



## Measuring the Success of the National Directorate of Employment Initiatives in Reducing Unemployment in Abuja, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Unemployment remains a significant issue in Nigeria, despite various policy measures aimed at fostering job creation and economic empowerment. This research examines the effectiveness of the National Directorate of Employment's (NDE) initiatives in reducing unemployment in Abuja, Nigeria. A mixed-methods approach was utilised to gather data from 250 beneficiaries of the program through structured surveys and 10 key informant interviews involving NDE officials and community leaders. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis were applied to evaluate employment outcomes, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data interpretation. The results indicated that NDE programs effectively lowered unemployment rates, boosted self-employment, and raised income levels for participants. The logistic regression findings identified access to credit, educational attainment, and the type of program as significant indicators of employment success. Nonetheless, challenges such as insufficient funding, inadequate monitoring, and poor access to credit facilities hindered long-term viability. The study concludes that although NDE interventions play a role in creating short-term employment, comprehensive reforms are essential for improving their sustainability and scalability. It suggests increasing funding, enhancing monitoring and evaluation processes, providing credit assistance, and ensuring alignment with broader industrial and entrepreneurial policies.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment remains one of the most pressing socioeconomic issues facing Nigeria, despite years of policy measures, institutional reforms, and development strategies aimed at generating sustainable livelihoods for its rapidly expanding population (Adekoya et al., 2025). This issue is particularly critical among the youth, who make up over 60% of Nigeria's population and struggle to find employment opportunities even after obtaining formal education or vocational training (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). The rise in unemployment is closely associated with poverty and insecurity (Jafaru et al., 2024), undermining the nation's broader development objectives, including those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). In this context, poverty extends beyond mere income deficiency to include a multidimensional lack of access to education, healthcare, housing, and worthwhile employment (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2020). Unemployment exacerbates these issues by stripping individuals of their productive potential, weakening household resilience, and perpetuating cycles of poverty across generations (Magaji, 2007). Therefore, efforts to reduce unemployment also significantly contribute to poverty alleviation and socioeconomic stability (Shaba et al., 2018).

One of the primary institutional mechanisms established to tackle unemployment and its related poverty implications in Nigeria is the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). Established in 1986 during General Ibrahim Babangida's military regime, the NDE was established in response to the soaring unemployment rates among graduates and youth, resulting from the global economic

downturn and the structural adjustment programs that deepened job losses in the formal sector (Ekong, 2020). The Directorate was tasked with the design and execution of training, employment, and entrepreneurship schemes that would engage unemployed youth and graduates in productive activities (NDE, 2021). Over the years, the NDE has rolled out various initiatives, such as vocational skills training, small enterprise development, rural employment support, and targeted public works programs aimed at curbing unemployment and, by extension, reducing poverty (Adewale & Yusuf, 2021).

In Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), challenges related to low educational attainment and high unemployment have been intensified by rural-to-urban migration, population growth, and the limited capacity of the formal job market to absorb newcomers (Gabdo et al., 2025). Many young individuals migrate to Abuja seeking white-collar jobs but often find themselves underemployed or jobless due to a misalignment between the skills they possess and the demands of the labour market (Okoro & Abdulrahman, 2022). As a result, the programs of the NDE in Abuja—such as the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme, Basic Business Training, and Graduate Attachment Program—are crucial in providing participants with valuable skills for employment, fostering self-employment, and facilitating the creation of micro-enterprises (Aliyu, 2020). These initiatives tackle unemployment while also acting as tools for poverty alleviation by empowering families to earn sustainable incomes (Magaji, 2008). Nevertheless, after over thirty years of implementation, doubts remain regarding the genuine effectiveness of these programs in reducing unemployment and helping individuals escape poverty in tangible ways.

