YOUTH EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES AND THEIR IMPACT ON CRIME REDUCTION IN BENUE STATE

BY

ANDOR SESUGH

MATRIC NUMBER:20/15SCSOO2

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, THOMAS ADEWUMI UNIVERSITY,OKO KWARA STATE. IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN CRIMINOLOGY & SECURITY STUDIES

August, 2024.

DECLARATION PAGE

I, ANDOR SESUGH DANIEL do hereby declare that this work, titled:**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES AND THEIR IMPACT ON CRIME REDUCTION IN BENUE STATE** is a result of my research effort carried out in the Department of Criminology & Security Studies, Faculty of Social Science, Thomas Adewumi University under the supervision of Mr. Akano Oluwatobi. I further wish to declare that it has not been submitted for the award of any other Degree or Diploma in any other University or Institution of Higher Learning except where due acknowledgements have been made on citation.

_____   **Date:…………………...**

ANDOR Sesugh Daniel

CERTIFICATION PAGE

We certify that this research project titled: **Youth empowerment initiatives and their impact on crime reduction in Benue State** has been duly presented by Andor Sesugh Daniel **(20/15SCS002)** of the Department of Criminology & Security Studies, Thomas Adewumi University oko, Kwara State

Mr. Akano Oluwatobi

……………………………   ……………………….

                                                                                Date

       Project Supervisor

………………………………….   ……………………….

                                                                                 Date

       External Examiner

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty and all those who love the education of an African child.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT -

I am most grateful to Almighty God for completion of this work. It was quite a task putting this research work together; I thank God profoundly for all those who contributed to the success of this work.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Mr & Mrs Andor my parents, your moral, financial and spiritual support to my academic success was genuine and inborn and also for always encouraging me and always advising me that I can carry out this project and not to relent I am really grateful to them may GOD bless you.

I would like to express special thanks to HOD DR. JJ Olorunmola, for his time and efforts that he provided for me throughout the study year. Your useful advice and suggestions were really helpful in enabling me to complete the project. In this aspect, I am eternally grateful to you.

I would also like to show gratitude to my project supervisor Mr. Akano Oluwatobi for his time, efforts and advice towards me in the course of carrying out this project all your efforts have been very useful and apperciated I pray GOD continues to bless you sir.

 It may not go complete without mentioning my school mates and friends Adejumo Adenike, Olushola Olubusola Oluwasheyi, my best regards for your special assistance. You truly helped me in ways that I will never forget. Thank you all.

I would like to acknowledge that this project was completed entirely by me and not by someone else.

Andor Sesugh Daniel

20/15SCS002

TABLE OF CONTENT

Content Page

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

ABSTRACT

Youth crime remains a significant challenge in many regions, often exacerbated by socioeconomic factors such as unemployment and lack of educational opportunities. In Benue State, various youth empowerment initiatives have been implemented to address these issues, aiming to reduce crime and promote socio-economic development. This study critically examines the effectiveness of these initiatives within four wards of Markurdi Local Government Area: Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, and North Bank. The study employs a triangulated research methodology, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Qualitative data was gathered through key informant interviews and in-depth interviews, involving 20 participants selected via purposive and clustered sampling techniques. The interviews focused on community leaders, religious leaders, youth empowerment program officials, and beneficiaries of these programs. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires distributed to 351 residents of the four wards, who were selected using simple random sampling. These respondents were permanent residents, aged 18 and above, who had lived in the community for at least five years. The questionnaires were designed to assess the demographic characteristics, the existence and impact of youth empowerment initiatives, the challenges faced, and potential strategies for enhancing their effectiveness.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis for the qualitative data and SPSS for the quantitative data. The findings reveal a complex relationship between youth empowerment initiatives and crime reduction, highlighting both successes and areas needing improvement. The study concludes with recommendations for policy adjustments and the enhancement of program implementation strategies to better address youth crime in Benue State.

Keywords: Youth Crime, Empowerment Initiatives, Markurdi, Benue State, Qualitative and Quantitative Research, Crime Reduction

Word Count: 253 words

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background To The Study

Youth empowerment has emerged as a pivotal developmental strategy in many countries, particularly those with large youth populations, such as Nigeria. In a nation where the youth demographic constitutes a significant portion of the population, empowering young people with the necessary skills, resources, and opportunities is crucial for fostering economic growth, social stability, and national development. Youth empowerment in Nigeria encompasses a broad range of dimensions, including educational, economic, social, and political aspects. The ultimate goal of these initiatives is to enable young people to gain control over their lives, fostering self-reliance, active citizenship, and meaningful participation in society. Various programs have been implemented at both the national and state levels, with the Nigerian government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies playing key roles. For instance, the National Youth Policy emphasizes the importance of education, skills acquisition, and entrepreneurship as critical areas for youth empowerment (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019).

Studies have shown that effective youth empowerment can lead to significant socio-economic benefits. According to Akinyemi and Olatunji (2022), well-designed empowerment programs improve participants' employability, increase their income potential, and enhance their overall quality of life. These programs not only provide immediate economic benefits but also contribute to long-term social stability by reducing the factors that contribute to crime. However, despite the clear benefits, these programs often face considerable challenges that hinder their effectiveness. Inadequate funding, limited reach, and inconsistent implementation are some of the common issues. Furthermore, Okafor and Okafor (2021) highlight the problem of inadequate infrastructure, which hampers the effective delivery of training and other essential services.

In the context of Benue State, youth empowerment programs are increasingly recognized as essential tools for reducing crime. The state has experienced significant socio-economic challenges, with crime being one of the most pressing issues. High crime rates among the youth in Benue State are often attributed to factors such as unemployment, poverty, and a lack of education. The state's unique socio-political landscape, characterized by ethnic tensions and political instability, further exacerbates these issues. Research indicates that socio-economic deprivation often pushes young people towards criminal activities as a means of survival or as an expression of frustration (Nwankwo et al., 2023). Empowerment initiatives in Benue State, therefore, aim to provide young people with the skills and opportunities needed for gainful employment, thereby reducing the likelihood of their involvement in crime. For example, the Benue State Youth Empowerment Scheme (BSYES) is one of the flagship programs that offer vocational training in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and information and communication technology (ICT). This initiative aims to enhance the employability of young people and foster entrepreneurship, which is seen as a proactive approach to mitigate the socio-economic conditions that often lead to criminal behavior.

One of the critical challenges faced by youth empowerment programs in Benue State is the disparity in access between urban and rural youths. While urban youths often have more opportunities to participate in these programs, rural youths are frequently left out due to factors such as geographical isolation, lack of infrastructure, and limited information. This disparity creates a situation where the benefits of empowerment programs are unevenly distributed, which can perpetuate socio-economic inequalities and limit the overall impact of these initiatives.

The issue of funding is another significant challenge that limits the scope and effectiveness of youth empowerment programs in Benue State. Many of these programs rely heavily on government funding, which is often insufficient to meet the needs of all participants. The lack of adequate funding not only restricts the number of youths who can benefit from these programs but also affects the quality of training and support provided. For instance, the BSYES program, while successful in many respects, has struggled with limited resources, which has constrained its ability to reach more young people and expand its offerings.

Moreover, poor coordination and insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms further complicate the implementation of youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State. Ochoga and Ejeh (2023) report that many of these initiatives suffer from a lack of clear objectives, fragmented implementation strategies, and inadequate oversight. This makes it difficult to accurately assess the impact of these programs and to identify areas for improvement. Without robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, it is challenging to measure the long-term effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives and to ensure that they are achieving their intended outcomes. Despite these challenges, the potential of youth empowerment to reduce crime and foster socio-economic development in Benue State is significant. The existing initiatives have made important strides in providing opportunities for skill development and economic participation. By equipping young people with the skills needed for employment and entrepreneurship, these programs help to address some of the root causes of crime, such as unemployment and poverty. For instance, Adebayo (2021) found that vocational training programs significantly reduce the propensity for criminal behavior among participants, as they offer practical skills and economic opportunities that divert young people from criminal activities.

However, to fully realize the benefits of these programs, there is a need for increased funding, better coordination among stakeholders, and more robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the government, NGOs, and the private sector. By improving the design and implementation of youth empowerment initiatives, it is possible to create a sustainable model that can effectively reduce crime and promote positive socio-economic outcomes in Benue State.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of these initiatives and to identify best practices that can be scaled and replicated across similar contexts. Understanding the factors that contribute to the success or failure of youth empowerment programs in Benue State will be crucial for informing future policy and practice. This research will not only contribute to the academic literature on youth empowerment and crime reduction but also provide practical insights for policymakers and practitioners working in this field.

In Nigeria, the youth population plays a critical role in the country's development and security. Young people are often seen as the drivers of social and economic progress, but they are also vulnerable to the challenges of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), over 50% of crimes in Nigeria between 2000 and 2019 were committed by youths. This statistic underscores the urgent need for effective youth empowerment programs that can address the root causes of crime and provide young people with viable alternatives.

Crime, defined as any action deemed illegal that jeopardizes the peace and cohesion of a community, has far-reaching consequences for both individuals and society. In Benue State, the high rate of crime among youths is particularly concerning, with offenses such as fraud, kidnapping, armed robbery, and political violence being prevalent. These crimes not only disrupt economic activities and social peace but also drain significant government resources allocated to combating insecurity (Okoye, 2019). Recognizing that youth involvement in crime is often driven by socio-economic factors, Nwokocha (2019) argues that a practical approach to crime reduction must include robust youth empowerment programs. These programs should aim to equip young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities they need to achieve self-sufficiency and to contribute positively to their communities.

Empowerment initiatives can help to reduce the appeal of criminal activities by providing young people with alternative pathways to success. To address the issue of crime in Nigeria, the Federal Government has implemented various empowerment initiatives targeting the youth population. These programs, which have been introduced at different times, aim to equip young people with skills and resources that can help them to become economically self-sufficient and to avoid criminal behavior. Some of these initiatives include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), and the Youth Enterprise with New Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN). Additionally, the government, through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), has established Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs), which provide training and support for young entrepreneurs.

In Benue State, several initiatives have been implemented with the specific goal of creating employment opportunities for young people and reducing their involvement in criminal activities. For example, in 2017, the State Government introduced a Skill Acquisition Programme aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number , which aims to promote decent work and economic growth. This program provided one-year free vocational training in various fields, such as tailoring, hairdressing, barbing, and aluminum works apprenticeship, with financial assistance provided to help participants start their own businesses (Amoke, 2018). Another notable initiative is the Benue Skill-Up Project, launched in 2018 in collaboration with the iCreate Agency. This project aimed to empower over 500 youths in the state through technical and vocational skills training. The project focused on delivering skilled training in areas such as welding, carpentry, tiling, plumbing, electrical installation, and wallpaper installation, among others (Onusi, 2021). These initiatives are examples of how targeted empowerment programs can create tangible opportunities for young people and contribute to the reduction of crime.

