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# **Digital Libraries and Skill Acquisition Training Among Rural Communities for Poverty Alleviation in Rivers State, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the extent of contribution of digital libraries to poverty alleviation of rural communities through skill acquisition training in Rivers State. The study was guided by one research question and a null hypothesis. The descriptive survey research was adopted. The sample size of 236 was drawn from the population of 2,355 registered learners from 12 registered vocational education centres using the convenience sampling technique. Data collecting instrument was the researchers' structured questionnaire which was face validated by three experts. A reliability coefficient value of 0.83 was obtained using the Pearsons Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research question. The one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings among others showed that digital libraries have highly contributed in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training. Based on these findings, recommendations were made.

*Keywords: digital libraries, skills acquisition, training, rural communities, poverty alleviation*

## **Introduction**

One of the challenges faced by rural communities is the restriction of information for societal transformation. This information could be obtained through the presence libraries. The libraries are therefore saddled with the primary responsibilities of generation, acquisition, processing, storage refining and dissemination of data, information and knowledge to people in all sphere of life. The libraries are believed to be fundamental to intellectual experience and natural activity of the mind. They also found to exhibit three roles in education namely; sharing of rich information, maintaining ideas and giving awareness to bring together individual with learning aims (Abbasi & Zardary, 2012). It is also believed that in a technological age, the

changing pattern of information delivery calls for a pragmatic shift in the use of the library to digital.

Digital libraries are powerful resources capable of providing new opportunities to communities that are involved in inquiry based learning. They offer enormous opportunities to participate in global affairs and raise the standard of living of the people in developing countries. Hence, digital libraries are organisations that provide the resources, including the specialised staff, to select, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or sets of communities (the federal library federation as cited in Saini & Sharma, 2015). By this definition, digital library is said to constitute an environment which supports the full life cycle of creation, storage, preservation, dissemination and use of data, information and knowledge in networked environment for the improvement of the condition of the communities. This invariably accounts for its place in retrieval and dissemination of valuable information relating to skill acquisition for poverty alleviation among rural communities.

Skill acquisition is the possession of competencies and capabilities to perform a given task for the attainment of stipulated objectives. Skill ordinarily is the ability to do something usually acquired through training. This has to do with expert knowledge and creative reasoning to a level of mastering. Acquisition on the other hand connotes the gaining of something for oneself. Skill acquisition therefore constitutes the transmission of exploitable knowledge for participation of an individual in the labour market. It is the ability that an individual acquires through training, education or experience to effectively carry out functions for the benefit of self and mankind (Lapak, Moris & Shikfu, 2018). The competencies serve as measures for unlocking the economic potentials of the communities, thereby increasing the capacity to empower and equip them to participate and benefit from their national economy as well as facilitates economic development (Unachukwu, 2009). These skills consist of the body of knowledge, procedures, competencies, aptitudes and attitudes required for carrying out various activities to a certain degree of quality and effectiveness and in an independent and flexible manner (Kechagias, 2011).

Skill acquisition is described as the procedure for empowering, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenues for employment and wealth creation among the people

(Isaac, 2011).). It is a process whereby an individual undergoes some training needed to be self relevance (Emaikwu, 2011). The author added that the introduction of this training is geared at providing the level of education or knowledge needed to exploit entrepreneurial opportunity that could help in the economic development of such countries. It is not surprising that skill acquisition is aimed at impacting skills, attitudes, aspirations and competences mostly on the youths (Samian & Buntat, 2012). Olabiyi (2015) shared similar view on the efficacy of this acquisition when he noted that it is the ability to be trained on a particular task of function and become expert in it. Hence, empirical evidence further showed that participants with high skill training had the ability to secure better jobs than those with low skills training among others (Ukpabi, 2019). In a related study, about 60% of beneficiaries of entrepreneurial/vocational skill acquisition programme were found to afford the basic necessity of life (Adofu & Ocheja, 2013), while significant impact of vocational training on poverty alleviation was found (Asghar & Sajjad, 2015). These studies notwithstanding attempt to

establish a relationship between skill acquisition and poverty alleviation. The relationship is obtained through the accessibility of relevant information, which is one of the attributes of digital libraries. It is believed that the acquisition of skills helps in creating options, acquisition of capabilities and applying negotiating skill through confidence, and having a right in controlling a person's beliefs and abilities (Noreen, 2011).

Consequently, skill acquisition training instills the competencies required of communities especially those in rural communities as relate to the present study to fight poverty. Rural communities constitute a social setting that is characterised by little or no social amenities needed for an improved standard of living. While it is acknowledged that the sector has made enormous contribution to the economic development of the country, it is found to suffer depression, degradation and deprivation. This invariably calls for the search through digital libraries on skill acquisition among others for improved quality of life. To improve the standard of living of communities, is to alleviate poverty.

