced by programme implementation, such as overcrowding, theoretical bias, and infrastructural deficits. Also, there is limited empirical evidence on how these obstacles intersect with the aspirations and lives of women in Nigeria. In order to address these deficiencies, this study aims to analyze the training requirements and obstacles encountered in developing skills acquisition programmes for women's empowerment in Nigeria. While existing research highlights the potential of skills acquisition programmes for women empowerment, there is a dearth of localized studies that specifically examine the context of Gusau Local Government Area. Therefore, this study is to assess the challenges and training needs of women empowerment through skills acquisition programmes in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The Purpose of this study are to:

1. Examine the challenges faced by women beneficiaries during skills acquisition training programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria; and
2. Examine the training needs of women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition training programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria



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## Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. What are the challenges faced by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria?
2. What are the training needs for women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition training programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria?

## Research Methodology

The phenomenological qualitative research design was employed in our study. We investigated the lived experiences and perceptions of women participants in skills acquisition programmes regarding their challenges and training needs during the skills acquisition programmes. Beck (2021) sees phenomenological research approach as having the capacity to offer to readers and researchers a privileged view of the meaning of the experience of a particular phenomenon from their different perspectives. The participants for this study were 40 female beneficiaries from eight (8) skills acquisition centers in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State, Zamfara State, Nigeria who were purposively sampled. This sample size is considered adequate, given that sample sizes ranging from 15 – 20 participants have been adopted by researchers in qualitative studies, and they have hit data saturation points within this range (Hossain et al., 2024). The participants were those women who have participated and completed in different skills acquisition programmes, as well gave their consent for participation in the study. Within each skills acquisition center, the participants were randomly selected into four (4) Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). Each group consisted of 4 participants. The study sites were in Zamfara State which is a Northwest Nigerian state with its capital city located in Gusau. A FGD was used in collecting the qualitative data which bothered on exploring the perception on the challenges faced by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme and the training needs for women during the skills acquisition training programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria. The FGDs guide was validated by two experts in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The question items included: what are the challenges faced by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria? and what are the training needs for women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition training? The processes in data collection, included seeking the consent of the respondents, and explaining the purpose of the study to the respondents. Only skills acquisition beneficiaries who gave their consent were included in the study. Thereafter, the FGD sessions started with conversations that aimed at relaxing the respondents and create opportunity for discussion. The conversations were used to inform the participants about the aim of the discussion. The discussions took place at the participants' skills acquisition centers and lasted for about 50 minutes. The discussions were digitally recorded. The data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. The recorded interview was transcribed verbatim. The inductive analysis was employed in our study. Inductive analysis focuses on deriving concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by a researcher (Thomas, 2006). Manuscripts were read many times and coded to identify emerging concepts that addressed the research questions. There was no restriction on the number of emerging themes and sub-themes until they are exhausted. Before the coding of the data, the researchers immersed themselves in the data to get familiar with the data, understand the data, pre-code the data by underlining a participant's significant quotes that strikes their attention. After identifying major emerging concepts, specifics were grouped into sub-themes, and these were drawn together to form themes. From the manuscripts, verbatim expressions such as "*No, we were not taught practically, only theory*" was coded "no practical exposure"; and "*We didn't learn anything about skills acquisition...*" was coded "no relevant course". These were later classified under the theme of "Inadequate Skills Acquisition Training and Preparation". Codes and themes were reflected upon by the researchers for depth and appropriateness. Where there was no disagreement the codes and themes were adopted whereas changes were made where the researchers agreed that there was a need for adjustment in the codes and themes.

## Findings

### Challenges faced by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme

Regarding the challenges faced by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme, five (5) broad themes emerged from the discussions. These include inadequate training and preparation, instructional challenges and time constraints, inadequate infrastructures and facilities. These themes are presented thus:

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#### **Inadequate Inclusive Training and Preparation**

These consists of challenges related to their skills acquisition training that prepares them to be skillful in one area or more. Through the discussion, a good number of participants reported that their training was insufficient to enable them to become self-empowered and reliant. One of the challenges was related to over-reliance on theoretical exposition of some of the skills without practical exposure. One of the participants noted: "No, we were not taught practically, only theory" (A1, Group 1). Another respondent from group 4 stated that: "Because we are only taught the theory, no enough practical" (C1, Group 4). These shows that most of their training focused on just theories without practical skills that could help them implement these strategies during their training as a result of inadequate training materials and facilities. One of the participants explained that: "the tools were not enough for all participants, sometimes we have to wait for hours to get a chance to practice" (P4). In confirmation to this, a respondent noted that they were not trained in fishing and carpentry: "We didn't learn anything about fishing and carpentry. So I'm not prepared in my area of choice" (R2, Group 3). More so, some respondents noted that contributing to their unpreparedness is that their curriculum was inadequate indicating that they may need more skill-based courses: "The curriculum is not enough". (C4, G5). Flowing from this, many of the participants were unfamiliar with the skills of their choice like fishing and carpentry "We didn't have any course that teaches us how to fish or do capentary work" (R1, G3).