However, despite these efforts, the challenges facing youth empowerment programs in Benue State remain significant. The success of these initiatives depends not only on their design and implementation but also on the broader socio-economic and political context in which they operate. Ensuring the sustainability of these programs will require ongoing investment, continuous evaluation, and adaptive strategies that can respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

This research explores the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction in Benue State, providing an in-depth analysis of how these programs influence youth behavior, opportunities, and societal outcomes. By examining the successes and challenges of these initiatives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of youth empowerment in promoting.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Crime refers to any illegal action punishable by a governing body. Such actions, known as criminal offenses, not only harm individuals but also detrimentally affect society as a whole. Examples include rape, robbery, murder, theft, vandalism, and kidnapping. Each country defines criminal offenses through its legal system. Many

young people engage in criminal behavior due to factors like poverty, lack of education, impoverished environments, parental neglect, and negative social influences. Youth empowerment seeks to address these issues by equipping young people with skills, resources, and motivation to improve their lives. This involves enhancing access to opportunities that can alter their beliefs, values, and attitudes for the better. Stakeholders such as governments, NGOs, and international organizations should assess youth conditions to develop effective empowerment policies and programs. Successful youth empowerment initiatives can significantly enhance youths' quality of life and foster positive societal change

 Many empowerment programs suffer from insufficient funding, which limits their reach and effectiveness. Without adequate resources, it's challenging to provide comprehensive training, support services, and follow-up assistance to empower young people effectively.

 Some empowerment programs may lack clear goals, strategies, and implementation plans. Ineffective program design can lead to confusion, disorganization, and ultimately, failure to achieve meaningful outcomes for participants.

 Even when empowerment programs exist, not all young people have equal access to them. Factors such as geographical location, socio-economic status, educational background, and discrimination can create barriers that prevent certain youth populations from benefiting fully from these initiatives. One-size-fits-all approaches to youth empowerment often overlook the diverse needs, interests, and circumstances of young people. Without personalized support and guidance, individuals may struggle to translate their skills and aspirations into tangible opportunities for success.

 Fragmentation and duplication of efforts among various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector partners, can undermine the effectiveness of youth empowerment efforts. Lack of coordination leads to inefficiencies, gaps in service delivery, and confusion among participants.

Without robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating program outcomes, it's challenging to assess effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and learn from successes and failures. Lack of accountability and transparency can undermine trust and confidence in youth empowerment efforts.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that involves adequate funding, stakeholder collaboration, tailored support services, long-term planning, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. By addressing systemic barriers and adopting inclusive, evidence-based strategies, youth empowerment initiatives can become more effective in realizing their goals of fostering positive outcomes for young people and society as a whole.

While there are numerous youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State, their impact on crime reduction has not been systematically assessed. There is a dearth of comprehensive studies that analyze the effectiveness of these programs in curbing youth involvement in criminal activities. Understanding the relationship between youth empowerment and crime reduction is crucial for developing policies and programs that can effectively address the root causes of youth crime.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction in Benue State. The specific objectives include:

1. To identify the various youth empowerment initiatives implemented in Benue State.

2. To evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives in reducing youth involvement in crime.

3. To examine the challenges faced by youth empowerment programs in Benue State.

4. To provide recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in crime reduction.

**1.4	Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the existing youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State?

2. How effective are these initiatives in reducing youth crime in Benue State?

3. What challenges do youth empowerment programs face in Benue State?

4. What strategies can be employed to improve the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction?

**1.5	Research Hypothesis**

This study is guided by the following hypothetical statements labeled as H_0 (Null Hypothesis) and H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis);

1. **H_0**: There is a significant absence of effective youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State.

   *H_1:	There is no significant absence of effective youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State.*

2. **H_0**: There is no notable correlation between empowerment programmes and crime reduction among youth in Benue State.

   *H_1:	There is a notable correlation between empowerment programmes and crime reduction among youth in Benue State.*

3. **H_0**: There is no substantial correlation between the challenges encountered and the success of youth empowerment programmes in Benue State.

4. *H_1: There is substantial correlation between the challenges encountered and the   success of youth empowerment programmes in Benue State.*

H_0: There is no significant association between the implementation of improved strategies for youth empowerment initiatives and decreased crime rates among youth in the Benue State.

6. H_1: There is significant association between the implementation of improved strategies for youth empowerment initiatives and decreased crime rates among youth in the Benue State.

1.6   Scope and Limitations of Study

The study focused on the appraisal of youth empowerment as strategy to crime reduction in Benue State, Nigeria and was confronted/limited by some constraint including logistics and geographical factors which made the study to be carried out only among the youths of Benue State.

Like in every human endeavour, the researchers encountered slight constraints while carrying out the study. The significant constraint was the scanty literature on the subject owing that it is a new discourse thus the researcher incurred more financial expenses and much time was required in sourcing for the relevant materials, literature, or information and in the process of data collection, which is why the researcher resorted to a limited choice of sample size. Additionally, the researcher simultaneously engaged in this study with other academic work. Despite the constraint encountered during the research, all factors were downplayed in other to give the best and make the research successful.

1.7 **Significance of Study**

The study thoroughly examined how youth empowerment and employment can effectively alleviate poverty and reduce crime in Nigeria. Despite various government initiatives aimed at empowering and employing citizens, short-term schemes have often proven ineffective. This research investigated strategies for the government to implement sustainable and well-planned programs to combat poverty and crime in the nation.

The study explained the essence of youth empowerment as measure to eradicating crime in Benue State. It highlighted how important youth empowerment is especially when it comes to reducing crime rate in a any community. Youth empowerment can be the bedrock of community development since the youth are said to be the future of any community.

1.8   Definition Of Terms

Youth empowerment: Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. They do this by addressing their

situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Crime: Crime is any unlawful act punishable by a state or other authority .The act is considered a criminal offence when it is not only harmful to the individual but to the society or community such as rape, robbery, murder, theft, vandalism, kidnapping etc. Criminal offenses are defined by criminal law of every country. Criminologist Paul Tappan defines crime as "an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law committed without defense or justification, and sanctioned by the state as a felony or misdemeanor."

Unemployment: Unemployment is a term referring to individuals who are employable and actively seeking a job but are unable to find a job. Included in this group are those people in the workforce who are working but do not have an appropriate job. Usually measured by the unemployment rate, which is dividing the number of unemployed people by the total number of people in the workforce, unemployment serves as one of the indicators of a country's economic status.

Skills acquisition: A skill is the learned ability to act with determined results with good execution often within a given amount of time, energy, or both. Skill acquisition refers to acquiring, developing, and improving specific skills or abilities through learning and practice.

Poverty: Poverty is a state of deprivation characterized by a lack of essential resources and opportunities necessary for an individual or a community to meet their basic needs for a decent standard of living. These resources include adequate income, shelter, food, health-care, education, and access to clean water and sanitation.

1.9 Research Organization

This research work is organized in five chapters, for easy understanding, as follows.

Chapter one: This is concerned with the introduction, which consist of the (overview, of the study), historical background, statement of problem, objectives of the study, research question, significance of the study, research hypothesis, scope and limitation of the study, definition of terms and the study organization.

Chapter two: This highlights the conceptual and theoretical framework on which the study is based, thus the review of related literature.

Chapter three: This deals with the methodology adopted in the study. In this study, it explains the use of survey questionnaire to examine and evaluate the Youth empowerment as a strategy for reducing crime in Benue State.

Chapter four: This concentrates on the data collection and analysis and presentation of findings.

Chapter five: This gives the summary, conclusion, and recommendations made from the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

Youth empowerment initiatives have increasingly become a focus of public policy and community development strategies, particularly in regions experiencing high levels of youth unemployment and crime. In Benue State, Nigeria, various programs have been implemented to address these issues. This literature review explores the existing body of knowledge on youth empowerment initiatives, their effectiveness in reducing crime, the challenges they face, and recommendations for enhancing these initiatives

2.1   Conceptual Review

Youth empowerment has been a prominent topic in global development literature for several decades, emphasizing its critical role in fostering individual and societal progress. Education and skill development are often highlighted as fundamental components of empowerment, with organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank documenting how access to quality education enhances critical thinking, employability, and economic independence. Economic empowerment through job opportunities and entrepreneurship is another key theme, as studies from the International Labour Organization (ILO) demonstrate the significant impact of decent work on reducing poverty and deterring youth from engaging in criminal activities. Civic engagement and leadership have also been extensively explored, with the United Nations and scholarly articles in the Journal of Youth Studies emphasizing how involving young people in governance and community service contributes to democratic processes and societal stability.

Additionally, mental health and well-being have emerged as crucial areas, with research in journals such as The Lancet highlighting the importance of addressing psychological challenges to ensure holistic youth development. Overall, the literature suggests that comprehensive youth empowerment programs, which integrate these various elements, are most effective in promoting personal and societal well-being and reducing crime.

In Nigeria, the significant youth population has made youth empowerment a critical area of focus in both academic and policy discussions. Studies frequently underscore the importance of improving access to quality education, as reflected in reports by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and various Nigerian academic journals. Programs like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme are often cited for their efforts to enhance educational outcomes. Addressing high youth unemployment through economic empowerment is another prominent theme, with scholars and organizations such as the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) advocating for entrepreneurship as a viable solution. Initiatives like the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN!) have been studied for their impact on developing business skills and creating jobs. Literature also reviews the effectiveness of government and non-governmental programs, noting both successes and challenges.

Reports from the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and the Tony Elumelu Foundation highlight the need for effective policy implementation and sustained support. Moreover, the connection between youth empowerment and crime reduction is a recurring subject, with studies in the African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies showing that educational and job opportunities can significantly lower crime rates among youth. Despite these findings, the literature often points to gaps in policy implementation and the need for tailored approaches to address regional disparities, particularly in the conflict-affected northern regions.

Youth empowerment is a multifaceted concept that has gained global attention due to its significance in addressing socioeconomic challenges and fostering sustainable development. This conceptual review aims to explore the concept of youth empowerment from a global perspective, with a focus on Africa, Nigeria, and Benue State.

Youth empowerment on a global scale encompasses initiatives aimed at enhancing the capabilities, opportunities, and well-being of young people. It involves providing access to education, employment, health-care, and participation in decision-making processes. Globally, organizations like the United Nations have emphasized the importance of empowering youth as key agents of change in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In Africa, youth empowerment is critical due to the continent's youthful population demographic. With a large percentage of the population under the age of 30, Africa holds immense potential for economic growth and development. However, challenges such as high unemployment rates, inadequate education, and political instability hinder the realization of this potential. Youth empowerment programs in Africa aim to address these challenges by providing skills training, entrepreneurship support, and access to resources.

Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, faces similar challenges in youth empowerment. Despite being endowed with vast natural and human resources, Nigeria grapples with high youth unemployment, poverty, and social inequality. The Nigerian government has implemented various youth empowerment schemes and policies to address these issues, including the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), N-Power program, and YouWin initiative.

In Benue State, Nigeria, youth empowerment takes on a localized approach to address specific challenges facing young people in the region. Situated in the North-Central geopolitical zone, Benue State is known for its agricultural potential. However, factors such as farmer-herder conflicts, insecurity, and limited access to education and health-care impede youth development in the state. Youth empowerment programs in Benue State focus on agricultural training, skills acquisition, and community development projects to harness the potential of young people and mitigate socioeconomic challenges.

