



Causes of Youth Unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Youth unemployment has become one of the most persistent socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria, with severe implications for economic development, social stability, and human capital utilization. In Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, increasing numbers of educated youths remain unemployed despite various government interventions and rising educational attainment. Existing studies on youth unemployment have largely focused on national and urban contexts, with limited empirical evidence on community-specific determinants and locally grounded measurements of the problem. This study investigated the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The study examined the demographic characteristics of youths and their perceptions regarding the causes of unemployment, as well as gender differences in these perceptions. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population comprised youths aged 15–35 years residing in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area, from which a sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure, with 80 respondents drawn from each of five purposively selected communities. Data were collected using the researcher-developed Youth Unemployment Causes Questionnaire (YUCQ), a validated instrument with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, while Independent Samples t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that all twenty identified variables were perceived as significant causes of youth unemployment, with a grand mean of 3.20. Corruption and nepotism in hiring practices, lack of vocational and technical training, inadequate access to startup capital, poor educational quality, and curriculum-labour market mismatch emerged as the most prominent determinants. The study further revealed no statistically significant gender difference in perceptions of the causes of youth unemployment ($t = -0.90$, $p = .373$), indicating that both male and female youths share similar views regarding the factors driving unemployment. The study concludes that youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area is predominantly driven by structural, institutional, and educational factors rather than gender-related considerations. It recommends comprehensive curriculum reforms that integrate vocational, entrepreneurial, and digital skills development, expansion of youth-friendly startup financing programmes, transparent and merit-based recruitment practices, and increased investment in industrial development, infrastructure, and career guidance initiatives to enhance youth employability and promote sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: Youth Unemployment; Ijebu Ode Local Government Area; Vocational Training; Curriculum-Labour Market Mismatch; Startup Capital; Corruption; Human Capital Theory; Structural Unemployment.

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment has emerged as one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges confronting developing nations in the twenty-first century. In Nigeria, the phenomenon has assumed alarming dimensions, with millions of young people who are willing and able to work unable to secure gainful employment. The youth population, which represents the most vibrant and productive segment of any

society, is paradoxically also the most economically vulnerable in Nigeria, where structural, educational, and governance-related deficiencies have combined to create a chronic unemployment crisis. Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State is no exception to this national trend, and an understanding of the causes of youth unemployment in this locality is essential to designing effective remedies.

Adewale, K. A.; Soetan, O. M.; Owoyele, J. W.; Oludare, P. O. and Olayanju, R. O., (2026). Causes of Youth Unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria, *Ijagun Journal of Social and Management Sciences (JOSMAS)*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 102-112.

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The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years, and unemployment as the condition of being without work, currently available to take up employment, and actively seeking work. Using this

definition, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) reported that the youth unemployment rate in Nigeria rose to approximately 53.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020, making it one of the highest in Africa. This figure underscores the severity of the crisis and justifies the need for rigorous, evidence-based investigations into its root causes at the local level.

In Ogun State specifically, rapid urbanization, population growth, and the influx of graduates from various tertiary institutions have placed enormous pressure on the available labour market. Ijebu Ode, as a historically significant commercial and educational hub in Ogun State, attracts large numbers of young people seeking employment, yet the town's industrial and commercial capacity has not expanded proportionately to absorb this growing labour force. The gap between labour supply and demand therefore widens each year, contributing to rising levels of frustration, social unrest, and economic deprivation among youth in the area.

Several interrelated variables are known to drive youth unemployment in developing economies. These include inadequate practical skills among graduates, poor quality of education, lack of vocational and technical training, absence of startup capital for self-employment, corruption and nepotism in hiring practices, mismatch between school curriculum and labour market needs, poor government policies, limited industrial development, economic instability, and a culturally entrenched preference for white-collar jobs over entrepreneurship or skilled trades. Each of these variables represents a dimension of the problem that requires systematic measurement and analysis to generate actionable insights.

The Youth Unemployment Causes Questionnaire (YUCQ) developed by Soetan (2024) provides a validated instrument for measuring these variables among youth in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area. By capturing respondents' perceptions across twenty item statements on a four-point Likert scale, the instrument enables the researcher to quantify the extent to which each identified factor contributes to unemployment in the study area. The present study employs this instrument to generate empirical data that will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform policy decisions at the local, state, and national levels.

