



# Gender Differences in Vocational Skill Acquisition and Utilization among Youths in the Informal TVET Sector

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**Abstract:** *The need for youth empowerment for productive engagement remains a central point in achieving socio-economic development of developing nations. This study examined the differences in vocational skill acquisition and utilization of male and female youths in the informal TVET sector. The study took a survey of vocational practitioners and experts in the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local government of Ogun State. Multi-stage sampling was used to select 160 vocational practitioners and experts across different vocations from the two geo-political divisions of Yewa South Local Government. Data were collected with a questionnaire tagged “Vocational Skill Acquisition and Utilisation Questionnaire (V-SAUQ)”. Data obtained were analysed with frequency count and mean. The results indicate considerable skill acquisition and utilization of the youths in the study area with the female gender portrayed as having moderately higher vocational skill acquisition level and noticeable high difference in vocational skill utilization than the male gender. It was concluded that the tendency to acquire and utilize vocational skills in the informal TVET sector may be related to the peculiarity of such vocations to each gender and the gender-dominance of the vocation. It was recommended, among others, that government and all stakeholders in TVET should gear more efforts towards skill acquisition and utilization by the youths and the peculiarity of each gender should be factored into policy formulation and implementation of youth empowerment in technical and vocational engagements.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Informal TVET Sector, Vocational skill acquisition, Vocation skill utilization, Youth

## Introduction

The need to prepare youths for productive engagement has remained a central focus of the developmental agenda of most developing countries. Countries all over the world prioritize economic development initiatives that emphasize self-reliance and economic engagement of the youths. Many programmes and initiatives such as youth Entrepreneurship Support Programme, Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative, N-Power, Graduate Internship Scheme, Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture, etc. have been instituted by the Nigerian government over the years towards achieving the global goal of youth productive engagement and economic empowerment.

Youth empowerment through skill acquisition and economic sustenance or wellbeing of the youths through skill utilisation remain at the center of all dimensions of youth development initiative and form the critical purposes of technical and vocational training (Ogeh, 2023). The acquisition of technical and vocational skills necessary to drive youth empowerment, productivity and economic engagement happens in both formal and informal education sectors. However, while the formal

sector has gained attention among researchers and high interest in policy initiatives, the informal sector, which is practically active in the training and job creation for a large number of youths who do not have access to formal education, suffers attention (Bubna *et al.*, 2022).

One of the many initiatives geared toward youth empowerment for productive life and economic sustenance is vocational skill acquisition (Kulmie *et al.*, 2023). Vocational skills typically refer to skills gained toward becoming knowledgeable in a specific trade or profession (Nanjwan *et al.*, 2019; Amuzie *et al.*, 2021). They are acquired through technical training and apprenticeships, and are often hands-on in nature, improving through regular experience, and rigorous planned and unplanned improvement efforts (Brad, 2024). According to Bwanbale (2024), vocational skills are field or industry-focused mastery, competences and specialization for technical and problem-solving needs of the society. Such skills require acquisition of knowledge and training, involving intellectual thinking and skillful manipulations of instruments and equipment to function productively (Bulus, 2015) and to transform into creators of wealth and employment instead of job seekers (Ayonmike, 2015; Banagiri *et al.*, 2021).



According to Morley (2024), a central strength and focus of vocational training is the attention to skills gaps in key industries demands, with increasing need for skilled individuals in specialized areas, especially where the conventional academic pursuits often fail. Thus, vocational training is seen as the mechanism for providing skill-based competences that are needed to meet current industrial and economic demands of the society, and for nurturing a talent conduit for ensuring sustainable skill acquisition, with adaptability for changing labour market demands. However, the acquisition of skills will not translate to productive engagement of the trained persons until the skills acquired are channeled into the specific field, thus making vocational skill utilization (Mathews & Arulsamy, 2019; Zylfijaj & Shaqiri, 2023). As highlighted in Cedefop (2023) and amplified in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report (2023), vocational education and training must go beyond simply imparting skills; it must ensure that trained individuals are positioned to use these skills effectively in their chosen fields. This alignment of skills with industry needs is crucial to closing the skills gap and enhancing employability (OECD, 2023). This implies that while the training of individuals in trades and vocations is essential, the real value of such skill acquisition is dependent on how well the skills are utilized by such skilled persons to identify, explore and create employment opportunities, meet market demands and earn appreciable living out of it (Iroegbu, 2017; OECD, 2023).