Youth empowerment is crucial for sustainable development at the global, African, Nigerian, and Benue State levels. By investing in the education, employment, and participation of young people, societies can harness their potential as drivers of change and innovation. However, concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and the private sector are needed to create an enabling environment for youth empowerment and ensure the realization of their aspirations.

Jega (2012), writing on the roles and importance of youth in the society, asserted that it is imperative for policy makers and parents to understand and appreciate that youth are the future of this country; therefore, their mindset and creativity should be of a great concern to the nation. There is need for the government to create an atmosphere favorable for the youth to achieve their desired objectives. The agonies of Boko

Haram, militancy, armed robberies, scams, and other social deviance are the product of lack of guardianship and vision for national development. Jega concluded by saying that, investing in knowledge and skill is critical to youth development.

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including youths and adults. Youth empowerment is seen as a gateway to inter-generational equity, civic engagement and democracy building.

Youth involvement in crimes and it's detrimental impact to youth delinquency which includes socioeconomic disadvantage as Adebayo (2022) demonstrated in a link between poverty, unemployment and limited education among youths and their vulnerability to crime and also psychological factors. Youth empowerment aims to equip young people with the knowledge skills and agency to improve their lives. Empowerment fosters a sense of identity and competence, reducing the appeal of crime. It includes vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, mentor-ship initiations, etc.(Cheung et al., 2021). Youth empowerment programs can address the root causes of crimes in several ways. Vocational training programs can increase employ-ability and reduce economic strain(Afolabi et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurship programs can foster self-employment and economic independence, decreasing the need for crime as a means of survival (Setiawan et al., 2021). Mentors-hip program connects youths with positive role models who can offer guidance and support, potentially replacing negative influences. Life skills training equips youths with communication, conflict resolution and decision making skills, fostering positive choices. (Adekoya, 2020).

Aja (2020) explores ideas for youth empowerment that can be utilized to motivate young people to participate in activities that promote sustainable economic growth. The concept of youth empowerment is examined in this study, along with its potential for growth if executed wisely and supported by a legal framework. The report simply made the recommendation that the youth empowerment initiatives be redesigned in a way that will involve the youth and generate enormous economic growth.

2.2 Identification of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Benue State

Benue State has implemented various youth empowerment initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment and curbing youth involvement in crime. These initiatives span governmental, non-governmental, and international efforts. A key government-led initiative is the Benue Youth Empowerment Scheme (B-YES), which focuses on vocational training and skills acquisition. The program has been instrumental in providing young people with practical skills in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and information technology, thereby increasing their employability and reducing their vulnerability to criminal activities (Edeh, 2020).

In addition to government efforts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in youth empowerment in Benue State. The Foundation for Youth Empowerment (FYE), for example, has provided educational scholarships, entrepreneurship training, and mentorship programs aimed at fostering self-reliance among youth (Adamu & Agada, 2021). These initiatives have been particularly effective in reaching marginalized groups and offering them opportunities for personal and economic development.

International organizations have also contributed to youth empowerment in the state. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported several projects aimed at enhancing youth employability and promoting community participation. These projects include vocational training programs, leadership development workshops, and initiatives designed to foster civic engagement among young people (Ogbu, 2019). Such efforts are critical in providing the necessary resources and platforms for youth to actively participate in society, thereby reducing their involvement in criminal activities.

2.3 Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Reducing Youth Involvement in Crime

The effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State, particularly in reducing youth involvement in crime, has been the focus of several studies. Research indicates that these programs have the potential to significantly decrease criminal activities among young people by providing them with alternative pathways and

fostering a sense of purpose (Nwankwo & Odo, 2020). For instance, the B-YES program has been credited with reducing the youth unemployment rate in Benue State, which is a critical factor associated with crime (Edeh, 2020).

Studies have also shown that initiatives focusing on skill development and entrepreneurship have been particularly effective in diverting youth from criminal activities. By equipping young people with the skills needed for self-employment, these programs offer sustainable livelihood opportunities, which in turn reduce the likelihood of their involvement in criminal behavior (Agada & Adamu, 2021). For example, the iCreate Skill-Up Project has empowered hundreds of youths through training in various technical skills, leading to a decrease in the crime rate in the areas where these youths are active (Onusi, 2021).

Moreover, evidence suggests that participation in youth empowerment programs is associated with a reduction in violent behaviors and an increase in positive social attitudes among youth. Programs that involve community stakeholders and integrate cultural elements have been particularly successful, as they resonate more with the local population and address the specific needs of the community (Olukoya, 2021; Ogbu, 2019).

2.4 Challenges Faced by Youth Empowerment Programs in Benue State

Despite their successes, youth empowerment programs in Benue State face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness. One of the most significant barriers is inadequate funding, which limits the scope and sustainability of these initiatives (Edeh, 2020). Many programs struggle to secure consistent financial support, leading to disruptions in training activities and a reduction in the number of beneficiaries.

Another major challenge is political instability and the lack of continuity in government policies. Changes in political leadership often result in the discontinuation of empowerment initiatives, as new administrations may not prioritize the same programs or may lack the resources to sustain them (Nwankwo & Odo, 2020). This inconsistency undermines the long-term impact of the programs and reduces their ability to achieve lasting results.

Inadequate infrastructure is also a critical issue, as many training centers lack the necessary equipment and materials to deliver effective programs. This limitation not only affects the quality of training but also discourages participation, particularly among youths in rural areas who already face numerous barriers to accessing such opportunities (Ogbu, 2019).

Cultural attitudes towards youth, especially regarding gender roles, present another challenge. In many communities, traditional gender norms limit female participation in empowerment programs, thereby excluding a significant portion of the youth population from these initiatives. Addressing these cultural barriers is essential for ensuring the inclusivity and effectiveness of empowerment efforts (Adamu & Agada, 2021).

Finally, the lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks poses a significant challenge. Without proper mechanisms to assess the impact of these initiatives, it is difficult to identify areas for improvement or to scale successful programs. This gap in evaluation hinders the ability to make informed decisions about the allocation of resources and the direction of future empowerment efforts (Olukoya, 2021).

2.5 Recommendations for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Crime Reduction

To enhance the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in reducing crime in Benue State, several strategies should be considered. First, there is a need for increased and sustained funding from both government and private sectors to ensure the continuity and expansion of these programs. Financial stability is crucial for maintaining the quality and reach of training activities, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is limited (Olukoya, 2021).

Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks is also essential for assessing the impact of empowerment programs and identifying best practices. These frameworks should be designed to track the long-term outcomes of the initiatives, allowing for data-driven adjustments and improvements over time (Adamu & Agada, 2021).

Strengthening collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations is another key recommendation. By pooling resources and expertise, these stakeholders can create more comprehensive and effective empowerment programs that address the diverse needs of the youth population. Additionally, culturally sensitive approaches should be adopted to ensure inclusivity, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and disabled youth (Ogbu, 2019).

Integrating digital literacy and technology skills into empowerment programs is also critical in preparing youth for the evolving job market. As the economy increasingly relies on technology, equipping young people with these skills will not only enhance their employability but also reduce the likelihood of their involvement in crime (Agada & Adamu, 2021).

Finally, policies should be implemented to ensure the political neutrality of youth empowerment programs. Safeguarding these initiatives from political interference and changes in government will help to ensure their continuity and long-term success (Nwankwo & Odo, 2020).

Youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State have shown significant potential in reducing crime and fostering positive socio-economic outcomes. However, addressing the challenges of funding, political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural barriers is crucial for maximizing their impact. By adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach, these programs can be enhanced to better serve the youth and contribute to the overall development and safety of Benue State.

2.6   Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory (SLT), developed by Albert Bandura, posits that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between social influences and individual behavior, including criminal behavior. Social learning theory is often referenced to as a crucial element for sustainable natural resource management and fostering positive behavioral change (Muro & Jeffrey, 2008). The theory posits that learning occurs through social interactions. By observing others' behaviors, individuals tend to adopt similar actions. People assimilate and replicate these

behaviors, particularly if the observed experiences are positive or come with rewards. Bandura emphasizes that imitation entails the actual replication of observed motor activities (Bandura, 1977).

Social (or Observational) Learning Theory stipulates that people can learn new behaviors by observing others. Earlier learning theories emphasized how people behave in response to environmental stimuli, such as physical rewards or punishment. In contrast, social learning emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between social characteristics of the environment, how they are perceived by individuals, and how motivated and able a person is to reproduce behaviors they see happening around them. People both influence and are influenced by the world around them

The Social Learning Theory stands as a fundamental theoretical framework elucidating the pathways through which individuals engage in criminal behavior. To underscore its relevance in explaining criminal involvement, it is pertinent to assess the theory using evaluation criteria proposed by Akers, Sellers, and Jennings (2016): logical coherence, breadth of application, simplicity, verifiability, empirical soundness, utility, and implications for policy. Hence, scrutinizing the Social Learning Theory through these lenses reveals its applicability in criminological contexts, elucidating the mechanisms by which individuals become ensnared in criminal pursuits.

Firstly, the Social Learning Theory is characterized by logical consistency because its propositions are clearly connected, and key conclusions are made with reference to such concepts as differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation without contradicting each other (Akers et al., 2016). Secondly, the theory is wide in its scope because it can explain any crime without depending on its type. The Social Learning Theory describes how any criminal behavior can develop in general (Vito & Maahs, 2017).

According to SLT, individuals can learn criminal behavior by observing others engaging in such activities, especially if those behaviors appear to lead to rewards or lack of punishment.

For example, a young person who sees a peer group successfully committing theft without consequences may learn to see theft as a viable option for achieving financial gain. The theory emphasizes the influence of role models. If individuals are surrounded by role models who engage in criminal behavior, they are more likely to adopt those behaviors. Environments that lack positive role models and are rife with criminal activity provide ample opportunities for learning and imitating criminal behavior.

Also, Criminal behaviors that are rewarded (e.g., gaining money, status, or power) are likely to be repeated. Conversely, behaviors that are punished (e.g., incarceration, social disapproval) are less likely to be repeated. Inconsistent punishment or the absence of punishment can lead to the persistence of criminal behavior.Numerous studies have shown that peer influence is a significant factor in the development of criminal behavior. Youths are more likely to engage in criminal activities if their peers do so (Warr, 2002). Media portrayals of violence and crime can also influence individuals, particularly when such behaviors are depicted as glamorous or rewarded (Bandura, 1977).

Youth empowerment initiatives aim to provide young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to become productive members of society. These programs often include vocational training, education, mentorship, and community engagement activities. By participating in these initiatives, youth are exposed to positive role models and constructive behaviors, which they can observe and imitate. In the context of Benue State, where crime rates among youth are often linked to socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty, youth empowerment programs offer alternative pathways. By equipping young people with employable skills and promoting entrepreneurial activities, these initiatives create opportunities for legitimate income generation, reducing the allure of criminal activities .Moreover, Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of reinforcement in behavior change. In youth empowerment programs, positive reinforcement—such as recognition, rewards, or successful outcomes—encourages participants to continue engaging in constructive behaviors. As these behaviors are consistently reinforced, they become internalized, leading to a long-term reduction in criminal tendencies. The application of Social Learning Theory to youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State highlights the

importance of creating supportive environments where positive behaviors are modeled and reinforced. This approach not only addresses the immediate needs of at-risk youth but also fosters a culture of lawfulness and community involvement, ultimately contributing to crime reduction in the region.