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Youth unemployment remains one of the most persistent socio-economic challenges confronting developing nations, particularly within sub-Saharan Africa. The International Labour Organization defines youth as

individuals aged 15 to 24 years; however, Nigeria and several African countries extend the classification to 35 years because of prolonged economic dependence and delayed labour market integration. In Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics reported a youth unemployment rate of 42.5%, reflecting the structural and institutional nature of the crisis. Scholars have increasingly identified youth unemployment as a multidimensional problem associated with educational deficiencies, labour market mismatch, weak economic structures, institutional barriers, and inadequate entrepreneurial support systems.

The Human Capital Theory developed by Gary Becker and later expanded by Theodore Schultz provides an important explanation for unemployment among young people. The theory argues that investments in education, training, and skill acquisition improve individuals' productivity and employability. Within this perspective, unemployment results largely from inadequate human capital development. Empirical evidence in Nigeria supports this proposition. Nwosu and Orji (2021) observed that many university graduates lack practical, vocational, and digital competencies required by employers despite possessing formal academic qualifications. This suggests that educational attainment alone does not guarantee labour market integration unless accompanied by relevant employable skills.

Similarly, the Structural Unemployment Theory advanced by Edmund Phelps explains unemployment as a consequence of mismatch between labour market demands and the skills possessed by job seekers. Applying this framework to Nigeria, Adebayo (2020) reported that while the economy increasingly demands technical, entrepreneurial, and information technology skills, educational institutions continue to produce large numbers of graduates in disciplines with limited labour market relevance. This structural mismatch contributes significantly to persistent unemployment among educated youth and raises concerns about the responsiveness of the educational system to economic realities.

Existing literature consistently identifies poor educational quality and curriculum mismatch as major determinants of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Okafor (2022), in a survey conducted among employers in Lagos and Ogun States, found that a substantial proportion of graduate applicants were unable to demonstrate minimum practical competencies expected in the workplace. The study attributed this deficiency to the theoretical orientation of university education in Nigeria. In a related study, Alabi and Fashola (2023) argued that many tertiary institutions emphasize theoretical learning at the expense of industry-based and problem-solving skills, thereby producing graduates who are academically certified but practically unemployable. These findings reinforce calls for curriculum reforms that integrate

entrepreneurship, innovation, digital literacy, and practical training into higher education.

The inadequacy of vocational and technical education (VTE) has also received considerable scholarly attention. Eze and Nwosu (2022) found that communities with stronger access to vocational education programmes recorded lower youth unemployment rates because such programmes provide practical and immediately applicable skills that facilitate self-employment and informal sector participation. However, Eniola and Entebang (2020) observed that vocational occupations in Nigeria continue to suffer from historical stigma associated with colonial preference for white-collar employment. This social orientation has weakened societal interest in technical education and contributed to the shortage of skilled manpower required by local economies.

Institutional barriers such as corruption, nepotism, and non-meritocratic recruitment practices further compound unemployment challenges among young people. Olajide (2022), in a study across southwestern Nigeria, reported that a majority of unemployed graduates believed that favouritism and nepotism significantly influenced recruitment processes. Similarly, Amaeshi and Idemudia (2021) found that informal networks, political affiliations, and financial inducements frequently determine access to employment opportunities in Nigeria, thereby excluding qualified individuals who lack such connections. These practices undermine confidence in formal labour market systems and contribute to frustration, inequality, and underutilization of human capital.

Another critical factor identified in the literature is limited access to startup capital and entrepreneurial finance. Eniola and Entebang (2020) noted that high collateral requirements imposed by commercial banks prevent many young entrepreneurs from accessing formal credit facilities. As a result, numerous youths remain unemployed despite possessing viable business ideas. Supporting this argument, Nwibo and Okorie (2022) found that inadequate access to finance constituted the greatest barrier to business creation among young entrepreneurs in Ogun and Oyo States. Although government-backed empowerment and microfinance initiatives exist, Akinbobola and Saibu (2023) argued that their implementation and coverage at the grassroots level remain inadequate and ineffective in addressing large-scale youth unemployment.