Vocational skill utilization is the deliberate and conscious efforts by a vocationally trained individual to use his acquired skills for technical, crafts and other productive engagements and wellbeing (Akinade, 2019). It should be noted that technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills are acquired in the formal sector (technical or vocational schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities), non-formally in vocational training centers outside formal schooling and informally through apprenticeship and unstructured learning activities and practices (Okwelle & Wordu, 2016; Igbongidi, 2023). According to Mbijjiwe and Kathurel (2013), studies have shown that few percentages of students enroll into pure vocational and entrepreneurial programmes in most of African tertiary institutions. Given the growing scarcity of white-collar employment opportunities, vocational skill acquisition and utilisation involving micro or small productive activities in the informal TVET sector come to the forefront (Kathure & Mbijjiwe, 2014) and generate large chunk of employment and wealth creation in most developing countries (Walter, 2011). Specifically, the informal sector provides jobs for many uneducated, undereducated and even qualified young people who could not get employment in the formal sector and it is expected to employ 90% of the economically-active population (Kathure & Mbijjiwe, 2014). As argued by

International Labour Organisation (2014), the high employment intake of the informal sector is just a workable option for the majority of willing-to-do young people who practically see informal employment opportunities as means for economic sustenance. Given the increasing non-availability of employment in the formal sector of most developing economies, the informal sector is experiencing a high share of employment offers, especially among young people, taking up self-employment and informal employment with a view to escaping the harsh consequences of high unemployment (Onwo & Ohazulike, 2021). Thus, the informal sector becomes absorbent of excess formal unemployment (ILO, 2014; Sultana, 2022)

One of the factors which have been pinned to social integration, skill and educational preferences is gender (Ugwu, 2016; Adamu et al., 2019). There are noticeable differences between male and female dispositions and inclinations in terms of roles and responsibilities, choices and preferences which vary from one society to another and from one culture to another (Nwakanma & Uchekukwu, 2019). While gender disparity is evidenced in various sectors of human endeavour, it has become more obvious in the acquisition of vocational and technical skills (Nwakanma & Uchekukwu, 2019). Gender disparities, often informed by cultural, parental, social and economic factors, have posed a significant concern for vocational skill acquisition and utilization as the segregation of women in specialized fields restrict their participation in several skill acquisition training and programmes in technical and vocational domains (Borgonovi, et al., 2023). Once vocational skills are acquired, gender disparities persist in their utilization. Men are more likely to apply their skills in higher-paying, formal sectors, while women tend to be concentrated in informal or low-income sectors, where opportunities for skill utilization and career growth are limited (Wafula & Omondi, 2021), thus creating occupational segregation in which women are kept in lower-income engagements (Pereira *et al.*, 2023).

With the global acknowledgement and empirical evidence that skill acquisition and utilisation are essential means to leverage for job creation and poverty reduction, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, able and willing to do population outgrows employment spaces (Nkomo & Adanlawo, 2023), this study focuses on the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State where observations on activities of young people in the communities reveal the engagement of this significant part of the society in menial jobs and unskilled labours such as okada riding, shop keeping, smuggling and illegal trans-border activities. In addition, any intelligent investigation into the challenges and hindrances against vocational skill acquisition and utilization requires an understanding of the level of such processes or activities among the subject of investigation. Furthermore, as studies have



shown that gender constitutes a major factor in the propensity of youth towards vocational skill acquisition on one hand (Adamu *et al.*, 2019; Nwakanma & Uchechukwu, 2019; Borgonovi, *et al.*, 2023; Adanlawo & Nkomo, 2023) and utilisation on the other (Ugwu, 2016; Nwakanma & Uchechukwu, 2019), it is important to determine the levels of vocational skill acquisition and utilisation between young men and women as a first step in charting a road map for enhancing youth vocational skill acquisition and utilization especially in the informal TVET sector.

