

Research Article

Role of Skill Acquisition on Employment Generation in Nigeria: A Case of Industrial Training Fund

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Abstract

The acquisition of skills has been worldly recognised as a legitimate tool towards employment creation and the sustained economic development. The study examined the role of skill acquisition on employment generation in Nigeria with respect to the Industrial Training Fund (ITF). The analysis of the data was based on descriptive statistics in terms of tables and simple percentages, whereas the objective was verified at a significance level of 5% using the Generalised Linear Model (GLM). The outcome showed that the involvement in ITF programmes and relevance of skills were significant in terms of employment creation that were positively and statistically relevant with coefficient of 0.3641 and 0.1445 respectively, whilst technical proficiency, soft skills, and industry alignment were significantly not relevant with coefficient of 0.131, -0.1655 and 0.580 respectively. The research falls to the conclusion that formal attendance at skills acquisition schemes like the ones adopted by the ITF, has a significant positive impact on the employment opportunities, creation of entrepreneurial possibilities, and income generation of the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, bottlenecks of poor facilities, little connections with the private sector, and poor alignment of industries still hinder the best results. The research thus suggests that the government and other stakeholders ought to enhance the institutional capacity of the ITF by providing sufficient funds, frequent review of the curriculum and the close working relations with industries. Moreover, after the training programmes like business start-up grants, mentorship programmes, and access to microfinance programmes are to be institutionalised to translate the learnt skills into long-term self-employment and inclusive national development.

Keywords

Skill Acquisition, Employment Generation, Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Human Capital Development, Entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Nigeria, like other emerging countries, is confronted with the challenge of slow economic growth largely due to a high

reliance on oil revenues, structural weaknesses, and a lack of investment in strategic areas, especially skills development

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and human capital. The unemployment problem is compounded further for the populace, for, regardless of a young growing workforce, the labor market remains constrained due to limited availability of vocational training, poor infrastructure for education, and exposure to technological evolution. Economic stagnation has proved a rather serious impediment for successive governments that have led the country since the 1990s, with successive governments introducing policies for significantly increasing employment, yet without much success. According to estimates, over 200 million people across the globe suffer from unemployment, with one of the causes for the sustaining low growth and endemic poverty being the lack of skills acquisition, which slows down productivity and self-reliance [15]. For Nigeria, economic growth, based on real gross domestic product (GDP), averaged 2.5% per year between 2010-2020, which is much below the dividend that diversification of the economy into skills-based industries could have provided [29]. Current estimates have the unemployment rate at around 33% for 2023, but youth unemployment crossing over 40%, indicating the unrealized human capital potential [16]. For a similar assessment, according to Adola and Ibrahim, insubstantial skills acquisition is one of the primary deterrents for employment generation for Nigeria during the recent years [2].

The skills acquisition schemes' potential for stimulating employment generation was witnessed in India in the 1980s, when liberalisation of the economy allowed for expanded access for the workforce to vocational training; it was noted that such schemes could increase employment rates by 15.0 percent at a tiny fraction of the cost of large investments [14]. A package of policies for workers, therefore, was adopted, with the Government of India leading an initiative supported by institutions; training was offered at preferential terms, advisory services were given, and a waiver of import taxes on skill-raising equipment was allowed for. The promotion of skills acquisition lessened youth unemployment from 51.0 percent in 1977 to 27.0 percent in 1999. What was also noted was that large infrastructure projects created modest employment between 1990-2000, while schemes for skills created a tripling of the number of jobs created in Brazil; the vocational training program accounts for 60.0 percent of workforce development, contributing 18.0 percent towards GDP, and 40.0 percent towards workers being incorporated into the labour market [22]. There exist myriad support programs and services addressing the compelling needs of workers across such countries; they are provided for both through government agencies as well as the private sector, such as non-governmental entities, as well as communities at large. There was growing usage of local governments towards skills development as well. Government financing, as well, along with international lending agencies, invested more of the lending portfolios on vocational training. In China, experts have estimated that skills schemes acquisition are now credit for close to 50% of employment increase, and assist 70% of the workforce across the urban regions [28].

They form a safety net for the workers who have been re-trenched due to market-oriented changes in the economy, which have affected Government-owned industries.