Social Learning Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction in Benue State. By leveraging the principles of observation, imitation, and reinforcement, these programs can effectively guide youth towards positive social behaviors, reducing their involvement in criminal activities and promoting overall community well-being.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the various approaches used in the gathering of data from respondents. Specifically, it deals with the research design, study area, study population, sample size and sampling methods, method of data collection, instrument of data collection, method of data analysis, and ethical consideration.

3.2   Research Design

This study employed an explanatory research design, which is appropriate for exploring the relationship between youth empowerment initiatives and crime reduction in Benue State. The primary objective of this design is to elucidate the causal mechanisms and contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of these initiatives. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics between youth empowerment and crime reduction. The quantitative aspect of the research involved the administration of structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions. These questionnaires were designed to capture socio-demographic data of the respondents and assess their perceptions of the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction. The quantitative data provided statistical insights into the prevalence of certain views and the overall effectiveness of the programs. Complementing the quantitative data, the qualitative component included in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. These were conducted with a diverse group of participants, including youths, community leaders, and program administrators in Benue State.

The qualitative interviews aimed to explore the personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants regarding the youth empowerment initiatives. This method provided rich, contextual insights that helped to explain the quantitative findings and offered a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes of the initiatives. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure a representative sample of

the population. The first stage involved selecting specific areas within Benue State, followed by the random selection of participants within these areas. This approach allowed for the inclusion of both urban and rural perspectives, ensuring that the findings are reflective of the diverse experiences within the state. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software, with descriptive and inferential statistics used to identify trends and relationships between variables. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns that provide insight into the effectiveness of the youth empowerment initiatives. The integration of both data sets facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these initiatives on crime reduction.

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity was preserved throughout the research process. The study also sought approval from relevant ethical review boards to ensure that the research met all ethical standards. By employing this mixed-methods approach, the study aims to provide a robust analysis of the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction in Benue State. This design not only allows for a detailed examination of the phenomenon but also offers practical insights that can inform policy and program development in similar contexts.

3.3   Study Area

Benue State, situated in the North-Central region of Nigeria, offers a distinctive and compelling context for this research. As one of the central states in Nigeria, with Makurdi as its capital, Benue State encompasses an area of 34,059 square kilometers (13,142 square miles). According to the 2006 census, the state has a population of 4,253,641, yielding an average population density of 99 persons per square kilometer. Benue State is notable for its natural resources, including the River Benue, one of the longest rivers in the country.

The state is ethnically diverse, primarily inhabited by the Tiv, Idoma, Igede, and Etulo tribes, with English, Tiv, Idoma, and Igede being the predominant languages. The religious landscape includes Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Beliefs. Home to over 30 ethnic groups, Benue State is characterized by significant cultural diversity,

which influences its social and economic dynamics. The state's economy is largely driven by agriculture, including farming, fishing, and livestock rearing, providing substantial opportunities for wealth creation and entrepreneurship. This cultural and economic diversity presents unique opportunities for tailoring youth empowerment programs to address the specific needs and aspirations of its young population.

Conducting research on youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State is expected to yield valuable insights into the effectiveness of these programs. Additionally, it will contribute to identifying best practices and informing policy and programmatic decisions aimed at enhancing youth development and reducing crime in the region.

3.4 Study population

The study population encompasses youth empowerment officials and community members residing in selected wards. The target population specifically includes respondents and participants who are actively engaged with or have substantial knowledge of youth empowerment programs. This group consists of residents within these selected wards who possess in-depth understanding and experience regarding the assessment and acceptability of these initiatives, as well as their impact on crime reduction in Benue State.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study would employ both qualitative and quantitative methods for quantitative, a descriptive survey design would be employed as data would be collected using a questionnaire method. Following a sample table by Cochran's (1977) formula to determine the sampling size:

$$n = \frac{Z^2[p-(1-p)]}{E^2} \quad \text{Where,}$$

n=sampling size

Z= standard normal score = 1.95

P= the estimated proportion of people = 3

E= sampling error that can be tolerated=5

$$n = \frac{1.95^2[0.30(1-0.30)]}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1.95^2 (0.3) (0.7)}{(0.05)(0.05)}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8025 (0.21)}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.0798525}{0.0025}$$

n = 319.41.

In order to avoid omission in the course of administering questionnaire, 10% attrition rate were added 319.41 to compensate for any expected error. This amounted to sample size of 351. 351 respondents were carefully selected and purposely taken from the study area. This research took its sampling from four wards in the local government that are considered to be more populated, where economic and social activities are prevalent. The wards in question are Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank , will be selected due to their high levels of economic and social activities within the local government.

Futhermore, for the qualitative data, a total number of 10 participants will be selected for the in-depth interview while a total of 10 participants will be selected for the Key Informant Interview (KII).. These participants include youth empowerment initiative directors, people with adequate knowledge about youth empowerment initiatives, community leaders, and a government official. All these participants will be selected within the four selected wards (Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank). However, a total number of four hundred (351) respondents will be sampled for this study.

3.5.1 Qualitative sample size

For the qualitative study, studies by (Carillo and Fontdevilla 2011) made use of 20 to 30 numbers of interviews for the study; this study therefore used the numerical guide and purposive sampling to adopt 20 studies using clustered sampling of Markudi local government into 4 wards each until the saturation point

3.6   Method of Data Collection

The study adopted the triangulation method which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative method to gather data from respondents.

3.6.1   Qualitative

For the qualitative study, studies by (Carillo and Fontdevilla 2011) made use of 20 to 30 numbers of interviews for the study; this study therefore used the numerical guide and purposive sampling to adopt 20 studies using clustered sampling of Markudi local government into 4 wards which are Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank , each until the saturation point

3.6.2   Quantitative

So as to give precise information and accuracy. The participants were heterogeneous in nature so as to give the research more validity and reliability and respondents who have lived in the community for 5 years and above were chosen to make the research outcome.

Respondents who met the criteria were identified and included in the study until the data got saturated. The participants had to meet the following criteria to be included in the sample.

The should;

Be at least minimum of 18 years

Be permanent resident of Markurdi residing or working in Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank for at least five years

Be of the male or female gender of any race or ethnicity

Be mentally sound in order to consent to participation

Be willing to participate

Anyone who did not meet some of the needed criteria stated above was automatically excluded from the study. It consists of instrument used to collect data for the research. The research was conducted using qualitative and quantitative data in key informant and in depth interview and questionnaire. Data was collected through primary source of data collection using questionnaires, key informant interview and in depth interview method of data collection. Primary data are sourced directly by the researcher for the purpose of a specified research. This interview method of collecting data consists of oral-verbal stimuli and reply in terms of oral-verbal responses while the questionnaires was distributed to the participants to fill. The interview was conducted using purposive sampling by identifying while the questionnaire will be distributed using simple random sampling by the researcher. The interview was conducted using purposive sampling by identifying while the questionnaire will be distributed using simple random sampling by the researcher. People with in depth knowledge about youth empowerment initiatives and in-depth interview of officials of the empowerment initiatives. Respondents were sampled based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study and questionnaires was distributed randomly to members of the community in each ward.

3.7   Instrument of Data collection

3.7.1   Key Informant Interview

Key informant interview are open ended discovery oriented methods used to generate greater depth or meaning on a given issue. The instrument was divided into various sections. The interview was conducted by the researcher after getting an ethical approval from the right authority and it was conducted based on confidentiality The interview was conducted using a tape recorder to record the voice of the religious leaders Youth empowerment program officials Government officials, community

leaders in each ward. Purposive sampling was used to select participants and was analyzed using content analysis to analyze the transcribed data gotten from the field for detailed understanding 10 key informants were used for the study, it comprises of community leaders, Youth empowerment program officials and Religious leaders in Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank in Benue State respectively.

3.7.2 In-depth interview

In-depth interview are open ended discovery oriented methods used to generate greater depth or meaning on a given issue. The instrument was divided into various sections. The interview was conducted by the researcher after getting an ethical approval from the right authority and it was conducted based on confidentiality. The interview was conducted using a tape recorder to record the voice of Youth that have benefited from various empowerment programs, parents, Educators and Trainers in Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank in Benue State respectively. Purposive sampling was used to select participants and was analyzed using content analysis to analyze the transcribed data gotten from the field for detailed understanding.

3.7.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed to members of the community in Central/South Mission, Ankpa/Wadata, Modern Market, North Bank in Benue State respectively who are adults above 18 years and have been residing in the community for at least five years and it was analyzed using computer software; statistical package for social science (SPSS). The instrument used for this study is questionnaire. This was constructed and validated by the researcher. The questionnaire was made up of five sections with a total of 30 questions these five sections are

SECTION A: Focused on demographics data of respondents (personal data).

SECTION B: the existing youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State.

SECTION C: the effect of applied initiatives in reducing youth crime in Benue

SECTION D: challenges youth empowerment programs face in Benue State.

SECTION E: strategies employed in improving the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on crime reduction.

3.10   Method of Data Analysis

The collected data underwent analysis, presentation, and interpretation, based on the participants' questions and answers. The process involved transcription and content analysis, which included transcription, checking, editing, analysis, interpretation, and verification (Karlson & Sarantakos, 1998). The data was then analyzed by grouping it into meaningful units after reading each paragraph and identifying its theme. The data's validity and reliability were also checked.

The researcher carefully studied and arranged information gathered from the survey according to the order of responses. Thereafter, responses on each of the items were tabulated and converted into frequencies. Data gathered from the instrument were analysed by working out simple percentage on the "Yes" (Y) and "No" (N) responses from each item.

The analysis of data in this study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The quantitative data was derived from questionnaire response while analysis involved the use of SPSS Chi-square in testing the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance (Adam Hayes, 2022). Tables were used in showing the results and interpretations followed immediately after each table.

$$\textbf{Chi-Square} = \ x^2 \ = \ \frac{\sum(O \ - \ E)^2}{E} \ ; \qquad \textbf{Note:} \ x^2 = \ \text{Chi-Square}$$

$$O \ = \ \text{Observed Value}$$

$$E \ = \ \text{Expected Value}$$

$$\textbf{Degree of Freedom} = \textbf{df} = (\text{No of Rows} - 1) \times (\text{No of Column} - 1)$$

3.11   Ethical consideration

Ethical consideration is very important in any research because most people see security as a very delicate issue and very sensitive and should not be discussed with just anybody. The researcher obeyed all ethical consideration during and after this research including:

Autonomy: The researcher respected the decision and opinion of each respondent because they have decision-making capacity. Informed consent was applied on each participant and they were also be informed about the purpose of the study. Before the interview, each respondents consent were sought and after the interview as well. No respondent was forced against their will to conduct the interview.

Justice: The participants were given right to fair treatment and right to privacy. The respondents were be selected on the basis of the principle of equity, fairness and justice.

Utility: The researcher ensured the research produced more benefits and less harm to the society.