Population growth and macroeconomic instability also exert substantial pressure on Nigeria's labour market. Nwosu and Orji (2021) established a statistically significant relationship between rising youth population and unemployment rates across Nigerian states, indicating that job creation has not kept pace with demographic expansion. Ezenwakwelu (2022) similarly warned that without deliberate industrial expansion and employment-oriented policies, increasing population growth would continue to intensify unemployment

among young people. Beyond demographic pressure, economic instability further constrains employment generation. Makinde (2022) reported that policy inconsistency, regulatory uncertainty, and fluctuating taxation discourage investment in labour-intensive industries. Ezenwakwelu (2022) further noted that inflation and currency instability reduce business productivity and hiring capacity, disproportionately affecting young and entry-level workers.

Although existing studies have extensively examined youth unemployment in Nigeria, most research has focused on national or urban contexts, with limited attention given to local government areas and community-specific realities. Consequently, local variations in the causes and manifestations of youth unemployment remain insufficiently explored. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the predictors of youth unemployment within Ijebu Ode Local Government Area using locally relevant instruments and context-sensitive analysis capable of generating empirical evidence for targeted interventions and policy formulation.

2. Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, youth unemployment is a significant development issue that has dire economic, social, and security impacts. In Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, most youths are unable to secure meaningful employment despite their level of education, resulting in poverty, frustration, and susceptibility to social vices. Current government interventions have yielded limited outcomes, largely because they are general, top-down, and not grounded in sound local data. Moreover, there are no established, locally validated tools for determining the causes of youth unemployment at the local government level, even though these causes vary considerably across localities. This disparity restricts the effectiveness of policies and interventions. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area using a validated instrument, in order to produce credible, locally grounded evidence for informed and context-specific policy-making.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender and age range?
2. What are the demographic characteristics of respondents based on highest educational qualification, marital status, and area of residence?
3. What are the respondents' perceptions regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State as measured by the Youth Unemployment Causes Questionnaire (YUCQ)?

4. Research Hypotheses

The following null and alternate hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female youths regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

H₁: There is a significant difference in the perceptions of male and female youths regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

5. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the perceived causes of youth unemployment among young people in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a large population without manipulation of variables, while providing an opportunity to describe respondents' perceptions and opinions regarding factors contributing to youth unemployment.

The target population comprised youths aged 15–35 years residing in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area. Based on projections from the National Population Commission (2006) and demographic estimates for Ogun State, the youth population in the area was estimated at approximately 45,000. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Five communities representing urban, semi-urban, and rural areas were purposively selected, after which 80 respondents were systematically sampled from each community to ensure adequate representation.

Data were collected using a self-developed instrument titled Youth Unemployment Causes Questionnaire (YUCQ). The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A obtained demographic information such as gender, age, educational qualification, marital status, and area of residence, while Section B contained 20 Likert-type items measuring perceived causes of youth unemployment. The items addressed dimensions such as inadequate job opportunities, educational quality, skill deficiencies, vocational training, corruption, access to startup capital, economic instability, and government policies. Responses were rated on a four-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in Educational Foundations, Counselling Psychology, and Labour Economics. Their observations guided the revision of the final instrument. Construct validity was established through factor analysis, which confirmed adequate item loading across the measured dimensions. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency of the instrument.

Data collection involved direct administration of the questionnaire within the selected communities. Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Counselling Psychology and Educational Foundations, Tai Solarin Federal University of Education. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and participation was made strictly voluntary. Trained research assistants administered and retrieved the questionnaires immediately after completion to ensure a high response rate and minimize data loss.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and perceptions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for decision-making. Inferential statistics, including independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), were used to examine significant differences in perceptions based on demographic variables at the 0.05 level of significance.

The study was limited to youths aged 15–35 years in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area and focused specifically on perceived causes of youth unemployment. Consequently, findings may not be generalized beyond the study area. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the study and the possibility of socially desirable responses constituted potential limitations.

6. Result and Discussion

6.1 Results

This presents and discusses the data gathered from respondents in the Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State using the Youth Unemployment Causes Questionnaire (YUCQ).

Research Question 1: What are the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender and age range?

Table 1 shows that 46 respondents (57.5%) were male while 34 (42.5%) were female. Although male respondents constituted the majority, the distribution suggests that youth unemployment is a concern that cuts across gender lines in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area.