In Nigeria, the services sector, along with manufacturing, contributed 58.4% to GDP during the first quarter of 2023, with skilled labour contributing the majority. Out of such contribution, unskilled workers constitute more than 80.0 percent of the workforce, yet formal training remains less than 5.0 percent. Hence, employment growth has averaged 2.0 percent per year, corresponding to muted overall economic performance. Government is relentless, and efforts have been stepped up over the last decade or so for improvement in this sector of the national economy, beginning with the establishment of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) in 1971, adoption of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), establishment of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme, amongst other efforts of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment and development partners. Government also opines that the key unlock for this sector is additional support for value chain improvement, aside from the provision for regular, affordable training materials. A lot of efforts are on course towards improvement of technical education and apprenticeships across the nation. Training centres, extension services on new vocation techniques, value addition, enhancement of tools supply are being sought for pursuit in the skills sector [11]. Notwithstanding efforts of the government towards ensuring that skills acquisition delivers effective output, employment generation is still muted across Nigeria. Based on the facts above, it has become relevant for a study on the likelihood of increasing employment generation for Nigeria, given a specific lens on the Industrial Training Fund.

The rest of the paper is organized such that: Section 2 provides a review of theories and literatures for the study. Section 3 outlines the study methodology. Data analysis results are presented, interpreted, discussed based on the findings of other studies. Section 5 concludes and presented the study policy implication.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Skill Acquisition

The concept of skill acquisition has been theorised in different ways in the academic literature. Fitts and Posner describes the process of learning skills as progressive as that which involves individuals shifting cognitive conceptualization of a particular task into autonomous execution through systematic practise and feedback [12]. The main advantage of this definition is that it is organised and stage-based, and thus it produces an easy analysis protocol to learning. Its main weakness, however, is that it is linear, and therefore, it does not take into account individual differences and contingencies of situations. According to Anderson, skill acquisition is the process by which declarative knowledge is changed into procedural competency with the help of repetition and cognitive

automation [5]. The strength of this definition lies in its focus on cognitive processes that involve learning of a skill; however, it has a weakness in not considering the environmental and social aspects that affect the results of learning. According to Schmidt and Wrisberg, acquisition of skills entails the development, enhancement and automatization of motor and mental skills needed to efficiently carry out tasks [24]. Its benefits are in the combination of motor and cognitive components, yet the weakness of it is overemphasis on the performance optimisation, as opposed to the socio-emotional factor of learning. According to Eraut, skill acquisition is described as the development of competence and ability by an individual as a result of experience, reflection, as well as learning in contexts both in the formal and informal environments [10]. The advantage of this definition is that it is holistic and experiential in nature, though it can be criticised as being too broad, so that it could not be empirically measured and replicated. This study defines skill acquisition as the participation in industrial training fund activities that broadens beneficiaries' practical skills toward personal development and industrial alignment for improved productivity.

Employment Generation

The literature has characterised employment generation in different ways, which are the different theoretical and contextual approaches. The conceptualisation of employment generation by Todaro and Smith is that the economy creates productive employment that consumes the existing labour force and increases the living standards [27]. The strongest aspect of this definition is that it has a developmental orientation and proclamation on productivity, but fails to capture dynamics of the informal sector which is so common in most developing economies. According to Akinboye, employment generation refers to the process of creating wage and self-employment jobs by undertaking specific measures using the public policies, the private initiatives, and the entrepreneurial development [4]. The definition is praised as identifying the multidimensional sources of employment, but it is limited by its policy-focused prism, which has a tendency to underrate the market and technological revolution. On the same note, Anyanwu describes employment generation as the process through which economic growth and structural transformation are converted into a rise in labour absorption in sectors [6]. This definition can help in associating growth with employment, but implicitly, it presupposes that growth automatically creates employment, which is being undermined by the so-called jobless growth. Conversely, Ogunlela describes employment generation as the ability of an economy or an intervention programme to create sustainable livelihoods that minimise poverty and inclusive development [19]. The given approach is unique by being focused on sustainability and inclusivity, yet its normative character may make it challenging to measure it empirically. This study there defined employment generation as the ability of industrial training fund to equip participants with the needed skills that fit all sectors (private and public) towards expanding job creation opportunities in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Capital Theory holds that investments in education, training and developing of skills will greatly increase the productivity, employability and economic contribution of the individuals, thus leading to economic growth and development. This school of thought, first developed by economists like Schultz and Becker conceptualises skills and knowledge as capital (just like physical capital) which pays off in better labour market performance and higher national output [25, 7]. The theory emphasizes the importance of investments in human capital, whether in the form of formal education, vocational training or on-the-job learning in decreasing unemployment, relieving poverty, as well as making economic progress sustainable. It is based on the fact that a qualified labour force will increase the efficiency of resource allocation especially in an economy that is typified by structural issues like skills and that have high unemployment rate.