Poverty is a social exclusion that assumes complex multi-dimensional processes such as lack or denial of goods and services, resources, rights and ability to partake in normal relationships and activities accessible to the majority in the society, whether in political, social, economic or cultural arenas (Levitas,2009). Poverty has also been seen psychological. The present study however looks at poverty as inadequacies of communities in terms of social,

economic, cultural and political entitlements. To cushion the effect of poverty, various programmes have been executed by government. Some of these programmes are National Poverty Eradication Programmes (NAPEP), Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) 1 and II, The Nigeria Vision 20:2020 and subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), and N-power which was initiated by Buhari's administration. Unfortunately, while it is believed that the programmes were meant to alleviate poverty among communities, Agbionu (2014) observed that most of these programmes failed to meet their objectives owing to lack of political will. It was found that empowering the communities especially the youths for productivity and innovation was unrealistic (Olagunju,2020). These failures among others invariably account for the high poverty level among rural communities in Rivers State.

Admittedly, given the fact that digital libraries offer a variety of opportunities for individuals to access information for improved quality of living without geographical restriction owing to the presence of technological explosion in the environment, one wonders how and why the communities in Rivers State have not sufficiently benefited from such opportunities. It is even more worrisome considering the fact that most beneficiaries of vocational education programmes are found not to utilise the opportunity of accessing digital libraries for the acquisition of skills needed to ameliorate poverty in the communities. This has further given rise to the question as to whether the relevance of digital libraries in alleviating poverty among communities through skill acquisition has not been ascertained. The present study therefore attempts to add to existing literature, empirical evidences on the contribution of digital libraries to the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training in Rivers State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study was to determine the extent of contribution of digital libraries to poverty alleviation of rural communities through skill acquisition training in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

ascertain the extent to which digital libraries have contributed to the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training in Rivers State.

## **Research Question**

To what extent has digital libraries contributed in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training in Rivers State?

## **Hypotheses**

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of adult learners from the three senatorial districts on the extent to which digital libraries have contributed in the alleviation of poverty through skills acquisition training in Rivers State.

## **Empirical Studies**

Some reviews on the relevance of skill acquisition training in the alleviation of poverty were made. For instance, Adogu and Ocheja (2013) revealed that the acquisition of skills has afforded at least 60% of its beneficiaries the basic necessity of life. Similar study, revealed that there was a significant impact of vocational training on poverty alleviation (Asghar & Sajjad, 2015). Furthermore, Ukpabi (2019) showed that participants with high skill training had the ability to secure better jobs than those with low skills training. In Gambia, Oladotun (2020) revealed that adult literacy and skill acquisition programmes correlated significantly with women empowerment and self reliance. These studies obviously demonstrated the enormous contributions of skill acquisition to poverty alleviation on the beneficiaries. In spite of these contributions, none of these studies seem to recognise the place of digital libraries in the skill acquisition training for poverty alleviation among communities. Thus, the present study provides the empirical evidence to add to limited available literature.

## **Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design aims at collecting data on, and describing in systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). The choice of this design is because it has been adopted in similar studies (Olori & Olori, 2016; Olori, et al, 2022). Hence, the design sets to examine the extent to which digital libraries have contributed in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training in Rivers State. The population of the study was 2,355 registered learners from 12 registered vocational education centres in Rivers State. The sample

size of the study was 236 learners which was 10 percent of the population, drawn using convenience sampling technique. Data collecting instrument was the researchers' developed questionnaire titled, 'Digital Libraries and Skill Acquisition Training for Alleviation of Poverty' (DILSATAB). The questionnaire had two parts. Part A contained the personal data of the respondents, while Part B elicited information relating to the study objective, designed on a four point rating scale with assigned numerical values as: very high extent= 4 points; high extent =3 points; low extent = 2 points; and very low extent = 1 point. To ascertain the validity of the instrument, it was further subjected to face validity by three experts, one from the Department of Business Education, one from the Department of Adult Education and Extra Mural Studies, and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Science Education, all from the University of Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was established on a trial testing by administering the questionnaire on 20 learners in five vocational education centres from Asari Toru Local Government Area on two consecutive times within the interval of two weeks. The local government was chosen since it was not used for the study, though shared the same characteristics with the target population in terms programme. The Pearsons Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to obtain the reliability coefficient value 0.83. Data collected were analysed using the mean and standard deviation for the research question. The real limit of numbers was used in decision making for the items. This was classified as follows: very high extent (VHE) (3.50-4.00), high extent (HE) (2.50-3.49), low extent (LE) (1.50-2.49) and very low extent (VLE) (1.00-1.49).

Similarly, the null hypothesis was tested using a one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. Where the probability value was greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was not rejected, implying that significant difference was not found. But, where the probability value was equal or less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, implying that significance difference was found.