#### **Instructional Challenges and Time Constraints**

Further challenges reported by participants included time constraints. They noted that they experienced limited space of time to acquire skills of their choice. A participant narrated that "The programmes are too short to master the skills properly. We need longer courses to truly benefit" (P3). Also, one of the participants remarked that "Sometimes, there is no enough time to practice what we learn" (P4). Other participants reported that "Some of them do not understand fast, so I have to keep repeating and the time is not enough." (C3, Group 4). "I also had problem with time because they need more time to understand what I'm teaching." (C6, Group 4). "You will be trying to carry everybody along; it will consume your time." (C1, Group 2).

#### **Inadequate Infrastructures and Facilities**

Respondents also reported that inadequate infrastructure and facilities impeded their learning during the skill acquisition training. This consisted of the unavailability of materials, limited access to tools like sewing machine. One of the participants reported that "The tailoring machines are outdated, and sometimes there are not enough materials for all participants" (P1). Also, this was worsened by the lack of skills for improvisation. A participant noted that: "Most of the programmes focus on traditional skills like sewing, and there is little for women interested in technology or digital marketing skills" (P2). However, the responses from the participants showed that they face enormous challenges because they lack the requisite materials that can facilitate effective skills acquisition. For example, a respondent noted: "The center does not provide materials for us, and I don't know how to improvise." (C1, Group 4), and another stated: "We don't have enough instructional materials." (C3, Group 3).

#### **Training needs for women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition training programme**

The respondents, in this study, reported a number of skills acquisition training needs that will empower women during skills acquisition programme. During the focus group discussion, the themes that emerged were on the need for practical experiences and exposure; need for specialized skills, and provision of resources and support. Proper examination of the reported needs revealed that our participants needed improved training and the provision of facilities to empower women effectively for self-reliance. The extracts below present the common opinions of many of the respondents on this theme: one of the respondents reported that; "there is the need to introduce modern skills the computer literacy, graphic design, or coding to keep up with global trends" (P1). Another respondent noted on the need to; "Provide mentoring programmes to guide women on how to apply their skills effectively" (P2). A participant explained that "There should be awareness campaigns to educate men on the importance of allowing women to participate in these programmes (P3). Another participant remarked on the need to "Expand the centers to more remote areas so women in rural communities can benefit too" (P4).

#### **Provision of startup kits or funds**

The respondents called on the government, well-to-do individuals in the society to provide startup kits or funds as the case may be. A respondents expressed on the need that "The government and Non-governmental organisations should offer startup kits or funds to help us establish businesses after training" (P5)



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## Discussion of Findings

### Challenges faced by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme

The findings from this study revealed that some of the challenges by women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition programme include; inadequate training and preparation, instructional challenges and time constraints, instructional challenges and time constraints among others. A finding from this study indicated that most of the skills acquisition centers experienced inadequate training and preparation and limited capacity. This finding supported Emah, Doneys, Kusakabe, and Pathak (2025) that the quality deficit in the training and preparation in skills acquisition programmes affect women, who may have fewer alternative pathways to skill development. Also, one of the findings of this study indicated that skills acquisition centers for women empowerment had shortage of inadequate and limited facilities. This finding supported Akor, Agashi, Ekuje, and Odufu (2017) that inadequate facilities have grave consequences on women's participation in technical and vocational education. Furthermore, Bradford and Adewale (2024) noted that the existing facilities cannot accommodate the growing population seeking skills training. Adelakun, Oviawe and Barfa (2015) observed that high demand for skills programmes exceeds available spaces, creating competitive admission processes. Also, Williams, Becky and Theophilus (2018) noted that limited time and resources are allocated to practical training components. This made Akor et.al. (2017) reiterated that the desire to produce competent and highly skilled women can only be achieved when workshop facilities are relevant and adequate for the programmes as demanded by the curriculum. This study found out that Domestic responsibilities represent the most significant barrier to women's participation in skills acquisition programmes. This finding supported the findings of Emah, Doneys, Kusakabe, and Pathak (2025) that that 78.1% of women cite household burden as a top inhibitor to skill acquisition and utilization. Fatimayan (2013) cited that women are primarily responsible for childcare, limiting their availability for training programmes. Also, Emah et.al. (2025) found out that the influence of husbands (76.4%) " was identified as top inhibitors to skill acquisition among women. One of this study's finding was on too much emphasis on theory than practical. This study found out that there was imbalance between theoretical and practical training which significantly impacts women's skills acquisition. This finding agreed with the finding of Alumona, Oyewumi and Awogoke (2022) that many programmes emphasized theoretical knowledge over hands-on practical skills development. This current study notes that "most women in skills acquisition centers lack the requisite skills for gainful employment," partly due to the theoretical focus of training programmes. This inadequacy affects both the quality of training received and women's confidence in their acquired skills.