Non-maleficence: The researcher ensured no one was armed. No harm was inflicted on anyone during the study and there was no form of psychological, social or emotional or economic harm to the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISSCUSSION

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of data gathered in the course of the work. The analysis is based on the responses to the questions contained in the questionnaire, which were used to validate or invalidate the hypothesis formulated. It was derived from three hundred (341) questionnaires returned out of the three hundred and fifty one (351) administered, which represents 97.2% with 2.8% not recovered.

4.1 Demographic Data Collected

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-24	35	10.4%
25 – 30	68	19.9%
31 – 36	85	24.9%
37 – 42	100	29.3%
Above 42	53	15.5%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field Work 2024

The above table shows the age distribution of the respondents. The above data shows that, out of the 341 respondents representing 100%; persons from the age

of 18-24, who are the lowest, were 35 in number being 10.4%. Those within age group 25-30 were 68, representing 19.9%, 31 – 36 group were 85 in number, representing 24.9%, 37 – 42 set were the highest with 100 population making 29.3% of the sampled respondents and lastly, those of 42 and above were 53 in number representing 15.5% percent. This shows that the study was made to cover both the experienced and inexperienced population in order to draw out valid opinions for the research.

Table 2: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	198	58%
Female	143	42%
Others	0	0%
Total	**341**	**100%**

Source Field Work, 2024

This table shows the sex distribution of both male and female respondents. The number of males who responded to the questions on questionnaire is 198 being 58% and that of female respondents is was 143, which is 48%. This shows that more males were administered with questionnaires, and responded than the females. It is worthy to note also that none other sex classification exists in the sampled population.

Table 3: Marital distribution of respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	160	47%
Married	121	35%
Divorced	60	18%
Total	**341**	**100%**

The table 3 shows that 160 (47%) respondents were single, 121 (35%) were married, 60 (18%) of the respondents were divorced. These further emphasize the fact that, the environment where this research was carried out was occupied by most young unmarried people at the time of the research. According to the table, it is evident that out of the 341 respondents included in the analysis, the majority, 160 individuals (47%), reported being single. A proportion of 121 respondents (35%), identified themselves as married. Only 60 respondents indicated being divorced, which was duely represented at 18%.

Considering the distribution of marital status, it appears that the research was conducted in an environment primarily occupied by young unmarried individuals at the time of the study. The high percentage of single respondents further emphasizes this fact the researcher was more inclined to evaluate youth hence they are the target for youth empowerment initiative programmes. Understanding the demographic composition of the sample population is important as it provides context for interpreting the research findings. In this case, it suggests that the results may primarily apply to young unmarried individuals, and caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to a broader population with different marital distributions.

Table 4: Educational Qualification

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Informal Education	31	9%
Primary	61	18%
Secondary	58	17%
Tertiary	191	56%
Total	**341**	**100%**

According to Table 4, which presents the educational level of the respondents, the following information can be derived: the table indicates that out of the 31

respondents included in the analysis, which were the least individuals represented 9% had no formal education. 61 of the respondents (18%) have primary education while 58 of them being 17% have attained the level of secondary education. The highest of the sampled population was 191, which is 56% were graduates from tertiary institution. This shows that the sampled population can thrive on any youth empowerment initiative if the opportunity ever exists.

Table 5: Occupational distribution of respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	46	13%
Unemployed	150	44%
Self Employed	105	31%
Student	40	12%
Total	341	100%

Source Field Work, 2024

According to Table 5, which presents the occupational distribution of the respondents infers that out of the 341 respondents surveyed, the majority, 150 individuals (44%), reported being unemployed. This suggests that a significant portion of the sample population has no occupation.

Additionally, 46 respondents (13%) identified themselves as employed workers, indicating that they are engaged in some sort of employment while 105 respondents being 31% were self-employed. Only 40 (12%) were students. Based on this data, it can be inferred that the subject matter of the research is likely to be relevant and applicable to unemployed, self-employed and students, given that the vast majority of the respondents fall into the youth category. Although a small proportion of respondents were both students and workers, which suggests that the research findings may have implications for individuals who are balancing work and education commitments.

Table 5: Distribution of Monthly Income Generation

Religion	Frequency	Percentage

Below ₦20,000	181	53%
₦21,000 - ₦50,000	66	19%
₦51,000 - ₦100,000	54	15%
Above ₦100,000	40	13%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field Work: 2024

The table above goes to show that 53% of the respondents are representing 181 of the total earn below ₦20,000, 19% being 66 of the respondents are in the range of ₦21,000 – ₦50,000 earners. 15% representing 54 in number of respondent earns between ₦51,000 – ₦100,000. Whereas, 13% (40 respondents) of the sampled population were earning above ₦100,000. This implies that the study area is dominated by low earners. Although there are former forms of employment but the opportunities are grossly inadequate.

Youth empowerment can be conceptualized as a multidimensional process that enables young people to gain control over their lives, influence the decisions that affect them, and acquire the skills and competencies needed to participate fully in society (Bennett, 2018). Empowerment involves economic, social, psychological, and political dimensions, and is often facilitated through education, vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and civic engagement activities (Zimmerman, 1995). In the context of crime reduction, the theory posits that empowering youth reduces their likelihood of engaging in criminal activities by providing them with viable alternatives and promoting positive social behaviors (Hope, 2011).

Benue State has implemented various youth empowerment initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment and curbing youth involvement in crime. These initiatives span governmental, non-governmental, and international efforts. A key government-led initiative is the Benue Youth Empowerment Scheme (B-YES), which focuses on vocational training and skills acquisition. The program has been instrumental in

providing young people with practical skills in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and information technology, thereby increasing their employability and reducing their vulnerability to criminal activities (Edeh, 2020).

4.1.2 Objective 1: To identify the various youth empowerment initiatives implemented in Benue State.

In Benue State, several youth empowerment initiatives have been implemented, ranging from government-led programs to non-governmental organization (NGO) efforts. The Benue State Government has launched initiatives such as the Benue Youth Empowerment Scheme (B-YES), which focuses on vocational training and skill acquisition (Edeh, 2020). NGOs like the Foundation for Youth Empowerment (FYE) have also been active, providing educational scholarships, entrepreneurship training, and mentorship programs (Adamu & Agada, 2021). Additionally, international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have supported projects aimed at enhancing youth employability and community participation (Ogbu, 2019).

Table 6: Response on Youth Empowerment Initiations in Benue State

Questions	Variables	Frequency (341)	Percentage (100)
Youth empowerment initiatives like Education and Skills Training, Economic Empowerment, Leadership Development, Health and Wellness and Mentorship have not gained wide coverage in Benue State	Strongly agree	132	38.7
	Agree	88	25.8
	undecided	0	0.00
	Disagree	71	20.8
	Strongly Disagree	50	14.7
Youths are eager to participates in initiatives that dwell more on entrepreneurship, education, leadership, health, technology, arts and culture.	Strongly agree	157	46.0
	Agree	81	23.0
	Undecided	10	2.8
	Disagree	52	15.2
	Strongly Disagree	41	12.1

There is often low media coverage on youth empowerment initiatives programmes in the State.	Strongly agree	152	44.6
	Agree	96	28.2
	undecided	11	3.2
	Disagree	51	14.9
	Strongly Disagree	31	9.1
I have never participated or experienced any youth empowerment initiative program in the State, be it Governmental, Non-Government or Civil Society Organisation.	Strongly agree	212	62.2
	Agree	73	21.4
	Undecided	10	2.9
	Disagree	27	7.9
	Strongly Disagree	19	5.6

Source: Field Work, 2023

The table above shows that participant were as if Youth empowerment initiatives like Education and Skills Training, Economic Empowerment, Leadership Development, Health and Wellness and Mentorship have not gained wide coverage in Benue State, 38.7% strongly agreed making it the highest while 25.8% agreed and 20.8% disagreed while 14.7% strongly disagreed while 0.00% were undecided. These indicates that these initiatives have not gained wide spread coverage yet.

When also asked by respondents If Youths are eager to participates in initiatives that dwell more on entrepreneurship, education, leadership, health, technology, arts and culture. The response showed 46.0% strongly agreed to the notion while 23.0% agreed while 15.2% disagreed, 12.1% strongly disagreed while 15.2% and 2.8% disagreed and were undecided respectively

When also asked If there is often low media coverage on youth empowerment initiatives programmes in the State, the response indicated that 44.6% strongly agreed while 28.2% agreed and 14.9% disagreed while 9.1% and 3.2% strongly disagreed and were undecided respectively.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked If they have never participated or experienced any youth empowerment initiative program in the State, be it

Governmental, Non-Government or Civil Society Organisation. 62.2% strongly agreed while 21.4% agreed, 2.9% were undecided while 7.9% and 5.6% Disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively

To support the response of the respondents, response of a participant who is a government official will be stated below to support the response of the respondent

One of the Participants stated that:

We have several key initiatives, including vocational training programs, sports development projects, and entrepreneurship workshops. These programs are designed to provide young people with the skills and opportunities they need to build successful careers and stay away from criminal activities.**(KII/M//government official/2024).**

Another participant also supported this by saying and has quoted below;

We design our initiatives based on direct input from the youth themselves. We hold regular forums and surveys to understand their needs and challenges. Our programs focus on practical skills, leadership development, and community service, providing young people with the tools they need to succeed and avoid criminal activities**.(KII/M//government official/2024).**

Objective 2: To evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives in reducing youth involvement in crime.

The effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in reducing crime has been a subject of considerable research. Studies suggest that these programs can significantly decrease youth involvement in criminal activities by providing alternative pathways and fostering a sense of purpose (Nwankwo & Odo, 2020). For instance, B-YES has been credited with reducing youth unemployment rates in Benue State, which is a known correlate of crime (Edeh, 2020). Similarly, initiatives focusing on skill development and entrepreneurship have been effective in diverting youth from criminal activities by offering them sustainable livelihood opportunities (Agada & Adamu, 2021).

Moreover, evidence indicates that youth who participate in empowerment programs are less likely to engage in violent behaviors and more likely to exhibit positive social attitudes (Olukoya, 2021). The involvement of community stakeholders and

the integration of cultural elements into these programs have been identified as critical success factors (Ogbu, 2019

Table 7: Responses on the effectiveness of these initiatives

Questions	Variables	Frequency (341)	Percentage (100)
The current youth empowerment initiatives have improved the economic opportunities in Benue State	Strongly agree	168	49.2
	Agree	100	29.3
	undecided	15	4.4
	Disagree	37	10.8
	Strongly Disagree	21	6.2
The skills training programs provided by initiatives prepares youth for job markets in Benue State and beyond.	Strongly agree	171	50.1
	Agree	71	20.8
	undecided	25	7.3
	Disagree	40	11.7
	Strongly Disagree	34	10
There are positive changes in the life of participants of youth empowerment initiatives by improved self-esteem, increased job prospects and improved relationships.	Strongly agree	160	47
	Agree	110	32.2
	undecided	15	4.4
	Disagree	31	9.1
	Strongly Disagree	25	7.3
These empowerment initiatives addressed the specific needs and concerns of youth in the State.	Strongly agree	200	58.6
	Agree	80	23.4
	undecided	18	5.3
	Disagree	23	6.8
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.9

The table above shows that, 699 responses strongly agreed that The Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Benue State has been registered in previous programmes. That is to say, it has provided a better template for improving the economic opportunities, enhancing skills for job markets, self-esteem, increased job prospects and improved relationships in the lives of youth that participated. Whereas, 361 of the responses agreed while 73 were undecided, 131 disagreed, 100 strongly disagreed.