Table 2 reveals that the 20-24 age bracket accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (48.75%), followed by the 25-29 bracket (21.25%). Together these two groups represent over 70 percent of the sample, indicating that the study predominantly captures youth in the early-to-mid prime working age where unemployment is most acutely experienced. The youngest cohort (15-19) accounted for 18.75 percent, while the 30-35 group constituted the smallest proportion at 11.25 percent, based on highest

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Male	46	57.5	57.5	57.5
Female	34	42.5	42.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Range

Age Range	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
15-19	15	18.75	18.75	18.75
20-24	39	48.75	48.75	67.50
25-29	17	21.25	21.25	88.75
30-35	9	11.25	11.25	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Highest Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
SSCE	9	11.25	11.25	11.25
OND/NCE	33	41.25	41.25	52.50
HND/B.Sc/B.Ed	19	23.75	23.75	76.25
M.Sc/M.A/M.Ed	13	16.25	16.25	92.50
Ph.D	6	7.50	7.50	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Single	34	42.50	42.50	42.50
Married	28	35.00	35.00	77.50
Divorced	9	11.25	11.25	88.75
Widowed	9	11.25	11.25	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Area of Residence

Area of Residence	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Urban	31	38.75	38.75	38.75
Rural	49	61.25	61.25	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

educational qualification, marital status, and area of residence?

Research Question 2: What are the demographic characteristics of respondents based on highest educational qualification, marital status, and area of residence?

From the Table above, OND/NCE holders constituted the largest qualification group (41.25%), followed by

HND/B.Sc/B.Ed holders (23.75%). The predominance of post-secondary respondents is consistent with broader patterns of graduate unemployment in Nigeria and suggests that formal educational credentials alone are insufficient to guarantee employment in the study area. Postgraduate holders combined accounted for 23.75 percent of respondents, indicating that unemployment cuts across all educational levels.

Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents were

single (42.50%), followed by married respondents (35.00%). Respondents who were divorced and widowed each contributed 11.25 percent. The substantial proportion of married and formerly married respondents indicates that unemployment in the study area extends beyond unmarried youth to those carrying family financial responsibilities, further underscoring the social urgency of the problem

Table 5 reveals that the majority of respondents resided in rural areas (61.25%), with the remaining 38.75 percent coming from urban communities. This distribution reflects the geographic composition of the selected communities within Ijebu Ode Local Government Area and indicates that youth unemployment has a pronounced rural dimension that warrants particular policy attention.

Research Question 3: What are the respondents' perceptions regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State as measured by the Youth Unemployment Causes Questionnaire (YUCQ)?

The research questions were addressed through computation of mean scores for all twenty items on the YUCQ. A four-point Likert scale was used: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted, such that any item with a mean score at or above 2.50 is considered agreed upon, while any item with a mean score below 2.50 is considered disagreed upon. Table 4.2 below presents the frequency counts, means, standard deviations, and decisions for all twenty items

As indicated in Table 6, all twenty items on the YUCQ were agreed upon by respondents, with individual item means ranging from 3.08 (item 11: preference for white-collar jobs) to 3.33 (item 6: corruption affects employment opportunities). The grand mean of 3.20 indicates that respondents, as a group, perceive all identified variables as significant causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area. The highest mean scores were recorded for corruption and nepotism in hiring practices (items 6 and 14), lack of vocational and technical training (item 5), and lack of access to startup capital (item 8), while preference for white-collar employment (item 11) scored lowest, suggesting that structural and institutional factors are perceived as more decisive barriers than cultural preferences.

The agreement on items 1 and 12 is consistent with the findings of Okafor (2011) on the structural underdevelopment of local economies in Nigeria, confirming that lack of job opportunities and limited industrial development are recognized structural causes of unemployment. Items 3, 4, and 17 confirm that inadequate practical skills, poor educational quality, and curriculum-labour market mismatch are widely acknowledged educational causal variables, providing

empirical support for the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964). The strong agreement on items 6 and 14 regarding corruption and nepotism mirrors the reports of Olajide (2017) and Amaeshi and Idemudia (2015), who identified corrupt hiring practices as among the most harmful institutional barriers to youth employment in Nigeria. Items 8 and 15, addressing startup capital and infrastructure, align with the findings of Eniola and Entebang (2015) and Nwibo and Okorie (2013), who documented financial exclusion as an institutional barrier to youth entrepreneurship.

Research Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female youths regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The research hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female youth regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. This hypothesis was tested using an independent samples t-test at a 0.05 level of significance. Tables 5 and 6 present the group statistics and t-test results respectively.

