

Soft-Skills Administration and Youth Empowerment: An Evaluation of Self-Employment and Capacity

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Abstract: Youth unemployment continues to hinder Nigeria's economic progress, particularly as universities are expected to equip graduates with the competencies required for success in an increasingly competitive labour market. While technical knowledge remains vital, recent evidence demonstrates that soft skills communication, organizational capability, and problem-solving play a decisive role in preparing young people for entrepreneurial careers. This study explored how structured soft-skills interventions strengthen students' readiness for self-employment at the University of Calabar (UNICAL). A survey design was used, and data were drawn from 200 randomly selected staff and students out of a population of 4,421. A validated questionnaire served as the main data-collection tool, and independent t-tests were conducted to examine the study hypotheses. Findings revealed that communication competence, organizational skills, and problem-solving abilities significantly enhance students' preparedness for self-employment. The study therefore concludes that integrating structured soft-skills development programmes can substantially improve entrepreneurial capacity among youth. It recommends that higher education institutions embed soft-skills training, experiential learning, and entrepreneurship support systems into their academic environment to expand self-employment prospects, reduce youth unemployment, and promote regional economic development.

Keywords: *Soft Skills, Entrepreneurship, Youth Empowerment, Self-Employment, Higher Education, UNICAL.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment continues to escalate across many developing countries, with sub-Saharan Africa experiencing some of the highest rates due to limited employment opportunities and a rapidly expanding youth population (ILO, 2023). Nigeria reflects this troubling trend, as many graduates face unemployment or underemployment because their skills do not adequately align with labour-market requirements. Higher education institutions are now tasked not only with providing disciplinary knowledge but also with fostering transferable skills that enable graduates to thrive in both formal employment and entrepreneurial pursuits (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2019).

Soft skills variously labelled employability skills, human-centred competencies, or non-technical capabilities encompass communication, leadership, creativity, teamwork, adaptability, emotional regulation, and critical thinking (Robles, 2022). These abilities complement technical expertise and are essential

for navigating contemporary work settings. For individuals intending to pursue entrepreneurship, these skills support networking, negotiation, decision-making, problem resolution, and resilience competencies that are critical in dynamic business environments. Although UNICAL provides entrepreneurship education and certain student development programmes, there remains limited research analysing how well soft-skills administration prepares students for self-employment. Many Nigerian graduates continue to report inadequate exposure to practical training, insufficient experiential learning, and limited industry engagement, which hinder their entrepreneurial confidence and readiness (Ekwere, 2021).

This study was therefore motivated by the need to examine the contribution of soft-skills administration to students' self-employment potential at UNICAL. The research centres on three vital soft-skills domains communication, organizational capability, and problem-solving identified in the literature as

essential for entrepreneurial success (Heckman & Kautz, 2020; Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2021; Maric *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2020).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The global rise in youth unemployment, particularly in emerging economies, has prompted a reassessment of traditional models of education and skills development. Across many countries, including Nigeria, the persistent inability of formal employment sectors to absorb the growing youth population has pushed governments and institutions to strengthen employability and entrepreneurship frameworks (ILO, 2020). Although mastery of technical or discipline-specific skills remains fundamental, an extensive body of scholarship has increasingly underscored the relevance of soft skills adaptable personal and interpersonal competencies that enable individuals to succeed in diverse work and social environments (Deming, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020). These soft skills, often categorized as non-cognitive or transversal competencies, include communication, leadership, initiative, teamwork, critical and creative thinking, self-regulation, and problem-solving (Robles, 2017; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2019). Unlike hard skills that are measurable and task-specific, soft skills are broad, flexible, and universally applicable, enabling individuals to respond effectively to uncertainty, complexity, and dynamic labour-market conditions.

Patton (2021) explored the relationship between soft skills specifically marketing and communication skills and self-employment outcomes among 171 postgraduate business-education students. Using a descriptive survey and t-test analysis, the study found that communication skills significantly enhance the availability of self-employment opportunities for graduates. Interestingly, Patton further revealed that gender differences did not influence how communication or marketing skills affected self-employment, suggesting that these competencies are universally beneficial across student sub-groups.

Craig (2021) also examined communication as a central employability skill and highlighted its importance for organizational success. His research, which synthesized diverse institutional assessments, showed that interpersonal communication competence enhances teamwork effectiveness, improves hiring prospects, and supports promotion and organizational adaptability. These findings imply that communication skills are crucial not only for formal employment but also for managing relationships with clients, customers, partners, and other business stakeholders in entrepreneurial settings.