In the Nigerian case, where unemployment and underemployment are still issues that are likely to be addressed, the Human Capital Theory offers a sound basis of explaining the importance of skill acquisition in creating employment. This is the case with the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) which was formed in an attempt to encourage these vocational and technical training under the pretext of preparing individuals with skills that are relevant to the industry in relation to labour market needs. According to the theory, these types of interventions enhance employability by eliminating skill gaps hence enabling the individuals to get a job or be involved in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, it is consistent with the endogenous growth models, which believe that sustainable investments in human capital are the basis of the long-term economic growth through the development of workforce productivity and innovation [21].

The theory also assumes that the quality and the level of human capital investments determine their efficiency. Large-scale training programmes, even those conducted by the ITF, can use economies of scale to produce extensive effects, whereas narrow interventions can be used to meet the needs of particular sectors, including the technical capabilities of manufacturing or services. In this respect, the present study will use the Human Capital Theory as the main theoretical approach. This decision is explained by the fact that the ITF is a critical institution, which supports the process of acquiring skills and directly leads to the creation of jobs in Nigeria. The ITF facilitates movement of skilled labour into the economy through investment in human capital thus facilitating creation of job opportunities, minimising cases of skills mismatch as well as creating sustainable economic growth.

Empirical Reviews

In an in-depth study of the effect of strategic skill acquisition in the process of job creation in Kaduna North Local Government Area, Nigeria, the research aimed to estimate the connections between technical skills, vocational skills, entrepreneurial skills, and digital skills with employment outcomes

[13]. The study based on an ordinal regression model and descriptive tools and correlation analysis showed that technical skills (odds ratio 1.524, $p = 0.030$), entrepreneurial skills (odds ratio 1.682, $p = 0.003$), and digital skills (odds ratio 1.446, $p = 0.044$) have a significant positive impact on employment generation, but the effect of vocational skills is insignificant (odds ratio 1.164, $p = 0.298$).

The entrepreneurial skills development and its sustainability in job creation among university students were also investigated with a goal of establishing current gaps and stakeholder involvement in the creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem [17]. The use of thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with secondary data triangulation revealed that experiential learning, mentorship, and digital skills proficiency cultivate entrepreneurial capabilities, and the students who were mentored were 30 per cent more likely to open sustainable businesses, thus developing self-employment and long-term jobs.

The study aimed to assess skills gained, business type, increases in income, and limitations on participants after exploring the effectiveness of the interventions of vocational skills acquisition in North-Eastern Nigeria [1]. Based on survey data in the form of descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) made using SPSS, it was revealed that there were moderate gains in employability (3.33), and income (3.42), and using market access (3.86), and capital restrictions (3.59) as a barrier to the sustained generation of employment.

The discussion of the role of skill acquisition on entrepreneurship development among Chinese students was to be able to determine the influences by referring to previous literature [20]. Based on a review of secondary information with no primary statistical analysis, some of the most important conclusions were made on the importance of skill acquisition in improving entrepreneurial skills resulting in wealth generation, lowering unemployment and providing job opportunities when self-employment and innovation occurred.

The purpose of assessing the effects of skill acquisition programmes on employment rates among Nigerian graduates of the University of Benin was to evaluate employment status, other skills that were gained, and their effects on employability [18]. Results using Pearson chi-square ($X^2 = 104.267$, $p = 0.000$) and correlation ($r = 0.204$, $p = 0.025$) statistics of questionnaire results showed that more hard skills (e.g., graphic design) and soft skills (e.g., public speaking) greatly increased self-employment (65% of respondents) and general employability.

Analysing the impact of skill development programmes in decreasing unemployment levels around the world, the research was aimed at assessing programme results, technological introductions and involvement of the stakeholders [23]. Compiling secondary empirical evidence of the existing literature, without conducting new analysis, results showed a potential increase of employment rates (up to 12,000) and a 25,000 increase in wages, which would increase the employment sector through vocational training, leading to the use of

artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) to improve the efficiency of skills acquisition by 30,000 to 40,000.

The empirical study of the role of vocational education and skill development in the Indian labour market aimed to assess the effects on employment, income and employment stability [8]. Using mixed-method data with t-tests, chi-square, regression, and thematic analysis methods, it was found that there was a 70% rate of employment among individuals who received training (as compared to half of those who did not receive training), a 29 percent wage premium, and a 7 percent annual increase in income, which it attributes to the practical skills to fill gaps and provide solid employment.