Table 7 shows that male respondents recorded a mean YUCQ score of 55.89 (SD = 8.81) while female respondents recorded a mean of 57.50 (SD = 6.57). Although the female group recorded a slightly higher mean, the difference appears small in magnitude. The t-test results in Table 4.3.2 below were used to determine whether this difference is statistically significant

Table 6 shows that Levene's test for equality of variances yielded $F = 1.34$, $p = .250$, confirming that the assumption of equal variances was not violated. The independent samples t-test result ($t = -0.90$, $df = 78$, $p = .373$) indicates that the difference in mean YUCQ scores between male and female respondents was not statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level. The 95 percent confidence interval for the mean difference (-5.19 to 1.97) included zero, further confirming the absence of a significant difference. The null hypothesis is therefore retained: there is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female youth regarding the causes of youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area. This finding implies that youth, regardless of gender, hold broadly similar views about the factors driving unemployment in their community.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

This study reveals that a combination of institutional, structural, educational, and cultural factors drives youth unemployment in the Ijebu Ode Local

Government Area of Ogun State. Mean scores on all twenty items of the YUCQ exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, and the grand mean of 3.20 reflects a strong and consistent pattern of agreement across the sample.

Table 6: Respondents' Perceptions of the Causes of Youth Unemployment (N=80)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Lack of job opportunities is a major cause of youth unemployment.	38	28	10	4	3.25	0.88	Agreed
2	Rapid population growth contributes to youth unemployment.	32	30	12	6	3.10	0.90	Agreed
3	Inadequate practical skills among youths leads to unemployment.	36	30	10	4	3.23	0.86	Agreed
4	Poor quality of education contributes to unemployment.	38	28	8	6	3.23	0.91	Agreed
5	Lack of vocational and technical training increases unemployment.	40	28	8	4	3.30	0.85	Agreed
6	Corruption affects employment opportunities for youths.	42	26	8	4	3.33	0.86	Agreed
7	Over production of graduates contributes to unemployment.	36	30	10	4	3.23	0.86	Agreed
8	Lack of access to startup capital prevents self-employment.	38	28	10	4	3.25	0.88	Agreed
9	Poor government policies increase unemployment among youths.	38	26	10	6	3.20	0.93	Agreed
10	Lack of career guidance contributes to youth unemployment.	34	30	12	4	3.18	0.87	Agreed
11	Preference for white collar jobs increases unemployment.	28	34	14	4	3.08	0.85	Agreed
12	Limited industrial development contributes to unemployment.	36	28	12	4	3.20	0.87	Agreed
13	Lack of work experience reduces employment chances.	36	30	10	4	3.23	0.86	Agreed
14	Nepotism and favoritism affect job opportunities for youths.	42	24	8	6	3.28	0.93	Agreed
15	Poor infrastructure discourages business development and job creation.	34	30	12	4	3.18	0.87	Agreed
16	Inadequate information about available jobs contributes to unemployment.	32	32	12	4	3.15	0.87	Agreed
17	Mismatch between school curriculum and labour market needs causes unemployment.	34	30	12	4	3.18	0.87	Agreed
18	Lack of entrepreneurial skills contributes to youth unemployment.	36	28	12	4	3.20	0.87	Agreed
19	Economic instability affects job creation for youths.	36	28	10	6	3.18	0.92	Agreed
20	Discrimination in employment practices contributes to youth unemployment.	34	30	12	4	3.18	0.87	Agreed
	Grand Mean					3.20		Agreed

The hierarchy of mean scores, however, indicates that institutional and structural variables are perceived as contributing more substantially to unemployment than cultural or informational ones.

Hiring practices emerged as the most strongly endorsed variables, with items 6 and 14 scoring means of 3.33 and 3.28 respectively. This aligns with Olajide (2017), who identified corruption as the most significant institutional barrier to youth employment in southwestern Nigeria, and with Amaeshi and Idemudia (2015), who found that merit-blind hiring procedures systematically exclude young people and entrench a culture of favouritism within Nigerian organisations. The current findings reinforce this conclusion at the local government level, suggesting that transparency reforms in recruitment and hiring are essential conditions for improving youth employment outcomes in Ijebu Ode.