Debates among scholars regarding the effectiveness of NDE interventions continue. Some research indicates that the programs have successfully equipped beneficiaries with skills and aided in poverty reduction across various states (Akinwale, 2021; Ude & Eze, 2020). For example, empirical studies suggest that participants in the Graduate Attachment Program acquired valuable workplace experience, which improved their employability (Onah & Aja, 2021). Likewise, vocational and entrepreneurship training initiatives have enabled participants to launch small businesses that bolster local economies and decrease household poverty levels (Ogunyemi & Alabi, 2022). Conversely, some critics argue that NDE programs frequently face challenges, including insufficient funding, ineffective monitoring and evaluation, limited access to credit facilities, and political interference in program implementation, which ultimately hinder their long-term viability and scalability (Adewale & Yusuf, 2021; Ekong, 2020). These criticisms underscore the necessity of ongoing assessment of NDE's strategies to ascertain whether they are fulfilling their dual goals of decreasing unemployment and alleviating poverty, particularly in Abuja, where these issues remain pressing concerns.

The selection of Abuja as the primary focus for this study is important for several reasons. Firstly, as the administrative and political heart of Nigeria, Abuja experiences a significant influx of job seekers nationwide, leading to heightened pressure on the existing labour market (NBS, 2023). Secondly, the city's diverse population provides an ideal setting to evaluate how well NDE programs adapt to different demographic and educational backgrounds. Thirdly, the insights gained from Abuja can serve as a reference point for evaluating the success of NDE initiatives in other urban areas throughout Nigeria. By focusing on Abuja, the study aims to develop a deeper understanding of how national employment programs are contextualised and implemented at the local level.

Thus, this paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the National Directorate of Employment's initiatives in addressing unemployment and alleviating poverty in Abuja, Nigeria. It specifically explores the degree to which NDE programs have facilitated job creation, skills development, and self-employment among participants, while also identifying the obstacles that impede their effectiveness. The study is grounded in the belief that successful employment programs should provide not only temporary solutions to unemployment but also create sustainable avenues for economic participation, poverty reduction, and livelihood security (Ogunyemi & Alabi, 2022).

Through a systematic assessment of the outcomes of NDE initiatives in Abuja, this research contributes to both policy and practical applications. It provides empirical data on whether the programs are achieving their intended goals and offers insights into how they can be improved to better align with the evolving demands of the labour market. Additionally, it places the analysis within the larger discussion on sustainable development, youth empowerment, poverty alleviation, and national economic transformation in Nigeria. The anticipated findings are expected to guide policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars focused on combating unemployment and poverty through targeted institutional frameworks.

Although the National Directorate of Employment remains a key component of Nigeria's employment and poverty alleviation strategy, its efficacy in diminishing unemployment and fostering sustainable livelihoods necessitates critical and ongoing evaluation. This paper addresses the need by focusing on Abuja, with the primary goal of assessing whether the initiatives of the NDE have significantly contributed to reducing unemployment and poverty in the Federal Capital Territory.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**2.1 Conceptual Definitions Poverty Concept:** Poverty is a complex condition defined by the lack of essential needs, resources, and opportunities necessary for a decent living standard (Enaberue et al., 2024). It extends beyond mere income deficiency to encompass limited access to essential services, including food, housing, healthcare, education, and social participation (World Bank, 2022). According to Sen's (1999) capability approach, poverty is understood as the absence of substantive freedoms required for individuals to live valued lives, shifting the focus from strictly economic metrics to those of human development. In Nigeria, poverty is prevalent and is closely associated with unemployment (Musa et al., 2024), as the lack of profitable employment directly affects household

income and the sustainability of livelihoods (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Recent estimates suggest that more than 40% of Nigerians exist below the national poverty threshold, with unemployment and underemployment serving as key factors (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). Consequently, poverty reduction acts as both a driving force and a benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of employment initiatives such as those carried out by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE).

**Unemployment Concept:** Unemployment is described as a state in which individuals who wish and are capable of working at prevailing wage rates cannot find gainful employment (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). In economic discourse, unemployment is classified into four main types: structural, cyclical, frictional, and seasonal unemployment (Todaro & Smith, 2020). In Nigeria, unemployment has traditionally been connected to structural challenges, such as inadequate small-scale industrial growth (Magaji & Saleh, 2010), discrepancies in educational qualifications (Magaji, 2023), and limited capacity of the labour market to absorb new workers (NBS, 2023). The definition of unemployment in Nigeria is further complicated by the high rates of underemployment, which refers to a situation where individuals occupy positions that do not align with their skills, qualifications, or provide inadequate working hours (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2021).