Investigating the importance of skill development classes to self-employment, the task was to evaluate the improvements of human capital and self-efficacy according to theoretical and empirical data [26]. By synthesising literature with reference to regression and difference-in-differences using secondary surveys, the essence of the work was to enhance entrepreneurial intentions, income and job satisfaction through skills in business planning and networking hence encourage self-employment and economic diversity.

The research question was to examine the role of entrepreneurial skills acquisition and reduction of poverty based on literature review to examine the potential effects of the research on income, job creation, and community empowerment [3]. The analysis of secondary data, not including primary techniques, showed that the effects to income generation, employment creation (reducing unemployment by enabling self-employment) and sustainability of businesses were positive, and such variables as access to training and financial resources led to economic security and growth.

The analysis of the impact of skill acquisition programmes on entrepreneurship in university graduates preoccupied with the development of entrepreneurial intention and business sustainability [9]. Despite missing the description of particular analysis methods, the results highlighted that technical and managerial skills could increase entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, and job creation by creating an SME and minimising the necessity to use formal employment. Having reviewed these studies, most of the studies have focused on techniques such as Chi-Square, regression, T-test and descriptive techniques. However, none of the studies utilized generalized linear model which serves as a gap this study filled within the context of ITF in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. This is due to the fact that the design enables the efficient collection of both quantitative and qualitative information drawing from the experiences and perception of ITF trainees and employers. The study population comprise of all ITF trainees who have benefitted from skill acquisition training of the ITF. The sample size of the study was arrived at using purposive and snow ball sampling techniques where a sample size of 105 participants

was conveniently chosen. The combination of these techniques allows for intentional selection of only beneficiaries of the fund as well as a hard to reach respondents which is made easy through referrals. Information for the study was collected using a structure question which was design in a clear and precise manner and issued to these trainees.

The study also deployed the use of generalized linear model to evaluate the effect of skill acquisition on employment generation. The choice of this technique is attributed to the linearity if the effect of the independent variables responses on the transformed responses in the form of a link function and

the non-normality of the error terms across distribution which is not strictly observed. GLM is capable of dealing with response variables that are not normally distributed like binary, count or categorical variable through the link function. Employment generation (EMP) is used as one of the transformed response variables in this study and they are based on categorical variables (indicators) of the labour-market participation and self-employment outcomes, which are non-normally distributed. Given this, the non-linear form of the model is expressed as:

$$EMP=f(ITF_PART, SKILL_REL, TECH_PROF, SOFT_SKILL, IND_ALIGN) \tag{1}$$

Where EMP is employment, Participation in ITF (ITF_PART), Skills Relevance (SKILL_REL), Technical Proficiency

(TECH_PROF), Soft Skills (SOFT_SKILL), and Industry Alignment (IND_ALIGN), B₀ is the constant while B₁-B₅ are the estimated parameters. The equation 1 is expressed further as:

$$EMP=\exp(B_0 + B_1ITF_PART + B_2SKILL_REL + B_3TECH_PROF + B_4SOFT_SKILL + B_5IND_ALIGN + \epsilon) \tag{2}$$

Theoretically, it is expected that B₁-B₅ would have a positive effect on employment generation. With this, the decision rule states that the null hypothesis is rejected when the probability of Quasi-LR statistic is less than 0.05 significance level.

4. Results

This section of the study presented the findings obtained from the field via the use of the structured questionnaire. In view of this, 105 questionnaires were shared to the participants using google form with the same number of the questionnaires adequately filled and returned. The outcome regarding the demographic information of the respondents is obtained in Table 1.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Total	105	100.0
Educational Level		
ND/NCE	11	10.5
HND/First Degree	66	62.9
Masters	28	26.7
Total	105	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	30	28.6
Female	75	71.4
Total	105	100.0
Age		
21-30	84	80.0
31-40	12	11.4
41-50	9	8.6
Total	105	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	88	83.8
Married	17	16.2

Table 1 includes the distribution of respondents based on sex, age, marital status, and educational attainment. The table discloses that the sex-based response rate of respondents shows that females made up 71.4% compared to males who made up 28.6%. This implies that most individuals engaged in skill acquisition programmes offered under the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) are females. The distribution of respondents based on age demonstrates that most respondents are within the 21–30 years band (80.0%), followed by respondents aged between 31–40 years (11.4%), yet only 8.6% are within the 41–50 years band. This suggests that the skill acquisition market is mainly youth-led towards the quest to improve one's marketability as well as entrepreneurial capacity. Based on the outcome of respondents over marital status, the discovery discloses that most respondents (83.8%) are single, yet 16.2% are married. This outcome serves to suggest that most recipients of skill acquisition schemes are young unmarried individuals desirous of developing skills that will facilitate self-employment prior to or during the early years of family life. The study also controls for the respondents' educational attainment. The distribution demonstrates that most respondents (62.9%) have HND/First Degree titles, followed by