To support the response of the respondents, response of a participant who is a community leaders will be stated below to support the response of the respondent

One of the Participants stated that:

These initiatives have been very effective. By engaging young people in positive activities and providing them with opportunities for personal and professional growth, we have seen a substantial reduction in youth crime. Our leadership training programs, in particular, have helped many young people develop a sense of purpose and direction.**(KII/M//Comm Leader/2024).**

Another participant also stated:

Certainly. Benue State has implemented a variety of youth empowerment programs, including vocational training, education scholarships, entrepreneurship support, and community development projects. These initiatives aim to equip young people with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to build productive lives and steer them away from criminal activities. Some programs are run by the government, while others are supported by NGOs and private sector partnerships. **(KII/F/local business owner/2024).**

Objective 3: To examine the challenges faced by youth empowerment programs in Benue State.

Despite their successes, youth empowerment programs in Benue State face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness. One of the most significant barriers is inadequate funding, which limits the scope and sustainability of these initiatives (Edeh, 2020). Many programs struggle to secure consistent financial support, leading to disruptions in training activities and a reduction in the number of beneficiaries.

Another major challenge is political instability and the lack of continuity in government policies. Changes in political leadership often result in the

discontinuation of empowerment initiatives, as new administrations may not prioritize the same programs or may lack the resources to sustain them (Nwankwo & Odo, 2020). This inconsistency undermines the long-term impact of the programs and reduces their ability to achieve lasting results.

Inadequate infrastructure is also a critical issue, as many training centers lack the necessary equipment and materials to deliver effective programs. This limitation not only affects the quality of training but also discourages participation, particularly among youths in rural areas who already face numerous barriers to accessing such opportunities (Ogbu, 2019).

Table 8: **Responses on challenges faced by youth empowerment programs in Benue State.**

Questions	Variables	Frequency (341)	Percentage (100)
Lack of clear objectives and strategies is an impediment to implementing youth empowerment programmes in the State.	Strongly agree	191	56
	Agree	85	25
	undecided	15	4.4
	Disagree	32	9.4
	Strongly Disagree	18	5.3
Inadequate infrastructure and facilities is also another stumbling block.	Strongly agree	173	50.7
	Agree	80	23.5
	undecided	21	6.2
	Disagree	42	12.3
	Strongly Disagree	25	7.3
Ineffective monitoring and evaluation too contributes to the failures of these programmes	Strongly agree	160	46.9
	Agree	115	33.7
	undecided	12	3.5

	Disagree	34	10
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.9
Limited access to engage and participate is yet another issue hindering implementation of youth empowerment programmes in the State.	Strongly agree	188	55.1
	Agree	92	27
	undecided	11	3.2
	Disagree	30	8.8
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.9

Source Field Work, 2024

The table above shows that, 711 responses strongly agreed that lack of clear objectives and strategies is an impediment to implementing youth empowerment programmes in the State. It also shows that inadequate infrastructural facilities is yet another stumbling block that is to say, it has provided a better template for improving the economic opportunities, enhancing skills for job markets, self-esteem, increased job prospects and improved relationships in the lives of youth that participated. Ineffective monitoring and evaluation too contributes to the failures of these programmes. Limited access to engage and participate is yet another issue hindering implementation of youth empowerment programmes in the State. Whereas, 372 of the responses agreed but 59 of the responses where undecided and 138 disagreed, 83 strongly disagreed.

To further buttress this, another participant also supported the fact that by saying that:

Absolutely, One of the main challenges is inadequate funding. Many youth empowerment programs struggle to secure sufficient financial resources to sustain their activities and reach a larger number of beneficiaries.**(IDI/M//2024)**

To further ascertain this, a participant said that:

A major challenge is the lack of proper infrastructure. Many areas in Benue State lack the necessary facilities for training and development, making it difficult to deliver these programs effectively. Additionally, there's often a gap between the skills

being taught and the actual needs of the local job market, leading to a mismatch that hinders the employability of the youth.**(IDI/M//2024)**

Objective 4: To provide recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in crime reduction.

To enhance the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in reducing crime in Benue State, several strategies should be considered. First, there is a need for increased and sustained funding from both government and private sectors to ensure the continuity and expansion of these programs. Financial stability is crucial for maintaining the quality and reach of training activities, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is limited (Olukoya, 2021).

Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks is also essential for assessing the impact of empowerment programs and identifying best practices. These frameworks should be designed to track the long-term outcomes of the initiatives, allowing for data-driven adjustments and improvements over time (Adamu & Agada, 2021).

Strengthening collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations is another key recommendation. By pooling resources and expertise, these stakeholders can create more comprehensive and effective empowerment programs that address the diverse needs of the youth population. Additionally, culturally sensitive approaches should be adopted to ensure inclusivity, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and disabled youth (Ogbu, 2019).

Integrating digital literacy and technology skills into empowerment programs is also critical in preparing youth for the evolving job market. As the economy increasingly relies on technology, equipping young people with these skills will not only enhance their employability but also reduce the likelihood of their involvement in crime (Agada & Adamu, 2021).

Table 12: Response on Recommendations for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Crime Reduction

Questions	Variables	Frequency (341)	Percentage (100)
Needs Assessment: There is need to conduct a thorough needs assessment to in order to understand the target youth population's needs, aspirations, and challenges.	Strongly agree	171	50.1
	Agree	100	31
	undecided	10	3
	Disagree	40	11.7
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.9
Stakeholder Engagement: It is wise to engage with local stakeholders, including youth, community leaders, and organizations, to ensure ownership and support.	Strongly agree	173	50.7
	Agree	95	27.9
	undecided	10	2.9
	Disagree	43	12.6
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.7
Clear Objectives: Define clear, measurable objectives aligned with the needs assessment and stakeholder input.	Strongly agree	180	52.8
	Agree	98	28.7
	undecided	5	1.5
	Disagree	30	8.8
	Strongly Disagree	28	8.2
Skills Development: Offer skills training and development opportunities aligned with labor market demands.	Strongly agree	200	56.7
	Agree	79	23.2
	undecided	6	1.8
	Disagree	35	10.3
	Strongly Disagree	18	5.3

Source: Field Work, 2024

In table 12 above shows, 724 responses strongly agreed that Needs Assessment: There is need to conduct a thorough needs assessment to in order to understand the target youth population's needs, aspirations, and challenges. Stakeholder Engagement: It is wise to engage with local stakeholders, including youth, community leaders, and organizations, to ensure ownership and support. Clear Objectives: Define clear, measurable objectives aligned with the needs assessment and stakeholder input. Skills Development: Offer skills training and development opportunities aligned with labor market demands. However, 372 of the responses agreed but 31 of the responses were undecided 148 disagreed, 91 strongly disagreed.

One of the participants stated that:

I recommend increasing accessibility and availability of these programs so more young people can benefit. Continuous support and follow-up can help participants stay committed. Incorporating more hands-on and practical training can also make these programs more appealing and effective. Additionally, sharing success stories can help inspire and motivate others to join. **(KII/M/youth beneficiary/2024)**.

To further support this assertion, A participant said that:

There needs to be a concerted effort to secure long-term funding, possibly through public-private partnerships. This ensures that programs are not only launched but sustained over time. Second, initiatives must be localized – meaning they should be designed with input from local youth, community leaders, and other stakeholders. This approach ensures the programs are relevant and meet the actual needs of the youth. Finally, better coordination and communication among all parties involved will create a more unified approach, leading to more significant impact. **(KII/M/parent of young beneficiary/2024)**.

4.2 Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis testing is a fundamental activity in the statistical decision making process. A hypothesis is a probabilistic statement about relationships or associations between two or more variables (Ogbeide, 1997:181). The importance of hypotheses cannot be achieved by simply observing a phenomena and collecting facts, but by providing hypotheses and tentative answer to problems of research and thereby subjecting them to empirical test (Osemwota, Okhakhu and Tonwe, 1996:83).

Hypothesis One: There is a significant absence of effective youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State.

Table 14: Testing of Hypothesis One

Youth Empowerment Initiations in the Benue State	Data Values	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
Youth empowerment initiatives like Education and Skills Training, Economic Empowerment, Leadership Development, Health and Wellness and Mentorship have not gained wide coverage in Benue State	Observed	154	103	82	51	**390**
	Expected	(202.75)	(100.50)	(54.00)	(32.75)	
	Chi-Square	[11.72]	[0.06]	[14.52]	[10.17]	
Youths are eager to participates in initiatives that dwell more on entrepreneurship, education, leadership, health, technology, arts and culture.	Observed	180	104	60	46	**390**
	Expected	(202.75)	(100.50)	(54.00)	(32.75)	
	Chi-Square	[2.55]	[0.12]	[0.67]	[5.36]	
There is often a low media coverage on youth empowerment initiatives programmes in the State.	Observed	232	110	31	17	**390**
	Expected	(202.75)	(100.50)	(54.00)	(32.75)	
	Chi-Square	[4.22]	[0.90]	[9.80]	[7.57]	
I have never participated or experienced any youth empowerment initiative program in the State, be it Governmental, Non-Government or Civil Society Organisation.	Observed	245	85	43	17	**390**
	Expected	(202.75)	(100.50)	(54.00)	(32.75)	
	Chi-Square	[8.80]	[2.39]	[2.24]	[7.57]	
TOTAL		**811**	**402**	**216**	**131**	**1560**

The chi-square statistic is 88.6726. The p-value is < 0.00001. The result is significant at p < .05.

DECISION: The chi-square statistic is 88.67. The p-value is 0.00001. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

ANALYSIS: Table 14 shows that the Chi-square statistics was adapted for the testing of hypothesis one at a significant level of 0.05 with 9 as the degree of freedom, and the result showed that an approximate chi-square calculated value of 88.67 was greater than the table value of 0.00001. Hence the result is significant, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis which states that: There is a significant absence of effective youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State. However, it failed to reject the alternative hypothesis: *There is no significant absence of effective youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State* is upheld.

Hypothesis Two: There is no notable correlation between empowerment programmes and crime reduction among youth in Benue State.

Table 15: Testing of Hypothesis Two

The Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Benue State	Data Values	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
The current youth empowerment initiatives have improved the economic opportunities in Benue State	Observed	168	136	65	21	390
	Expected	(196.75)	(122.25)	(42.25)	(28.75)	
	Chi-Square	[4.20]	[1.55]	[12.25]	[2.09]	
The skills training programs provided by initiatives prepares youth for job markets in Benue State and beyond.	Observed	196	111	40	43	390
	Expected	(196.75)	(122.25)	(42.25)	(28.75)	
	Chi-Square	[0.00]	[1.04]	[0.12]	[7.06]	
There are positive changes in the life of participants of youth empowerment initiatives by improved self-esteem, increased job prospects and improved relationships.	Observed	189	140	31	30	390
	Expected	(196.75)	(122.25)	(42.25)	(28.75)	
	Chi-Square	[0.31]	[2.58]	[3.00]	[0.05]	
These empowerment initiatives addressed the specific needs and concerns of youth in the State.	Observed	234	102	33	21	390
	Expected	(196.75)	(122.25)	(42.25)	(28.75)	
	Chi-Square	[7.05]	[3.35]	[2.03]	[2.09]	
TOTAL		**787**	**489**	**169**	**115**	**1560**

The chi-square statistic is 48.7611. The p-value is < 0.00001. The result is significant at p < .05.