**Employment Initiatives Concept:** Employment initiatives are intentional policy programs and interventions aimed at addressing job deficits by generating opportunities for self-employment, wage employment, or skills development. These initiatives may be government-initiated, donor-supported, or driven by the private sector. Often, they include training, vocational skill enhancement, financial support, public works schemes, and entrepreneurship assistance (Agboola & Usman, 2021). In Nigeria, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) stands out as one of the longest-standing frameworks for employment initiatives, having been established in 1986. The programs offered by the NDE include the Vocational Skills Development Programme, the Small-Scale Enterprises Programme, and the Rural Employment Promotion Programme (NDE, 2021).

**Job Creation Concept:** Job creation involves generating new job opportunities through economic development, investments, or targeted policy strategies (Magaji & Adamu, 2011). This can occur within the formal sector, characterised by organised contracts and wage systems, or the informal sector, which plays a dominant role in Nigeria's economy and accounts for over 65% of job opportunities (World Bank, 2022). Effective job creation is not just about the quantity of jobs but also the quality—ensuring decent employment with fair income (Eke et al., 2020), job security, and safe working conditions, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 (UNDP, 2022). **Program Effectiveness Concept:** In relation to employment initiatives, effectiveness is defined as the extent to which a program meets its intended goals, including reducing unemployment, boosting skills, and enhancing the livelihoods of beneficiaries (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2019). For NDE programs, effectiveness is evaluated using indicators such as the number of individuals trained, the percentage of beneficiaries who obtain employment or start businesses, income-generating capacity, and the long-term sustainability of these enterprises (Akinwale, 2021). Effectiveness also involves considering external factors, such as access to finance (Okoroafor et al., 2018), market connections (Magaji et al., 2022), and policy stability (Magaji et al., 2019).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

**Human Capital Theory:** The Human Capital Theory, proposed by Becker (1993), asserts that investments in education, training, and healthcare enhance individual productivity and employability. When applied to NDE programs, this theory suggests that vocational training and entrepreneurship development enhance the skills and competencies of participants, thereby increasing their likelihood of securing employment or starting a business. Research has shown that the accumulation of human capital is positively correlated with employability and income generation in developing countries (Magaji et al., 2025).

**Keynesian Employment Theory:** The Keynesian theory emphasises the role of government intervention and aggregate demand in generating employment (Keynes, 1936). According to Keynes, unemployment results from inadequate demand for goods and services, leading to a decline in labour demand. Programs such as those launched by the NDE under the Special Public Works Programme reflect Keynesian principles, as they inject public expenditure into the economy, generate temporary employment, and stimulate demand (Onah & Aja, 2021). This framework is relevant for understanding the NDE's role in mitigating cyclical unemployment in Nigeria.

**Institutional Theory** emphasises the influence of formal institutions on economic and social outcomes. It explains how structures, norms, and policies affect the effectiveness of interventions (North, 1990). The NDE, as a governmental institution, functions within broader institutional contexts characterised by bureaucratic inefficiencies, funding challenges, and policy inconsistencies (Ogunyemi & Alabi, 2022). Institutional Theory offers a perspective for evaluating how governance frameworks and institutional capacities influence the NDE's effectiveness in combating unemployment.

**Dual Labour Market Theory:** This theory categorises the labour market into primary (formal, stable jobs with good pay) and secondary (informal, unstable jobs) sectors (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). Nigeria's labour market is significantly tilted towards the informal sector (Muhammed et al., 2025). The NDE's emphasis on vocational training and microenterprise development often integrates participants into the informal economy. While this provides immediate relief, it raises concerns regarding the sustainability and quality of the jobs created (Aliyu, 2020).