Afolabi *et al.* (2017) addressed entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions and discovered that structured entrepreneurial training positively shapes students' inclination toward self-reliance. Their regression and

correlation analyses demonstrated that entrepreneurship education equips students with competencies, confidence, and practical knowledge needed for initiating business ventures. They recommended stronger collaboration between tertiary institutions and private sector organizations to improve experiential learning, and also suggested incentives such as awards and sponsorships to motivate students to transition their project ideas into viable start-ups.

Egwu (2017) examined the creative skills of business education students at Cross River State University of Technology and the University of Calabar. Using a descriptive survey approach, Egwu discovered that students possessed only moderate levels of creative thinking, a critical competency for entrepreneurial innovation. The study emphasized the need for higher institutions to require students to develop business plans or prototype ideas before graduation. Such requirements encourage practical engagement, stimulate innovation, and strengthen graduates' ability to pursue self-employment.

Similarly, Olabisi (2017) investigated the relationship between entrepreneurship skill acquisition and employability among graduates in Nigeria. The study, based on data from 353 social and management science graduates, found that entrepreneurship training fosters entrepreneurial intentions and enhances employability. However, many participants expressed hesitation towards becoming self-employed due to challenges such as access to capital, fear of failure, and insufficient managerial experience. This suggests that while soft-skills training is important, broader systemic challenges must also be addressed to boost self-employment rates.

Organizational capabilities form another important dimension of soft skills. Maric *et al.* (2022) conducted a systematic review exploring the link between organizational support and career self-management across three academic databases. They found that employee perception of organizational support through HR practices, leadership interactions, and workplace climate positively influences individual career initiatives and self-regulatory behaviours. Their findings imply that environments that model effective organizational structures may also help individuals develop similar organizational competencies that support entrepreneurial activity.

Leadership capability is another competence closely linked to entrepreneurship. Olufisayo (2016) investigated leadership self-efficacy and motivation to lead among 545 Turkish university students. The study found that leadership self-efficacy directly influences leadership practices, while motivation to lead plays a mediating role. This suggests that efforts to improve students' confidence and motivation can significantly enhance their ability to assume leadership roles, make decisions, and navigate complex tasks features essential for entrepreneurial ventures.

Organizational and psychological factors can also influence performance outcomes. In a study of employees at PT Media Indra Buana in Jakarta, Amalia (2014) examined the effects of organizational commitment and self-efficacy on job satisfaction and performance. Using structural equation modelling, the findings showed that self-efficacy had a significant positive relationship with both job satisfaction and performance, while organizational commitment influences performance directly. Although focused on employees, these findings underscore how personal belief systems such as self-efficacy, shaped productivity and resilience, which are crucial for entrepreneurs who must frequently confront uncertainty and challenges.

Problem-solving skills have emerged as a consistent predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour. Craig (2021) conducted a series of studies examining how self-awareness fosters problem-solving orientation. Across four studies involving students and working adults, Craig demonstrated that self-aware individuals tend to adopt problem-solving strategies that enhance their ability to select effective means toward achieving personal goals. These results point to the significance of reflective and analytical thinking skills that are critical for entrepreneurs navigating unpredictable markets.

Johnson (2016) also highlighted the role of problem-solving skills in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. In a qualitative study of 80 aspiring entrepreneurs, problem-solving was identified as a core competency that improves innovation, adaptability, and responsiveness to rapid changes in business environments. Similarly, Kim et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between problem-solving skills and innovative behaviour among 250 entrepreneurship students. Their regression analysis indicated that students who could generate multiple alternatives and evaluate potential outcomes demonstrated higher levels of innovation an attribute essential for business sustainability.

Idris and Bello (2019) used a mixed-methods approach to examine the influence of cognitive competencies on graduates' self-employment decisions. Their results showed that graduates with stronger problem-solving abilities were more confident in managing entrepreneurial risks, adapting to business challenges, and sustaining business ideas. On the other hand, Patel and Ganzach (2019), using longitudinal data, discovered that while problem-solving aptitude significantly increased earnings for those already in self-employment, it did not strongly predict who chooses to become self-employed in the first place. This distinction suggests that problem-solving supports entrepreneurial success more than it drives initial entrepreneurial intentions.