DECISION: The chi-square statistic is 48.7611. The p-value is 0.00001. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

ANALYSIS: Table 15 shows that the Chi-square statistics was adapted for the testing of hypothesis two at a significant level of 0.05 with 9 as the degree of freedom, and the result showed that an approximate chi-square calculated value of 48.7611was greater than the table value of 0.00001. Hence the result is not significant; therefore, the researcher accepted the null hypothesis which states that: There is notable correlation between empowerment programmes and crime reduction among youth in Benue State. Rather, the Null hypothesis: There is no notable correlation between empowerment programmes and crime reduction among youth in Benue State is rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no substantial correlation between the challenges encountered and the success of youth empowerment programmes in Benue State.

Table 16: Testing of Hypothesis Three

Challenges of Implementing Youth Empowerment Initiations	Data Values	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
Lack of clear objectives and strategies is an impediment to implementing youth empowerment programmes in the State.	Observed	201	120	47	22	390
	Expected	(199.25)	(116.50)	(46.75)	(27.50)	
	Chi-Square	[0.02]	[0.11]	[0.00]	[1.10]	
Inadequate infrastructure and facilities is also another stumbling block.	Observed	198	99	55	38	390
	Expected	(199.25)	(116.50)	(46.75)	(27.50)	
	Chi-Square	[0.01]	[2.63]	[1.46]	[4.01]	
Ineffective monitoring and evaluation too contributes to the failures of these programmes	Observed	187	135	44	24	390
	Expected	(199.25)	(116.50)	(46.75)	(27.50)	
	Chi-Square	[0.75]	[2.94]	[0.16]	[0.45]	
Limited access to engage and participate is yet another issue hindering implementation of youth empowerment programmes in the State.	Observed	211	112	41	26	390
	Expected	(199.25)	(116.50)	(46.75)	(27.50)	
	Chi-Square	[0.69]	[0.17]	[0.71]	[0.08]	
TOTAL		**797**	**466**	**187**	**110**	**1560**

The chi-square statistic is 15.2773. The p-value is .083595. The result is not significant at p < .05.

DECISION: The chi-square statistic is 15.2773. The p-value is 0.83595. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

ANALYSIS: Table 16 shows that the Chi-square statistics was adapted for the testing of hypothesis two at a significant level of 0.05 with 9 as the degree of freedom, and the result showed that an approximate chi-square calculated value of 15.2773 was greater than the table value of 0.83595. Hence the result is not significant; therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis which states that: There is no substantial correlation between the challenges encountered and the success of youth empowerment programmes in Benue State. Rather, the alternative hypothesis: There is substantial correlation between the challenges encountered and the success of youth empowerment programmes in Benue State is upheld.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant association between the implementation of improved strategies for youth empowerment initiatives and decreased crime rates among youth in the Benue State.

Table 17: Testing of Hypothesis Four

Recommended Approach in Implementation of Youth Empowerment Initiations in Crime Control	Data Values	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
Needs Assessment: There is need to conduct a thorough needs assessment to in order to understand the target youth population's needs, aspirations, and challenges.	Observed	188	120	58	24	390
	Expected	(191.75)	(120.50)	(48.75)	(29.00)	
	Chi-Square	[0.07]	[0.00]	[1.76]	[0.86]	
Stakeholder Engagement: It is wise to engage with local stakeholders, including youth, community leaders, and organizations, to ensure ownership and support.	Observed	200	101	50	39	390
	Expected	(191.75)	(120.50)	(48.75)	(29.00)	
	Chi-Square	[0.35]	[3.16]	[0.03]	[3.45]	
Clear Objectives: Define clear, measurable objectives aligned with the needs assessment and stakeholder input.	Observed	178	139	41	32	390
	Expected	(191.75)	(120.50)	(48.75)	(29.00)	
	Chi-Square	[0.99]	[2.84]	[1.23]	[0.31]	
Skills Development: Offer skills training and development opportunities aligned with labor market demands.	Observed	201	122	46	21	390
	Expected	(191.75)	(120.50)	(48.75)	(29.00)	
	Chi-Square	[0.45]	[0.02]	[0.16]	[2.21]	
TOTAL		767	482	195	116	1560

The chi-square statistic is 17.879. The p-value is .036603. The result is significant at p < .05.

DECISION: The chi-square statistic is 17.879. The p-value is 0.036603. The result is not significant at p < .05.

ANALYSIS: Table 17 shows that the Chi-square statistics was adapted for the testing of hypothesis one at a significant level of 0.05 with 9 as the degree of freedom, and the result showed that an approximate chi-square calculated value of 17.879 was greater than the table value of 0.036603. Hence the result is not significant; therefore, the researcher accepted the null hypothesis which states that: There is no significant association between the implementation of improved strategies for youth empowerment initiatives and decreased crime rates among youth in the Benue State. Instead, the alternative hypothesis: There is a significant association between the implementation of improved strategies for youth empowerment initiatives and decreased crime rates among youth in the Benue State was upheld.

4.3   Discussion of the Findings

Chapter 4: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected from the research, focusing on the responses to the questionnaire. The responses were used to validate or invalidate the research hypotheses. A total of 341 out of 351 administered questionnaires were returned, yielding a high response rate of 97.2%.

4.1 Demographic Data Collected

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents (29.3%) were aged 37-42 years, while the smallest group (10.4%) was aged 18-24 years. The data indicates that the study included a broad range of ages, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and opinions. This diversity supports the validity of the findings as it includes both experienced and inexperienced individuals.

Table 2: Sex Distribution of Respondents

The sex distribution reveals that 58% of the respondents were male, and 42% were female. No other gender classifications were reported. The higher number of male respondents suggests that men were more likely to participate in the survey, which may influence the findings by reflecting more male perspectives.

Table 3: Marital Status Distribution of Respondents

The marital status data shows that nearly half of the respondents (47%) were single, 35% were married, and 18% were divorced. This distribution suggests that the study area was predominantly occupied by young, unmarried individuals, aligning with the focus on youth empowerment. The findings may primarily reflect the experiences and needs of younger, unmarried individuals.

Table 4: Educational Qualification of Respondents

The educational data indicates that a significant majority (56%) of respondents had tertiary education, while only 9% had no formal education. This suggests that the respondents were well-educated and likely capable of understanding and engaging with youth empowerment initiatives. The high level of education among respondents implies that they could effectively participate in and benefit from such programs.

Table 5: Occupational Distribution of Respondents

The occupational data reveals that 44% of respondents were unemployed, 31% were self-employed, and 13% were employed. This high unemployment rate highlights the relevance of youth empowerment initiatives in the study area. The data suggests that

many respondents would benefit from programs aimed at improving employment opportunities.

Table 6: Monthly Income Distribution

A significant portion of respondents (53%) earned below N20,000 monthly, indicating a predominantly low-income population. This underscores the need for economic empowerment initiatives in the area, as many respondents live below the poverty line, which could lead to higher vulnerability to crime.

4.1.2 Objective 1: Identifying Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Benue State

The study identified various youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State, including government-led programs like the Benue Youth Empowerment Scheme (B-YES) and NGO efforts such as those by the Foundation for Youth Empowerment (FYE). Despite these efforts, the data suggests that these initiatives have not gained widespread coverage in the state. A significant proportion of respondents (38.7%) strongly agreed that such initiatives had not reached a large audience, and 46% expressed eagerness to participate in programs focusing on entrepreneurship, education, leadership, and other areas.

Moreover, 44.6% of respondents strongly agreed that media coverage of these initiatives was low, and 62.2% had never participated in any youth empowerment program. These findings indicate that while initiatives exist, their reach and impact are limited, possibly due to inadequate promotion and engagement strategies.

4.1.3 Objective 2: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives

The data suggests that existing youth empowerment initiatives have positively impacted the economic opportunities and personal development of young people in Benue State. A significant majority of respondents (49.2%) strongly agreed that these programs have improved economic opportunities, and 50.1% strongly agreed that the skills training provided has prepared youth for the job market.

Furthermore, 47% of respondents strongly agreed that participation in these initiatives led to improved self-esteem, increased job prospects, and better relationships. However, despite these positive outcomes, there is still room for improvement in addressing the specific needs and concerns of the youth, as only 58.6% strongly agreed that the programs effectively did so.

4.1.4 Objective 3: Challenges Facing Youth Empowerment Programs

The study identified several challenges hindering the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs in Benue State. Key issues include the lack of clear objectives and strategies (56% strongly agreed), inadequate infrastructure (50.7% strongly agreed), and ineffective monitoring and evaluation (46.9% strongly agreed).

Additionally, limited access to participate in these programs was highlighted as a significant barrier, with 55.1% strongly agreeing that this issue impedes successful implementation.

These challenges indicate that while the programs have potential, their effectiveness is compromised by systemic issues such as insufficient planning, poor infrastructure, and inadequate oversight.

4.1.5 Objective 4: Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Empowerment Initiatives

The respondents provided several recommendations for improving youth empowerment initiatives. A majority strongly agreed on the need for thorough needs assessments (50.1%), stakeholder engagement (50.7%), clear objectives (52.8%), and skills development aligned with labor market demands (56.7%). These recommendations emphasize the importance of tailoring programs to the specific needs of the youth, involving local stakeholders, and providing relevant skills training to enhance employability.

Participants also suggested increasing accessibility and availability of programs, securing long-term funding, and improving coordination between different initiatives to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0   Introduction

This chapter presents Discussion of the Findings, Conclusion, Implications of the study, Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Study.

5.1   Summary

The analysis of data in this study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The quantitative data was derived from questionnaire response while analysis involved the use of Chi-square in testing the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. Tables were used in showing the results and interpretations followed immediately after each table. The chapter ended with the discussion of findings and summary.

5.2   Summary of the Findings

This study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State, particularly in reducing youth involvement in crime. Data was collected from 341 respondents through questionnaires, achieving a 97.2% response rate. The key findings from the study are summarized below:

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age Distribution: The majority of respondents (29.3%) were between 37-42 years, with the least representation (10.4%) from those aged 18-24. This distribution shows a balanced representation of both experienced and less experienced individuals.

*Sex Distribution:*The sample had more male respondents (58%) than females (42%), indicating a slight male dominance in the population studied.

Marital Status: Nearly half of the respondents (47%) were single, 35% were married, and 18% were divorced. This suggests that the study environment was largely occupied by young, unmarried individuals.

Educational Qualification:A significant portion of respondents (56%) had tertiary education, indicating a well-educated sample population, which is crucial for assessing youth empowerment initiatives.

Occupational Distribution: The majority (44%) of respondents were unemployed, highlighting the relevance of youth empowerment initiatives in addressing unemployment issues in the region.