Collectively, these theories offer interconnected insights: Human Capital Theory elucidates the advantages of skill development, Keynesian Theory supports government spending interventions, Institutional Theory highlights governance issues, and Dual Labour Market Theory critiques the inherent structural challenges within the labour market.

### 2.3 Empirical Evidence

The effectiveness of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in addressing unemployment in Nigeria has garnered significant scholarly interest, revealing both positive outcomes and notable challenges. Adewale and Yusuf (2021) discovered that NDE programs considerably improved skill acquisition and microenterprise development among youth in Lagos and Kaduna. Their research indicated that program beneficiaries not only reported increased income but also showed decreased reliance on family support, thereby enhancing local economic resilience. Similarly, Akinwale (2021) emphasised how vocational skills training through the NDE has empowered women and rural youths to participate in small-scale enterprises, thereby fostering inclusivity in job creation. These findings imply that the NDE has made meaningful contributions to alleviating unemployment through focused vocational training.

Further evidence highlights the positive impact of specific NDE initiatives in Abuja and elsewhere. Onah and Aja (2021) analysed the Graduate Attachment Program (GAP) and reported that it significantly boosted employability by providing participants with practical work experience, which is often missing among Nigerian graduates. Likewise, Aliyu (2020) found that NDE's entrepreneurship training programs in Abuja contributed to the creation of microenterprises, thereby enhancing urban livelihood security. The results of this study are supported by Nwankwo and Eze (2021), who highlighted that the Small-Scale Enterprises program of the NDE has led to heightened entrepreneurial activity, particularly within the informal sector, which remains Nigeria's most significant source of jobs.

However, despite these accomplishments, numerous researchers have pointed out ongoing issues that hinder the effectiveness of the NDE. Ekong (2020) stated that insufficient funding, the politicisation of program execution, and inadequate monitoring systems have diminished the sustainability of NDE efforts. Furthermore, Ogunyemi and Alabi (2022) emphasised that a disconnect between vocational training and access to credit facilities has limited beneficiaries' ability to expand their enterprises and transition into medium-scale businesses. Ude and Eze (2020) reported that a notable number of beneficiaries revert to unemployment due to inadequate institutional support and failure to integrate into competitive markets. This concern corresponds with findings by Ibrahim and Lawal (2021), who illustrated that while NDE programs provide initial empowerment, the absence of continued mentorship and financial support leaves many beneficiaries exposed to economic shocks.

Recent research reveals additional gaps in the inclusiveness of NDE programs. Musa and Garba (2022) noted that rural areas in northern Nigeria have received less adequate attention from NDE interventions compared to urban centres, thereby exacerbating regional disparities in job opportunities. In addition, Bello and Salihu (2023) found that many young people perceive NDE programs as inaccessible due to bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of awareness, which hinders their ability to reach the most vulnerable groups. Together, these findings indicate that while the NDE has made strides in decreasing unemployment, systemic and institutional barriers continue to restrict its full effectiveness.

The situation in Nigeria reflects trends seen in other developing countries that have introduced employment initiatives. For instance, in Ghana, Aryeetey and Baah-Boateng (2021) found that youth employment programs enhanced technical and entrepreneurial skills but suffered from insufficient funding and weak monitoring systems, which led to poor long-term sustainability. In South Africa, McCord (2019) found that public works programs provided temporary assistance by absorbing unemployed youth but failed to secure lasting employment, mainly due to foundational weaknesses in the labour market. Likewise, in Kenya, Mwangi and Omolo (2020) indicated that youth empowerment initiatives improved opportunities for self-employment but faced hurdles from corruption, poor program coordination, and a lack of access to startup capital.

Similar challenges have also been noted in Asia. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India has effectively delivered essential income support to rural households; however, it has been plagued by corruption, political interference, and ongoing underfunding (Dutta, Murgai, Ravallion, & van de Walle, 2017). In Pakistan, Malik and Javed (2021) reported that skills acquisition programs enhanced the employability of beneficiaries but were hindered by a mismatch between the training content and labour market needs. These global experiences suggest that although employment initiatives can serve as temporary solutions, achieving their long-term effectiveness requires robust institutional frameworks, adequate funding, and alignment with broader economic policies.