The objective of this study was to determine the gender differences in vocational skill acquisition and utilization among youths in the informal TVET sector. With particular focus on youth in the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State, the specific objectives were to determine the difference in the level of vocational skill acquisition of male and female youths, and to ascertain the to determine the difference, if any, in the level of vocational skill utilization of male and female youths in the area.

### Methodology

This study used the descriptive in design. It employed the survey approach and used a structured questionnaire for data collection. The population of the study comprised of vocational experts and practitioners in the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State. The practitioners have acquired vocational training, they are actively utilizing their acquired skills and are involved in training youths in vocational and technical skills. 160 vocational experts and practitioners were selected as sample for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting the sample. 10 male-dominated and 10 female-dominated vocations were selected as depicted in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Selected Male and Female Dominated Vocations**

S/N	Male	Female
1	Shoe Making	Bead Making
2	Carpentry and furniture	Cake Making
3	Automobile mechanic	Soap Making
4	Automobile painting	Dress Making
5	Brick Laying	Photography
6	Welding & fabrication	Cosmetology
7	Interior Decoration	Nylon Making
8	Pipe fitting and plumping	Hair Dressing
9	Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	Event Decoration/Planning
10	Electrical wiring and installation	Organic Skin Care Production

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

The population was stratified into two according to the two geo-political divisions of Yewa South - Ilaro and Ifekowajo. For each vocation, 4 vocational experts were selected from each geo-political division to make 8

experts allocated to each vocation. Convenient sampling was adopted in selecting the respondents. The questionnaire used contained 17 items and was designed with a 4-point Likert rating options Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

### Results and Discussion

The criteria for the decision on the mean values were: mean < 2.0 = very low; 2.0 – 2.49 = low; 2.50 – 2.99 = High; and 3.0 – 4.0 = very high. A total of 160 questionnaires were administered but 143 were correctly filled and used for analysis (73 by male and 70 by female).

**Table 2: Perceived Level of Vocational Skill Acquisition of Youths**

S/N	Items	Male (N= 73)		Female (N= 70)	
		Sum	$\bar{x}$	Sum	$\bar{x}$
1	Interest in learning the vocation	182	2.493	215	3.071
2	Effort to quickly master the vocational skill	191	2.616	207	2.957
3	Determination to be well skilled in the vocation	189	2.589	201	2.871
4	Ability to withstand challenges during training	207	2.836	197	2.814
5	Level of dedication of learners to the vocation	228	3.123	213	3.043
6	Consideration of the vocation as better option	186	2.548	200	2.857
7	Completion of training	199	2.726	220	3.143
8	Being well skilled at the completion of training	235	3.219	246	3.514
Weighted Mean		2.769		3.033	

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

The Table 2 above shows the mean responses for the perceived level of skill acquisition of the male and female youths. The results indicate weighted mean values of 2.76 and 3.03 for the level of vocational skill acquisition of the male and female youths respectively.

**Table 3: Perceived Level of Vocational Skill Utilization of Youths**

S/N	Items	Male (N= 73)		Female (N= 70)	
		Sum	$\bar{x}$	Sum	$\bar{x}$
1	Determination to utilize acquired vocational skill	188	2.575	227	3.243
2	Being focused in the vocation	194	2.658	222	3.171
3	Opportunities for trainees to utilize vocation skills	229	3.137	224	3.200
4	Effectiveness in running the vocation	188	2.575	224	3.200
5	Ease of managing vocational outfit	186	2.548	216	3.086
6	Making use of opportunities to grow in vocation	209	2.863	236	3.371



7	Seeing the vocation as a major source of living	186	2.548	224	3.200
8	Capacity to withstand challenges in the vocation	198	2.712	223	3.186
9	Commitment to remain in the vocation	181	2.479	232	3.314
<i>Weighted Mean</i>			<b>2.677</b>		<b>3.219</b>