Master's degree holders (26.7%), while the lowest share is represented by ND/NCE holders (10.5%). This discovery suggests that the educational attainment opportunity is no barrier

to taking up skill acquisition since highly educated individuals now highly value the acquisition of hands-on skills to facilitate marketability in the prevailing economic challenges.

Table 2. Participation in Skill Acquisition.

	Frequency	Percent
Participated in any skills acquisition programme		
Yes	78	74.3
No	27	25.7
Year participated in skill acquisition		
Less than 1 year ago	43	41.0
2-5 years ago	42	40.0
6-10 years ago	14	13.3
above 10 years ago	6	5.7
Type of ITF programme participated in		
Technical skills training	12	11.4
Vocational skills training	31	29.5
Entrepreneurship development	11	10.5
ICT skills	9	8.6
Apprenticeship programme	3	2.9
Others	39	37.1
How did you learn about the ITF programme		
Through media	20	19.0
Referral from friends/family	27	25.7
ITF outreach/event	9	8.6
Employer recommendation	3	2.9
Educational institution	11	10.5
Others	35	33.3
Duration of the programme you participated in		
Less than 1 month	35	33.3
1-3 months	41	39.0
4-6 months	23	21.9
More than 12 months	6	5.7

Source: Field Survey 2025

The respondents were also investigated on their involvement in skill acquisition programmes as provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) as shown in Table 2. The participation rate in Table 2 has shown that most of the respondents (74.3) have attended one or more of the skill acquisition programmes and only 25.7% considered that they did not attend

any. This demonstrates that the majority of people in the area of study have been successful beneficiaries of the initiatives of ITF, which indicates that the Fund is quite comprehensive in its coverage and scope of operation in enhancing practical skills development to facilitate job creation in Nigeria. This data of distribution by year of participation showed that the

majority of the respondents (41.0%), completed their training within a year ago, closely followed by those who attended their training two to five years ago (40.0%). A lower percentage (13.3) had done their training between six to ten years ago with only 5.7 pursuing their training over ten years ago. This shows that the programmes of the ITF have been experiencing the growth of recent participation which implies a perpetual interest and constant attempts of the institution to increase its training outreach. The results indicate that 29.5 percent of surveyed had gone through vocational skills training, 11.4 percent had gone through technical skills training, 10.5 percent through entrepreneurship development, 8.6 percent through ICT skills and 2.9 percent through apprenticeship programmes, and 37.1 percent reported attending other skills development programmes. This outcome proves that the programmes offered by ITF are diversified, and they appeal to different occupational interests and economic sectors. Most of them

(33.3%) got the information about the programmes using other informal channels and 25.7% were referred by their friends or relatives. Approximately 19.0 percent of them had heard about the programmes via the media, 10.5 percent via educational institutions, 8.6 percent via outreach activities by the ITF and only 2.9 percent were referred to the programmes by their employers. Duration of training attended shows that respondents attended programmes that took one to three months for 39.0%, attended programmes taking less than one month for 33.3%, attended programmes taking four to six months for 21.9%, and attended programmes taking over twelve months for 5.7% of the respondents. This distribution then suggests that the majority of the programmes that the ITF conducts are short and extremely compact in nature with the intent to impart useful skills with brevity.

Table 3. Skill Acquired through ITF Programmes.

Statement	Percentage				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
The ITF programme equipped me with practical skills relevant to the job market	24.8	55.2	11.4	2.9	5.7
The training improved my technical proficiency in my chosen field	19.0	52.4	20.0	0	8.6
The programme included soft skills training (e.g., communication, teamwork) that enhanced my employability	12.4	61.9	17.1	0	8.6
The skills acquired were aligned with current industry demands in Nigeria	2.9	63.8	27.6	0	5.7

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 4. Impact on Employment Generation.