In summary, empirical research suggests that the NDE has achieved moderate success in offering skills training, encouraging entrepreneurship, and facilitating the establishment of microenterprises. Nonetheless, these achievements are frequently undermined by challenges related to sustainability, weak institutional backing, insufficient funding, and inadequate monitoring systems. Comparative data from other developing nations support this conclusion, signifying that employment generation initiatives are often effective in tackling short-term unemployment but seldom provide lasting solutions without additional structural reforms. For Nigeria, this means that NDE interventions should be incorporated into comprehensive economic development strategies, involving industrialisation, financial inclusion, and governance reforms, to guarantee scalability and sustainability.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** This investigation employed a mixed-methods research strategy, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) initiatives in Abuja, Nigeria. The selection of mixed methods was driven by the necessity to quantify the impact of NDE programs on unemployment, in addition to examining the personal experiences and perceptions of program beneficiaries. Quantitative techniques enabled the assessment of employment outcomes, such as job creation and income generation. At the same time, qualitative approaches provided more profound insights into contextual difficulties, institutional obstacles, and the sustainability of the interventions.

**Study Area:** The research was carried out in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, which is home to the national headquarters of the NDE and acts as a central point for implementing various prominent employment programs. Abuja is a diverse city with a significant influx of job seekers, including university graduates, artisans, and migrants from rural areas. The selected area was significant because it reflects both urban and peri-urban environments, alongside its critical role in the implementation of national employment policies.

**Population and Sampling:** The focus population included beneficiaries of specific NDE programs in Abuja, namely the Vocational Skills Development Programme (VSD), the Graduate Attachment Programme (GAP), and the Small-Scale Enterprises Programme (SSE). Moreover, NDE officials and community stakeholders involved in program management were also included as participants. A multistage sampling approach was adopted, starting with purposive sampling to select three program clusters that are extensively offered in Abuja. Subsequently, random sampling was utilised to choose 250 beneficiaries across these programs to ensure a representative sample. In addition, 10 key informant interviews were conducted with NDE officials, program trainers, and local community leaders to supplement the survey data.

**Data Collection Methods:** Primary data were gathered using structured questionnaires, interview guides, and observations made during field visits. The questionnaire aimed to collect information on demographic characteristics, employment status before and after participation in the program, changes in income, and perceptions regarding program effectiveness. The interviews concentrated on institutional challenges, program sustainability, and how NDE initiatives align with broader employment policies. Secondary data were retrieved from NDE annual reports, publications from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and earlier academic studies on employment initiatives in Nigeria.

**Data Analysis:** Quantitative data obtained from the survey were coded and analysed with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were employed to summarise the characteristics of beneficiaries and employment outcomes. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and logistic regression, were used to explore the relationships between participation in NDE programs and employment outcomes, like job retention and income generation. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and trends from interviews and field notes. This combination of methods improved the reliability and validity of the findings.

**Validity and Reliability:** To guarantee the reliability of the instruments, the questionnaire was pre-tested with 20 individuals outside of the sample frame, and necessary modifications were made for clarity and consistency. Content validity was confirmed through an expert review of the instruments conducted by scholars specialising in development studies and employment policy. The triangulation of various data sources and methods further bolstered the validity of the research findings, providing a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness of NDE programs.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical approval was secured from the University of Abuja Research Ethics Committee before collecting data. Participants were informed about the study's aims, and informed consent was obtained prior to distributing questionnaires or conducting interviews. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity. The data were handled carefully and employed solely for academic purposes.

### 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The research sampled 250 beneficiaries from NDE programs in Abuja, including individuals from the Vocational Skills Development (VSD), Graduate Attachment Programme (GAP), and Small-Scale Enterprises (SSE). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	142	56.8
	Female	108	43.2
Age Group	18–25 years	78	31.2
	26–35 years	112	44.8

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Educational Qualification	36–45 years	45	18.0
	Above 45 years	15	6.0
	Secondary	68	27.2
	Diploma/OND	52	20.8
	First Degree/HND	95	38.0
	Postgraduate	35	14.0

The data indicate that a majority of the beneficiaries were young adults aged 26 to 35 and had higher levels of education, which corresponds with the NDE's emphasis on unemployed youth and graduates.