### Training needs for women beneficiaries during the skills acquisition training programme

The finding of this study revealed the training needs of women during the skills acquisition training programme in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State Nigeria. The findings revealed that women need practical experiences and exposure; specialized skills, provision of resources and support and provision of startup kits or funds. These findings agreed with the findings of (Olagbaju, 2020; Ahamad et al., 2016) that training needs for women's empowerment in skills acquisition programmes encompass various aspects, including time management, access to startup capital, and mentoring. Olagbaju (2020) and Dadi (2021) further affirmed that these programmes aim to equip women with the necessary skills to become self-reliant and contribute to their communities

## Implications of Findings

This study demonstrates that these challenges have real consequences for women's economic empowerment. For instance, women who cannot access quality skills training remain vulnerable to "unemployment and poverty". Conversely, addressing these challenges can lead to improved "employability skills to secure jobs, generate income, and address socio-economic concerns". Also, digital skills are becoming more important for women's empowerment, enabling them to achieve financial independence and strengthen their social connections. Women's social and economic independence has been positively impacted by vocational training programmes in certain regions (Shah et al, 2024). Practically speaking, training programmes must be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of women serving them, equipping them with the necessary skills and resources to excel in their chosen fields (Castro et al, 2023). These findings have significant implications for policy makers and program designers that skills acquisition programmes need flexible scheduling options to accommodate women's domestic responsibilities. Moreso, substantial investment in training facilities and equipment is necessary to address overcrowding and inadequate materials. Greater emphasis on practical training and soft skills development is needed to improve employment outcomes. In practice, the results require a real overhaul of design and



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operation of the programme. To achieve sustainable empowerment, policymakers and practitioners must consider the importance of combining skills acquisition with infrastructural support, financial access, and mentorship. Practically, the findings suggest that addressing infrastructure shortfalls and curriculum imbalances is crucial to achieving the intended training effectiveness (Gupta et al., 2024). The theory of human capital is backed by this study, which asserts that investing in education and training results in economic and social benefits. The theoretical implication is that empowerment models should integrate practical skills development with theoretical knowledge to create a more holistic and effective approach (Ahamad et al., 2016).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on specific region and a few skills acquisition centers and programmes, potentially limiting generalizability. Additionally, some challenges may be interconnected, making it difficult to isolate individual factors. The absence of longitudinal data also is a hindrance to evaluating the long-term effects of skills acquisition on women's economic and social trajectory.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This study can be replicated in other regions to promote comparative analyses across diverse cultural and economic environments that can aid in comprehending the impact of contextual factors on programme outcomes. Also, the evaluation of the long-term effects of empowerment programmes should be based on longitudinal designs in future studies. Moreover, research into how digital technologies can increase access to training and mentoring could provide new opportunities for expanding empowerment programmes.

### **Conclusion**

The data presented highlights the diverse obstacles that women encounter when participating in skills acquisition programmes. The emphasis on theoretical instruction is offset by reduced practical use, insufficient training facilities, overcrowding and limited post-training support. All of these are major challenges facing the field. The limitations not only impede the effectiveness of empowerment programmes but also perpetuate systemic inequalities.' However, the study shows that women are keen on gaining more experience, financial support and ongoing guidance. These need to be met in order for skills acquisition programmes can become strong platforms for real empowerment. It is concluded that a holistic approach must be taken, which involves the integration of pedagogical reform, infrastructural investment, and socio-economic support.

### **Recommendations**

These recommendations aim to address the identified challenges and enhance the effectiveness of women empowerment programmes:

1. Much emphasis should be placed on practical, hands-on learning and training curricula of all skills acquisition centers should be through internships, apprenticeship programmes and simulation-based learning.
2. The investment in modern training facilities should be made available by governments and development partners (well-to-do individuals) to ensure equal access to tools, materials, and conducive learning environments during the training.
3. Mentorship programmes should be integrated into training structures, incorporating the skills of successful entrepreneurs.
4. To ensure access to financial literacy education, startup capital, and savings schemes, adequate arrangements should be made for trainees to form partnerships with financial institutions.
5. Continuous evaluation systems should be introduced to monitor programme performance and inform iterative improvements.

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