Employment status prior to participating in any ITF programme	Frequency	Percent
Unemployed	29	27.6
Self-employed	38	36.2
Employed in private sector	6	5.7
Employed in public sector	3	2.9
Student	26	24.8
Others	3	2.9
Current employment status		
Unemployed	23	21.9
Self-employed (started own business)	57	54.3
Employed in private sector	17	16.2
Employed in public sector	3	2.9
Freelance/Contract work	3	2.9

Employment status prior to participating in any ITF programme	Frequency	Percent
Others	2	1.9
extent attributed to your current job/business to the skills acquired from the ITF programme	6	5.7
Not at all	20	19.0
Slightly	11	10.5
Moderately	37	35.2
Significantly	37	35.2
Has participation in the ITF programme led to an increase in your income?	9	8.6
Yes	87	82.9
No	18	17.1
Have you been able to generate employment for others (e.g., through your business)?		
Yes	47	44.8
No	58	55.2
Rate the overall impact of ITF skills acquisition on employment generation in your community	9	8.6
1(No impact)	12	11.4
2	6	5.7
3	41	39.0
4	34	32.4
5(high impact)	12	11.4
How many workers did you employ before ITF participation (if self-employed)?	41	39.0
1	87	82.9
2	6	5.7
3	6	5.7
4	6	5.7

Source: Field Survey 2025

The questionnaire also surveyed the particular skills gained by respondents from the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) programmes as highlighted in Table 3. The table demonstrates that a sizeable number of respondents strongly agreed (24.8%) and agreed (55.2%) that the ITF program provided them with job market-relevant practical skills. A tiny number disagreed (2.9%) or strongly disagreed (5.7%). This suggests that most participants appreciate the ITF's ability to deliver hands-on skills that instantly improve their employability and self-sufficiency. Distribution with reference to the enhanced technical skill competence shows that 19.0% of the respondents strongly agreed and 52.4% agreed that the training enhanced their technical competence in the field of specialisation, whilst 20.0% were neutral and only 8.6% strongly disagreed. This suggests that the ITF's training activities are highly effective in enhancing the professional capacity of the participants. The table also shows that 12.4% of the respondents strongly agreed and 61.9% agreed that the

programme incorporated soft skills training such as communication, teamwork that enhanced their employment prospects. A moderate 17.1% maintained a neutral position, whilst only 8.6% strongly disagreed. This shows the ITF's awareness about the growing significance of non-technical skills in the new world of work. On the extent to which the skills obtained bear relevance to the prevailing industry needs in Nigeria, 2.9% of the respondents strongly agreed and 63.8% agreed, whilst 27.6% remained neutral with 5.7% strongly disagreed. This shows that most respondents view the ITF's training agenda as pertinent as well as responsive to the emerging industrial needs.

The study also surveyed the extent to which the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) skill acquisition programmes influenced employment creation among respondents, as depicted in Table 2. The table presents that before joining the ITF programmes, 27.6% of respondents were jobless, 36.2% were self-employed, 5.7% were employed in the private sector, 2.9% were

working in the public sector, while 24.8% were students and 2.9% belonged to other categories. This distribution suggests that prior to benefiting from ITF projects, a significant number of respondents were either jobless or undertaking self-enterprises that had limited scalability. Distribution according to the current employment status indicates remarkable improvement after joining the ITF programmes. Most (54.3%) of the respondents are self-employed, having ventured into businesses, while 16.2% are working in the private sector, 2.9% in the public sector, 2.9% are freelance or contractors, and 21.9% are still jobless. This significant transformation from joblessness to self-employment demonstrates the success of ITF's training in enhancing entrepreneurial development as opposed to over-reliance on the informal wage employment pathway. The table also evaluated the level to which respondents attributed their current job or enterprise success to the skills obtained through the ITF programme. Observations demonstrate that 35.2% of respondents attributed their job or enterprise success moderately, 35.2% considerably, while 19.0% attributed it slightly as did 10.5% who attributed it none at all. This demonstrates that a vast number recognize the ITF programme as the primary cause of their current job services.