#### 4.2 Results from Logistic Regression

To further assess the impact of participating in the NDE on the chances of beneficiaries finding employment, a binary logistic regression model was conducted. The outcome variable was employment status (1 = employed/self-employed post-program participation, 0 = unemployed/underemployed). Independent variables included sex, age, educational attainment, type of program, and availability of credit.

**Table 2: Logistic Regression Estimates for Employment Outcomes of NDE Beneficiaries (N = 250)**

Predictor Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)	Sig. (p)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.412	0.198	4.32	1.51	0.038*
Age (26–35 years)	0.376	0.165	5.19	1.46	0.023*
Education (Postsecondary)	0.548	0.210	6.81	1.73	0.009**
Program Type (SSE = 1)	0.624	0.192	10.56	1.87	0.001***
Access to Credit (Yes = 1)	0.912	0.278	10.75	2.49	0.001***
Constant	-1.064	0.382	7.75	—	0.005**

\*Significant at 0.05 level; \*\*Significant at 0.01 level; \*\*\*Significant at 0.001 level.  
Model Fit Statistics:  $\chi^2$  (5, N = 250) = 58.34,  $p < 0.001$ ; Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.42$ .

**Interpretation of Results:** The findings from the logistic regression analysis indicate that various factors notably affected the likelihood of beneficiaries obtaining employment following their involvement in the NDE program:

**Gender:** Male beneficiaries showed a 1.5 times higher likelihood of securing employment compared to females ( $p < 0.05$ ). This observation aligns with previous studies indicating that women encounter more obstacles in business expansion due to cultural and financial limitations (Akinwale, 2021).

**Age:** Individuals aged 26–35 exhibited a 1.46 times greater chance of being employed in relation to younger or older participants, underscoring the adaptability of this age group to training and entrepreneurship.

**Education:** Those with postsecondary qualifications were 1.73 times more likely to find employment compared to individuals with lower educational levels, reinforcing the belief that higher educational attainment improves employability (World Bank, 2020).

**Program Type:** The Small-Scale Enterprises (SSE) Programme demonstrated the most potent positive effect, with participants being 1.87 times more likely to gain employment than those involved solely in vocational training. This indicates that initiatives focused on enterprise creation yield superior outcomes.

**Access to Credit:** Beneficiaries who had access to credit facilities were 2.49 times more likely to maintain their employment, emphasising the essential role of financial resources in supporting the sustainability of the program. This result corroborates the findings of Ogunyemi and Alabi (2022), who highlighted the critical gap between training and access to credit in Nigeria.

#### 4.3 Employment Outcomes of Beneficiaries

The quantitative assessment indicated that NDE programs have positively impacted the reduction of unemployment in Abuja. As illustrated in Table 3, there was a significant improvement in employment status following participation in NDE initiatives.

**Table 3: Employment Status of Beneficiaries Before and After NDE Programs**

Employment Status	Before (%)	After (%)
Unemployed	64.4	22.0
Self-employed	18.8	46.0

Employment Status	Before (%)	After (%)
Wage employed	9.6	24.8
Underemployed	7.2	7.2

Chi-square tests indicated a significant association between NDE participation and improved employment outcomes ( $\chi^2 = 46.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This supports the argument by Adewale and Yusuf (2021) that NDE programs enhance employability and microenterprise creation.

#### 4.4 Income and Livelihood Effects

The analysis also showed an upward trend in monthly income levels among beneficiaries. Average monthly income increased from ₦25,000 before participation to ₦62,000 after program completion. This suggests that NDE interventions contributed to improved livelihood security. Interview narratives supported these findings.