Income Distribution: More than half (53%) of the respondents earned below N20,000 monthly, suggesting that low-income levels are prevalent among the youth in the study area.

2. Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Benue State

The study identified various youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State, including vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and educational scholarships. However, these initiatives have not gained widespread coverage, with 38.7% of respondents strongly agreeing that such programs are limited in reach.

- Youth showed eagerness to participate in programs related to entrepreneurship, education, leadership, and technology. However, low media coverage and lack of awareness were identified as significant challenges.

3. Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Crime Reduction

The findings suggest that youth empowerment initiatives have been effective in improving economic opportunities, enhancing skills for job markets, and boosting self-esteem among participants. This has, in turn, contributed to a reduction in youth crime.

Programs like the Benue Youth Empowerment Scheme (B-YES) were highlighted as successful in reducing youth unemployment, a key factor associated with crime.

4. Challenges Faced by Youth Empowerment Programs

Major challenges identified include inadequate infrastructure, lack of clear objectives, ineffective monitoring and evaluation, and limited access to these programs. These issues hinder the full implementation and success of youth empowerment initiatives in the state.

5. Recommendations for Improvement

The study recommends conducting thorough needs assessments, engaging local stakeholders, defining clear objectives, and offering skills development aligned with labor market demands. These steps are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in reducing crime and improving the socio-economic status of the youth in Benue State.

Overall, while the existing youth empowerment initiatives have shown positive impacts, particularly in reducing youth involvement in crime, there is a need for better

implementation strategies, improved infrastructure, and broader coverage to ensure these programs reach and benefit a larger segment of the youth population in Benue State.

Hypotheses Testing:

1. Hypothesis One:

Chi-square test (88.67, $p < 0.05$) led to rejecting the null hypothesis, indicating significant absence of effective youth empowerment initiatives.

2. Hypothesis Two:

Chi-square test (48.7611, $p < 0.05$) showed a notable correlation between empowerment programs and crime reduction.

3. Hypothesis Three:

Chi-square test (15.2773, $p > 0.05$) supported the alternative hypothesis, indicating substantial correlation between challenges and program success.

4. Hypothesis Four:

Chi-square test (17.879, $p > 0.05$) upheld the alternative hypothesis, demonstrating significant association between improved strategies and decreased crime rates.

5.2   Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore the critical need for comprehensive and well-structured youth empowerment initiatives in Benue State. Addressing the identified challenges and implementing the recommended strategies can enhance the effectiveness of these programs, ultimately contributing to economic empowerment and crime reduction among the youth. The demographic insights highlight the importance of tailoring initiatives to meet the specific needs of a diverse and predominantly young population.

5.3   Recommendations

   Implement comprehensive needs assessments to identify the specific requirements, interests, and aspirations of the youth. Tailoring programs to meet these identified needs will ensure higher relevance and effectiveness.Involve a broad range of stakeholders, including youth, community leaders, educational institutions, non-

governmental organizations, and government agencies in the planning and implementation process. Stakeholder engagement fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that diverse perspectives are considered.

Also Establish clear, achievable, and measurable objectives for each youth empowerment initiative. Clear goals facilitate better monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of programs to achieve desired outcomes.

Furthermore Invest in the necessary infrastructure to support youth empowerment programs. This includes creating safe and accessible physical spaces for training and activities, and ensuring access to technology and internet resources.

Develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and impact. Regular assessments will help identify successful components and areas needing improvement, facilitating data-driven decision-making.

Ensure equal access to empowerment programs for all youth, regardless of their background or circumstances. Provide transportation, financial assistance, or flexible scheduling to accommodate different needs and increase participation rates.

Utilize various media platforms to increase awareness and participation in youth empowerment programs. Effective communication strategies can reach a broader audience and encourage more.

5.4   Contribution of the Study to the Field of Knowledge

1. Enhanced Understanding of Youth Demographics:

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the demographic characteristics of youth in Benue State, Nigeria, highlighting key aspects such as age, sex, marital status, educational qualifications, occupation, and income levels. This detailed demographic data offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and program developers aiming to tailor youth empowerment initiatives effectively.

2. Identification of Youth Empowerment Needs:

By exploring the specific needs and interests of the youth, such as entrepreneurship, education, leadership, health, technology, arts, and culture, the study identifies critical areas for intervention. This understanding helps in designing targeted programs that

resonate with the aspirations of the youth, thereby increasing participation and engagement.

3. Assessment of Current Empowerment Initiatives:

The study evaluates the effectiveness of existing youth empowerment programs in Benue State, revealing both their strengths and areas for improvement. This assessment is crucial for refining current strategies and ensuring that initiatives are more impactful in enhancing economic opportunities, job market readiness, self-esteem, and social relationships among the youth.

4. Identification of Challenges and Barriers:

The study uncovers significant challenges faced by youth empowerment programs, such as lack of clear objectives, inadequate infrastructure, ineffective monitoring, and limited participation access. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing comprehensive solutions that address the root causes of program inefficacy.

5. Correlation Between Empowerment and Crime Reduction:

By establishing a correlation between youth empowerment initiatives and crime reduction, the study provides empirical evidence supporting the role of empowerment programs in enhancing social stability and safety. This finding underscores the importance of investing in youth development as a strategy for crime prevention.

6. Foundation for Future Research:

The findings and insights from this study lay the groundwork for future research in the field of youth empowerment. Subsequent studies can build on this research to explore deeper dimensions, such as long-term impacts of empowerment programs, comparative studies across different regions, and the role of digital and technological interventions in youth development.

Overall, the study significantly contributes to the field by providing a detailed analysis of the youth demographic, identifying critical needs and challenges, and offering evidence-based recommendations for enhancing youth empowerment initiatives.

5.5 Suggestion for Further Study

Long-term Impact Assessment:

Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impacts of youth empowerment initiatives. Assess how participation in these programs influences career trajectories, economic stability, and personal development over an extended period.

Comparative Studies:

Perform comparative studies across different regions or countries to identify best practices and successful strategies in youth empowerment. Understanding regional differences can help in customizing programs to better fit local contexts.

Role of Technology in Empowerment:

Investigate the role of digital and technological interventions in youth empowerment. Assess how access to technology, digital literacy training, and online platforms can enhance educational, entrepreneurial, and employment opportunities for youth

REFERENCE

Adamu, U., & Agada, T. (2021). *NGOs and youth empowerment in Benue State: Challenges and prospects.* Journal of African Studies, 12(3), 201-218.

Adebayo, T. (2021). Vocational Training and Crime Reduction among Nigerian Youth. *Journal of Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 17(2), 78-94

Ajufo, B.I. (2013). Challenges of youth unemployment in Nigeria Effective career guidance as a Panacea. *An international multidisciplinary journal, Ethiopia.* 7(1), 307-321

Akinyemi, A. & Olatunji, B. (2022). Youth Empowerment in Nigeria: Opportunities and Challenges. *Journal of Development Studies*, 58(3), 221-237.

Aremu, M.A & Ahmed, Y.A. (2011). Am investigation of security and crime management in developing society: The implication for Nigeria Democratic Set-up. *International journal academic resources for business and social science.* 3(1),390-399.corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/economics/unemployment/

Awogbenle, A. C., & Iwuamadi, K. C. (2010). Youth Unemployment: Entrepreneurship Development Programme as an Intervention Mechanism. *African Journal of Business Management,* 4, 831-835

Bennett, T. (2018). *Understanding youth empowerment: A multidimensional approach.* New York: Routledge.

Cook, P.J. (1991). The technology of personal violence. In Micheal Tony & Norval Morris, eds. Crime and Justice, Chicago University press 14, 142-153.

Ebigbo,O. (2013). Tackling youth Unemployment in Nigeria: The Lagos State development and empowerment program initiative. *Afro Asian journal of science,* 3(3),89-96.

Edeh, L. (2020). *Impact of Benue Youth Empowerment Scheme on youth unemployment.* Nigerian Journal of Social Sciences, 15(2), 45-60

Eze, O. (2020). Enugu Government Empowers Youths with Digital Skills. June, 2020 p10.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2019). National Youth Policy: Enhancing Youth Development and Participation in the National Development Process. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development

Hope, S. (2011). *Empowerment and crime prevention: Theoretical foundations and practical applications*. Crime Prevention Studies, 23, 15-30

Isa, A. M & Vembe, J.T. (2013). Youth empowerment and National Development in Nigeria. *international journal of Busines and Management invention*, 2(10), 82-88..

Ngwoke, I.B. (1992). Mobilizing and empowering youth for sustainable community. *Journal of human resources management.* 20(3), 52-67.

Nkpoyen, F. &Bassey, G.E. (2012). Micro-leading an empowerment strategy for poverty alleviation among women in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. *International journal of business and social science*. 32(18),233-241

Nwankwo, C., Nwachukwu, O., & Nwosu, I. (2023). Youth Empowerment and Crime Reduction: A Case Study of Nigerian States. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 9(1), 112-128

Nwankwo, A., & Odo, A. (2020). *Youth crime and the role of empowerment programs in Nigeria: A case study of Benue State*. African Journal of Criminology

Ochoga, E. & Ejeh, J. (2023). Evaluation of Youth Empowerment Initiatives in Benue State. *Benue State Journal of Development Studies*, 7(2), 201-219.

Ogbu, I. (2019). *International organizations and youth development in Nigeria: The case of UNDP in Benue State*. International Journal of Development Studies, 5(1), 89-105.

Okafor, G. & Okafor, E. (2021). Challenges of Youth Empowerment Programs in Nigeria. *African Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development*, 12(4), 345-362. Google Scholar

Okaba, B.O.(2005). Petroleum industry and the paradox of rural poverty in the Niger-Delta. Benin City. *Ethiope publishing corporation*

Oladeji,O.F. (2019). The skills acquisition programme and youth empowerment in Ondo state of Nigeria: An empirical study. *Global journal of human-social science.*18, 7-13.

Olaleye,Y.L. (2010). Empowering youth for a crime free society: the case study of Nigeria. *African journal for the psychological studies of social issues..*

Omeje, A.N., Mba, A.J & Okeke, M. (2020). Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: Implication for Economic Diversification. SAGE Open 10(4), 2158-2440.

Onoge, T. (2018). Entrepreneurship development in Nigeria: problem and prospect a year ago. *Legit Newspaper*, 13.

Onyekpe, N. (2007), Managing youth at election: The constitution. A journal of constitutional development. 1(1),76-87.

Slogan, W. (1986). Fear of crime and Neighborhood change. In Reiss, J. Jr & Tony,M. Eds. Communities and Crime. *Crime and Justice.* 8, 163-175.

Udoikah, J.M., Omeje, P.N & Ndaeyo, E. (2023). Youth Empowerment and Crime Reduction in selected Communities in NSukka, L. G. A of Enugu State. *Africa journal of politics and administrative studies.* 16(1) 547-574.

Ugochukwu, M.O & Uchenna, T.U. (2023). Youth empowerment, crime prevention and control in Ihiala L.G.A of Anambra State, Nigeria. *Socialscientia journal of the social sciencea and Humanities. Retrieved 12th March, 2024.*