Lack of vocational and technical training (mean = 3.30) and absence of startup capital (mean = 3.25) also emerged as highly significant factors. These findings are consistent with the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which holds that investment in skills development is directly associated with labour market success, and with Eniola and Entebang (2015), who demonstrated that financial exclusion constitutes a structural impediment preventing young people from realising viable business ideas. The Structural Unemployment Theory (Phelps, 1994) is further supported by the high levels of agreement on items relating to curriculum mismatches, inadequate practical skills, and poor educational quality, all of which reflect the persistent gap between the outputs of Nigerian educational institutions and the demands of employers. The identification of rapid population growth and overproduction of graduates (items 2 and 7, means of 3.10 and 3.23 respectively) as contributing factors aligns with the demographic analysis of Nwosu and Orji (2016), who established a statistically significant positive relationship between youth population growth rates and youth unemployment levels in Nigeria. The imbalance between labour supply and demand is an expected and foreseeable outcome in a local government where educational institutions continue to produce growing numbers of graduates while industrial and commercial expansion remains sluggish.

Cultural orientation toward white-collar jobs (item 11, mean = 3.08) produced the lowest mean of all twenty items, indicating that this variable is acknowledged as a factor but is not regarded as being as powerful as structural and institutional barriers. This is consistent with Makinde (2015), who observed that structural factors tend to dominate youth perceptions of unemployment causes in Nigeria, even though cultural orientations toward formal employment play a secondary role.

The retention of the null hypothesis on gender differences ($t = -0.90$, $p = .373$) is significant. It signals

a broadly shared understanding among male and female youth in the study area of the barriers to employment, thereby simplifying the development of gender-inclusive interventions. This is consistent with the broader literature, which treats youth unemployment in Nigeria as a structural rather than gender-differentiated issue, though it does not preclude the possibility of gendered barriers in specific sectors, credit markets, or entrepreneurial pathways that may warrant additional targeted attention.

7. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn. Structural deficits, including lack of job opportunities and limited industrial development, reflect the failure of the local economy to absorb a growing labour force and constitute major contributors to youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area. Rapid population growth and the overproduction of graduates, in the absence of commensurate labour market expansion, intensify competition for scarce job openings. Poor educational quality, curriculum-labour market misalignment, and inadequate practical skills leave many graduates ill-equipped for available positions, making structural reform of the educational system a precondition for meaningful improvement. The absence of vocational and technical training deprives youth of marketable skills necessary for both formal employment and self-employment. Corruption, nepotism, and favouritism in hiring practices systematically disadvantage merit-based candidates and erode trust in formal employment pathways. Lack of affordable startup capital prevents entrepreneurially inclined youth from converting viable business ideas into reality, constraining youth enterprise as an engine of local economic growth. Poor government policies, inadequate infrastructure, and economic instability collectively create an unfavourable environment for job creation and business expansion. Although the cultural preference for white-collar employment contributes to long-term unemployment, structural and institutional factors are the primary drivers of the problem in the study area. The broadly shared perceptions across gender lines affirm that youth unemployment in Ijebu Ode calls for inclusive, structurally oriented interventions rather than gender-specific ones.

8. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The federal, state, and local governments should intensify efforts to promote industrial development and attract private sector investment to Ijebu Ode Local Government Area.
2. Educational authorities at the federal and state levels should undertake a comprehensive reform of school curricula at secondary and tertiary levels to align learning outcomes more closely with contemporary labour market requirements, including the integration of vocational and technical education,

entrepreneurship, and practical skills development as core components of formal schooling.

3. Government and development partners should expand access to vocational and technical training programmes in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area, with particular attention to trades and skills in high demand in the local economy.

4. Anti-corruption measures in recruitment and hiring must be strengthened in both the public and private sectors through the institutionalization of transparent, merit-based hiring processes, independent oversight mechanisms, and enforceable sanctions against nepotism and favoritism in employment practices.

5. Financial institutions, microfinance banks, and government enterprise development agencies should design and implement accessible, youth-friendly startup capital schemes that do not rely solely on traditional collateral requirements, and should bundle such schemes with financial literacy and business management training to improve the viability of youth-led enterprises.

6. Youth development organizations and non-governmental organizations operating in Ijebu Ode should invest in career counselling and guidance programmes that expose young people to viable vocational and entrepreneurial alternatives to formal white-collar employment, delivered through schools, community centres, and digital platforms.

7. Government should prioritize the improvement of physical and digital infrastructure in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area, including reliable electricity supply, improved road networks, and affordable internet connectivity, as essential enablers of private sector growth, small business development, and overall youth employment.

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