Regarding the improvement of income, the table indicated that a massive 82.9% of the respondents said that they had increased their income after attending ITF programmes, and 17.1% expressed otherwise. This finding supports the transformative economic value of skills acquisition especially in

terms of improving income stability and decreasing the level of poverty among the beneficiaries. Moreover, in responding to whether they had created jobs to other people through their business enterprises, 44.8% said that they had done it and 55.2% had not. This implies that almost half of the ITF-trained people are now employers of labour and thus they can extend the benefits they get in employment welfare not only to themselves but also to the larger community economic development. Another aspect that is captured by the table is the rating of respondents on the overall effect of ITF skill acquisition to creation of employment in their respective communities. Approximately 39.0 percent respondents said the impact was moderate (3 on the scale), 32.4 percent said it was high (4), and 11.4 percent said it was very high (5) with only 8.6 percent and 5.7 percent of identical respondents saying it had no or minimal impact respectively. Such a distribution suggests that the majority of the respondents believe that the initiatives that the ITF has been undertaking have a significant and long-term impact on local employment patterns. Concerning the number of workers who were employed prior to undergoing training on ITF, the statistics indicate that 82.9% of the respondents hired one worker, 5.7% hired two, three, or four workers respectively. This is an indicator that before the training, majority of the self-employed respondents were operating on a small scale but after the training, it is likely their businesses grew and they could hire more hands.

Table 5. Role of Skills Acquisition on Employment Generation in Nigeria.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
C	1.005312	0.211306	4.757603	0.0000
ITF_PART	0.364080	0.116059	3.137032	0.0017
SKILL_REL	0.144460	0.054740	2.639006	0.0083
TECH_PROF	0.013137	0.083759	0.156847	0.8754
SOFT_SKILL	-0.165537	0.091668	-1.805828	0.0709
IND_ALIGN	0.058043	0.075381	0.770000	0.4413
Mean dependent var	1.552381	S.D. dependent var		0.499634
Sum squared resid	21.55282	Quasi-log likelihood		500.0707
Deviance	4.758622	Deviance statistic		0.048067
Restr. Deviance	5.813484	Quasi-LR statistic		23.17638
Prob (Quasi-LR stat)	0.000312	Pearson SSR		4.505936
Pearson statistic	0.045515	Dispersion		0.045515

Source: Author's Computation Using Eviews 10

Table 5 demonstrates that Industrial Training Fund participation in terms of employment (ITF_PART) is found to be positively and significantly correlated. This demonstrates that

a 1% improvement in participation in ITF programme activities would translate to a 36.41% improvement in employment creation. This agrees with the a priori expectation, as increased

participation in systematic training activities usually strengthens workforce skills and job creation, as ITF's role to fill skill gaps and encourage indigenous manpower development since 1971 demonstrates. However, employment and skills relevance (SKILL_REL) are positively and significantly correlated, indicating that a 1% improvement in the relevance of acquired skills would translate to a 14.45% improvement in employment; this agrees with the a priori expectation, given that relevant skills address direct deficiencies in the labour market, with studies reflecting high relevance scores in ITF programmes, though outdated packages sometimes hamper best possible results. The variable of technical proficiency (TECH_PROF) is also positively and insignificantly connected with employment, showing that a 1% improvement in technical proficiency would translate to a 1.31% improvement in employment creation; however, this relationship is statistically insignificant and therefore fails to strongly uphold the a priori expectation that significant benefit should be drawn from technical expertise, especially since facilities to practice expose limited gains in proficiency.

The relationship between employment and soft skills (SOFT_SKILL) is, on the contrary, inversely and insignificantly connected. Statistically, a 1% improvement in soft skills should translate to a 16.55% deterioration in employment. This refutes the a priori expectation because soft skills are otherwise expected to reinforce social interaction as well as employability, though extrinsic issues such as overexposure to technical needs in specific industries may be the cause since off-the-job learning modes such as role plays as well as discussions facilitate the development of soft skills with limitations in transfer to public service careers. Results for job creation in industry alignment (IND_align) showed that the effect is positive and statistically insignificant. This implies that the employment creation will increase 5.80% as the industry alignment varies 1%, confirming the model's prior assumption that alignment between the industry's needs and the provision of training translates into job creation.

The combined impact of the explanatory variables on employment is significant statistically at the 5% level. This is made known by the probability value of the Quasi-LR statistic (0.000312), that is smaller than the 5% confidence level. The fitness of the model as given by the Deviance statistic took the value 0.048067, that is considerably small. Therefore, deduce that predictions are trustworthy and near to the observed phenomenon, substantiating wider empirical findings where skill programs produce significant employment rates amongst trained graduates.