## **Result**

**Table 1:**

*Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent of contribution of digital libraries in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training (n=234)*

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Item Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rmk</b>
1	Acquire knowledge of craft making skills for economic empowerment	2.58	0.62	High
2	Acquire tailoring skills for enhanced living standard	2.61	0.91	High
3	Acquire the knowledge of modern butter making skills for improved income generating activities	2.60	0.97	High
4	Acquisition of hair dressing skills for income maximization	2.73	0.87	High
5	Acquire knowledge in the use of technology on milking for increased income	2.66	1.04	High
6	Acquire the knowledge of soap making skills for healthy looking	2.72	1.05	High
7	Acquire the knowledge in cheese making for economic empowerment	2.65	0.96	High
8	Acquire knowledge of computer proficiency for income generation	2.67	0.95	High
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>2.65</b>	<b>0.96</b>	High

Table 1 indicated that respondents had mean scores of high extent on all the items as 2.58, 2.61, 2.60, 2.73, 2.66, 2.72, 2.65 and 2.67, while the corresponding standard deviations were 0.62, 0.91, 0.97, 0.87, 1.04, 1.05, 0.96 and 0.95. The Table further had the cluster mean of 2.65 and standard deviation of 0.96 which implied that the extent to which digital libraries have contributed in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training was high in Rivers State.



**Table 2**

*A one-way ANOVA of the difference in mean ratings of respondents on the extent of contribution of digital libraries in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training*

S/N	Item Statements		SS	MS	F	p-value	Decision																																																																																								
1	Acquire Knowledge of craft making skills for economic empowerment	Between Groups	1.88	.938	1.10	.33	Ns																																																																																								
		Within Groups	194.57	.850				2	Acquire tailoring skills for enhanced living standard	Between Groups	2.74	1.37	1.68	.19	Ns	Within Groups	186.57	.82	3	Acquire the knowledge of modern butter making skills for improved income generating activities	Between Groups	.48	.240	.25	.78	Ns	Within Groups	217.04	.948	4	Acquisition of hair dressing skills for income maximization	Between Groups	5.42	2.71	3.64	.03	S	Within Groups	170.48	.74	5	Acknowledge knowledge in the use of technology on milking for increased income	Between Groups	2.83	1.41	1.30	.27	Ns	Within Groups	248.95	1.09	6	Acquire the knowledge of soap making skills for healthy looking	Between Groups	1.62	.81	.74	.47	Ns	Within Groups	251.60	1.10	7	Acquire the knowledge in cheese making for economic empowerment	Between Groups	1.11	.56	.60	.55	Ns	Within Groups	213.91	.93	8	Acquire knowledge of computer proficiency for income generation	Between Groups	.90	.45	.49	.61	Ns	Within Groups	208.55	.91							<b>0.41</b>	<b>Ns</b>	<b>Cluster p-value</b>		
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Table 2 revealed that significant difference was not found in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 with probability values greater than 0.05 level of significance. Item 4 had the probability value 0.03, which was less than 0.05 level of significance, implying the existence of significant difference.

The Table further showed that the cluster p-value (0.41) was greater than 0.05 level of significance, hence the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This implied that significant difference was not found in the mean ratings of adult learners from the three senatorial districts on the extent to which digital libraries have contributed in the alleviation of poverty through skills

acquisition training in Rivers State.

## **Discussion**

The findings showed that the extent to which digital libraries have contributed in the alleviation of poverty among rural communities through skill acquisition training was high in Rivers State. The high level accorded may not be surprising as findings showed that at least 60% of beneficiaries of skill acquisition can now afford the basic necessity of life (Adogu & Ocheja, 2013). This is also true as respondents affirmed that the acquisition of skills by learners offer them with skills needed to be economically viable. This knowledge is made possible through their access of information on the prospects of skill acquisition provided in digital libraries. These prospects are evident in the acquisition of various skill areas such as craft making, tailoring, soap making and proficiency in computer among others. It is believed that with the acquisition of these skills by rural communities, poverty is said to be alleviated. This was also corroborated in the findings of Asghar and Sajjad (2015) that there was a significant impact of vocational training on poverty alleviation. Further findings by Ukpabi (2019) revealed that participants with high skill training had the ability to secure better jobs than those with low skills training. This explains the place of digital libraries in awareness creation of opportunities for emancipation of the rural populace. It is therefore not surprising that the null hypothesis was accepted as respondents from the various senatorial districts in the state were found to have similar views.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes by recognising the enormous contributions of digital libraries in the alleviation of poverty through skill acquisition training in Rivers State. By exposing the rural populace to valuable information, it is believed that access to acquisition of skills was intensified. Thus, helping in the fight against poverty. The findings further corroborated with the study that adult literacy and skill acquisition programmes correlated significantly with women empowerment and self reliance (Oladotun, (2020). Hence, the need for the utilisation of digital libraries especially in rural communities for poverty alleviation in Rivers State.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education should intensify effort in the teaching of vocational skills to equip learners in a challenging world.
2. The ministry of education should ensure that more skill areas are incorporated in the curriculum for the teaching of vocational skills.

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