Source: Filed Survey, 2024

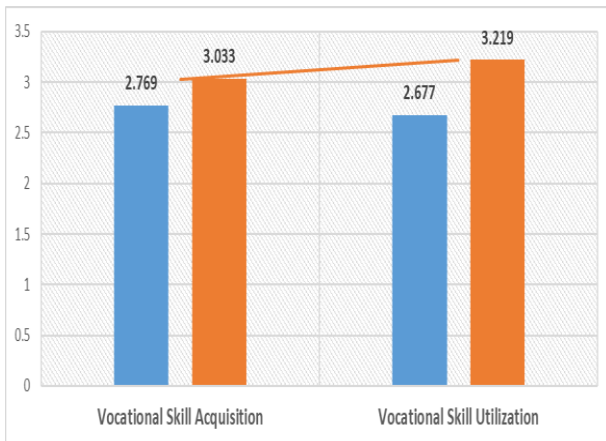
The results in the Table 3 indicate weighted mean values of 2.677 and 3.219 for the level of vocational skill utilization by male and female youths respectively.

**Table 4: Summary of Perceived Mean Differences in Skill Acquisition and Utilization by male and Female Youth**

Parameters	Male	Female
Vocational Skill Acquisition	2.769	3.033
Vocational Skill Utilization	2.677	3.219

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

From the Table 4, females have weighted mean values of 3.033 and 3.219 for skill acquisition and utilization respectively which are higher than 2.769 and 2.677 for male youths. This summary is depicted in the chart below:



The results revealed a considerably high level of skill acquisition and utilization by both male and female youths in the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local Government area of Ogun State. This implies that the youths make efforts towards skill acquisition in the selected vocational areas. The results point to the fact that the youths show high interest in vocational skill acquisition, make effort to acquire the skills and consider such training as a mechanism to create jobs for themselves since they do not have access to formal education that could avail them opportunities in paid employment. The result revealed that the youths become well skilled in their chosen vocation that could make them productively engaged for economic sustenance.

The result also revealed difference in the level of skill acquisition of the youth indicating fair marginal difference in the skill acquisition rate between the two genders with female showing higher rate and disposition to vocational skill acquisition than their male counterparts as perceived by experts and practitioners in the selected vocations. The result also shows a noticeable difference in the utilisation of acquired vocational skills. Female in their dominated vocations were presented as having higher commitment to the utilisation of their vocational skill than their male counterparts in their own dominated vocations. The result shows that the female has a higher capacity to withstand vocational challenges and do not easily quit the vocations in which they haven bee trained. The result shows that the females shows higher capacity to withstand vocational challenges and do not easily quit the vocations in which they have been trained. This result supports Ugwu (2016) that clear differences always exist in the inclination of male and female towards vocational skill acquisition and utilisation. As against Cho et al. (2013) and Nwakanma and Uchechukwu (2019) that women are usually constrained to participate well in technical vocations and their skill acquisition and utilization, and that they are affected by societal and parental/guidance, the findings of this study showed that women are more inclined to acquisition and utilization of skills in female dominated vocations than men will do in their gender-dominated ones.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that youths in the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local Government have a good disposition to vocational skill acquisition and that the female gender has higher vocational skill acquisition than the male in the respective gender-dominated vocations. It can also be concluded that the acquired vocational skills are being utilized to a remarkable extent by the youths with the female gender having higher inclination to vocational skill utilization than the male in the informal TVET sector of Yewa South Local Government. This study shows that the tendency to acquire and utilize vocational skills may be related to the peculiarity of such vocations to each gender and the gender-dominance of the vocations.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that government and economic development agencies and experts should intensify efforts at encouraging vocational skill acquisition of the youths in the informal TVET sector. Government should also make the operational environment of the informal TVET sector economically rewarding to enhance vocational skill acquisition and utilisation by the youths. In addition, while vocationally trained youths in the informal sector should be sensitized on the need to be committed to the utilisation of their acquired vocational skills to enhance their productive engagement and contribution to



economic growth, researchers and government should accord good concern and interest to skill acquisition and utilisation in the informal TVET sector to allow for discerning policy concerns as obtained in the formal sector.

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