5. Discussion of Findings

The analysis has shown that the involvement in ITF programmes (ITF_PART) was positively statistically significant related to the generation of jobs. This means that institutionalised training increases labour market commitment and entrepreneurial abilities. The survey data (large recent

participation levels and flow of respondents into self-employment) provide some credibility to this coefficient, and it is consistent with wider empirical accounts in the literature that institutional training when available and aimed proves to translate into quantifiable employment outcomes. Such participation enhances practical skills, lowers expenses on search by employers and triggers business start-ups among trainees. The result is consistent with Bhatt, Yadav and Khan and Sarkar *et al* who reported that involvement in vocational skills enhances the employment prospects [8, 23]. There is a positive and significant relationship between Skills relevance (SKILL_REL) and employment. This finding aligns with the logic of human capital-training, which maximises employability, increases the quality of the training, and fits the current industry requirements. The result brings to the fore the fact that it is not the sole matter of providing training but the match-up of course material with labour-market demands. The findings are consistent with Obeki and Anama who found that skill relevance increase employability [18].

Technical skill level (TECH_PROF) exerts a positive but statistically nonsignificant effect on the generation of employment. The finding suggests that, in this case, measured technical skill advances are either very small, irregularly spaced, or poorly transformed into employment as a consequence of bottlenecks in the provision of facilities to put people through school or weak practical orientation. In other words, technical skill advances may be necessary but in themselves insufficient to produce significant employment effects where the quality of practical preparation, access to finances, or absorptive industries is limited. The findings run contrary to Gajo *et al* and Bhatt, Yadav and Khan who reported statistically significant positive technical skills influences on employment [13, 8]. Soft skills (SOFT_SKILL) are found to be negatively related to employment and the coefficient is statistically nonsignificant. This could be because some industries in the frame may attach importance to technical skill over the ability to relate with people; soft-skills orientation may be offered in such a manner that is barely practical or transferable; or the measurement error/response bias may attenuate the true effect. The finding disagrees with Nkereuwem *et al* and Obeki and Anama, who established that soft skills, mentorship and experiential learning improve employability and entrepreneurship success [17, 18].

Industry alignment (IND_ALIGN) is positive though statistically insignificant on employment. The positive sign corroborates the model's a priori hypothesis that mutual synchronisation between provided training and industry demand promote job creation. The statistical insignificance, then, implies that the current improvement in alignment is minor or hampered by existing bottlenecks (e.g. leaky private-sector links, inadequate internship/apprenticeship attachments). Bhatt, Yadav and Khan and Sonkar and Chaudhary highlighted that alignment between the training provided and industry demand is significant for employment and income growth [8, 26].

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The value of this research is that it presents empirical findings on the role of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the skill acquisition variables connected to it in enhancing the creation of employment within the study region. The study establishes that enrollment in ITF programmes and the relevance of acquired skills positively impact employment creation significantly, highlighting the value of structured skill development and alignment to the needs of the labour market. On the contrary, technical competence, soft skills, and industry alignment present positive but statistically insignificant associations with employment, showing that though the variables pull in the correct direction, their impact remains weak as a consequence of contextual factors such as the inadequacy of practical facilities, weak industry links, as well as limited transferability of the results of the training. The implication is that increased enrollment in well-aligned skill development programmes has the potential to considerably expand employment, but improvement in the quality, practicability, as well as market orientation of the programmes of training is required to expand their impact.

Consequently, the government ought to enhance institutional ability of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) by provision of sufficient funding, modern equipments and qualified instructors to enhance the quality and accessibility of its programmes. It is also urgent that the ITF together with the private sector regularly revisits their curricula on training in the industry to keep in touch with the current and new industry demands particularly on the areas of digital, technical and entrepreneurial competencies. The government policy must also focus more on setting up of the regional skill development centres especially in those areas where the unemployment rate of youths is high to decentralise access to ITF programmes and to make it more inclusive. The soft skill elements are to be incorporated with technical training with participatory, project-based approaches to learning that will enable their application and maintenance. Other specific programmes like post training business start up grants, mentorship programmes, connexion to micro financial institutions etc. should also be stepped up to decipher learned capabilities into viable self-employment and entrepreneurship development. Institutionalisation of continuous monitoring and evaluation of skill acquisition programmes should be instilled to know the impact as well as distinguish where the training is not being implemented, and the training results must always be aligned with the national employment goals. With such a systemic and ongoing endeavour, skills development programmes led by the ITF and its stakeholders can play a significant role in alleviating joblessness and promoting inclusive economic development in Nigeria.

Abbreviations

ITF Industrial Training Fund

NDE	National Directorate of Employment
SAED	Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ND	National Diploma
NCE	Nigeria Certificate in Education
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
GLM	Generalised Linear Model
AI	Artificial Intelligence
VR	Virtual Reality
ILO	International Labour Organization
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

Author Contributions

Gyang Francis Dalyop: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there exists no conflicts of interest whatsoever.

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