*“Before joining the NDE training, I was relying on small help from family. Now I run a tailoring shop and make enough to support myself and even train an apprentice,”* (Female, 29 years, VSD participant, Abuja).

However, some respondents reported challenges sustaining businesses due to limited access to credit facilities and high operational costs.

#### Institutional and Programmatic Challenges

Despite positive outcomes, respondents and interviewees highlighted persistent challenges that constrained the effectiveness of NDE programs. Key issues included inadequate funding, politicisation of beneficiary selection, weak monitoring, and lack of credit support.

*“The training was good, but after graduation, many of us could not expand our businesses because banks demanded collateral we could not provide. Without follow-up loans, the program ended halfway,”* (Male, 34 years, SSE participant, Abuja).

These findings align with those of Ekong (2020) and Ogunyemi & Alabi (2022), who highlighted the absence of credit linkages and weak institutional support as key barriers to sustainability.

#### 4.5 Triangulation of Findings

Triangulation between survey data, interviews, and document review revealed three critical insights:

1. NDE contributes to employment reduction: Both statistical evidence and narratives confirmed improved employment rates among beneficiaries.
2. Income and livelihood security improved modestly: Beneficiaries experienced higher earnings and better livelihood conditions, though gains were uneven across gender and program type.
3. Sustainability challenges persist: Weak institutional capacity, limited financing, and market integration gaps reduced the long-term effectiveness of interventions.

#### 4.6 Discussion

The Abuja experience aligns with findings from other developing contexts. For example, Ghana’s youth employment programs improved employability but were hindered by sustainability issues (Aryeetey & Baah-Boateng, 2021). Similarly, South Africa’s public works programs offered temporary relief without long-term absorption (McCord, 2019). These parallels suggest that employment initiatives, while impactful in the short term, require integration with industrial development and financial support mechanisms for sustained success.

Overall, the results demonstrate that NDE initiatives in Abuja achieved moderate success in reducing unemployment and improving livelihoods. However, the limitations identified reinforce the need for comprehensive reform, including better funding, post-training support, and stronger linkages with the private sector. This aligns with Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman’s (2019) framework on program effectiveness, which emphasises sustainability, contextual factors, and measurable long-term outcomes.

### 5. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) initiatives in reducing unemployment in Abuja, Nigeria, employing a mixed-methods approach. The results revealed that NDE programs contributed significantly to reducing unemployment, increasing self-employment, and improving income levels among beneficiaries. Logistic regression analysis further demonstrated that access to credit, education, and program type were strong predictors of employment success. At the same time, qualitative findings highlighted institutional weaknesses, including inadequate funding, poor monitoring, and limited post-training support. Overall, the evidence suggests that while NDE interventions provide short- to medium-term relief from unemployment, their long-term sustainability remains constrained by structural barriers.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Post-Training Support: Beneficiaries should be linked to microfinance institutions and government credit schemes to ensure the sustainability of enterprises.
2. Enhance Gender Inclusion: Special provisions should be made to address barriers faced by women in accessing employment opportunities, such as subsidised credit and gender-responsive training.
3. Improve Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Establish robust M&E systems to track outcomes, reduce politicisation, and ensure accountability in program delivery.
4. Integrate with Industrial Policy: NDE programs should be aligned with national industrialisation and entrepreneurship policies to create long-term employment opportunities.
5. Expand Private Sector Collaboration: Partnerships with the private sector could enhance the market relevance of training and improve job placement opportunities.
6. Adequate Funding: The Government should increase budgetary allocation and ensure the timely disbursement of funds to strengthen program coverage and sustainability.

## 7. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study makes several contributions to the field of development and employment policy:

- i. It provides empirical evidence on the measurable outcomes of NDE programs in Abuja, showing both achievements and limitations.
- ii. By employing logistic regression, the study identifies critical predictors of program success, such as access to credit and program type, thus offering policy insights.
- iii. It adds to the comparative literature by situating Nigerian experiences within global debates on the effectiveness of employment initiatives.
- iv. Through the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, the study demonstrates the importance of triangulated evidence in evaluating employment programs in developing countries.

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