Research emerging between 2022 and 2024 has expanded the discussion on soft skills beyond entrepreneurship to administrative, organizational, and leadership contexts. Studies by Sari and Hidayat (2022), and Pradana and Wicaksana (2023), involving office administrators and educational staff,

respectively, concluded that communication, teamwork, adaptability, and initiative were stronger predictors of job performance than technical skills. These findings reinforce the argument that soft skills form a foundation for both administrative and entrepreneurial roles.

Phrombutr (2024) found that analytical thinking, creativity, communication, and teamwork significantly improve school administrative effectiveness. Hamad and Ahmed (2023), using structural equation modelling across private schools in Iraq, demonstrated that leadership soft skills such as adaptability, initiative, and communication enhance institutional agility, particularly during emergencies such as the rapid shift to remote learning.

Similarly, Al-Quraishi (2022) studied tourism education administrators and found that strong soft skills reduce conflict, strengthen teamwork, and enhance motivation among staff. Sutrisno (2023) emphasized that competencies such as communication, empathy, and conflict management contribute to inclusive school leadership and help build organizational trust. Safitri and Darma (2024) explored soft skills in human-resource development and identified adaptability, creativity, and decision-making as essential for managing digital-era challenges, recommending ongoing professional development programmes.

Brown and Luzmore (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of soft-skill frameworks in higher education, identifying over 40 distinct competencies and arguing for integrated learning models that blend workshops, experiential activities, and reflective practice. Their work offers theoretical clarity and highlights the complexity of defining and assessing soft skills. This complexity has prompted new methodological innovations such as the multimodal AI-based tool developed by Lin et al. (2025). Their system evaluates communication, creativity, and decision-making using facial expressions, gestures, and speech patterns, demonstrating improved objectivity compared to traditional self-report surveys.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection of data from a representative sample and supports the use of statistical procedures to examine relationships between variables. A descriptive survey allows the researcher to assess participants' opinions, attitudes, and experiences regarding soft-skills administration and its influence on self-employment readiness. This design has been widely applied in education and social-science research, particularly where the aim is to generalize findings from a sample to a larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

B. Area of the Study

The research was conducted at the University of Calabar (UNICAL), located in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. UNICAL was selected because, as a federal university, it plays a strategic role in human-capital development within the region. The campus hosts a diverse academic community across multiple faculties, providing a suitable setting for assessing soft-skills administration and entrepreneurial preparedness among students and staff.

C. Population of the Study

The target population consisted of 4,421 staff and students of UNICAL. This population included both academic and non-academic staff as well as students from various faculties. This broad representation was intended to ensure the inclusion of individuals who have participated in or benefitted from university-based soft-skills initiatives.

D. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 200 respondents were selected as the sample size. The sample size was considered adequate based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample-determination criteria for social-science studies. A simple random sampling technique was used to provide each member of the population an equal opportunity of being selected. This method minimizes bias and enhances the generalizability of findings to the broader population.

E. Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was titled Soft-Skills Administration and Youth Self-Employment Capacity Questionnaire (SSAYSECQ). It consisted of two major sections:

- Section A: demographic information (gender, age, academic role, and years of experience)
- Section B: 30 structured items designed to measure the three independent variables communication skills, organizational skills, and problem-solving skills—and the dependent variable, self-employment capacity.

A 4-point modified Likert scale was used to measure respondents' perceptions:

- Strongly Agree (4)
- Agree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly Disagree (1)

F. Validity of the Instrument

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts—two lecturers from the Department of Vocational and Special Education and one expert in

Measurement and Evaluation. Their recommendations led to adjustments in item wording, clarity, and relevance to research objectives. This expert review enhanced the instrument's precision and relevance.

G. Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method. A pilot study involving 30 respondents from a neighboring tertiary institution was conducted. The reliability coefficients obtained ranged from 0.87 to 0.89, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency according to Nunnally's benchmark of 0.70 and above for educational research instruments. Therefore, the instrument was deemed reliable for the main study.

H. Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was secured from university authorities prior to data collection. The researcher, with assistance from trained research aides, administered the questionnaire physically across different departments. Respondents were informed about the objectives of the research and assured of confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were collected within a two-week period.

I. Method of Data Analysis

Collected data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 25). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize demographic information. To test the hypotheses, the independent t-test was applied at a 0.05 significance level to determine whether significant differences existed in respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of the examined soft skills on self-employment capacity.

J. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were upheld throughout the study. Respondents participated voluntarily and were free to withdraw at any time without consequence. All responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Anonymity was ensured by refraining from collecting personally identifying information.

IV. RESULTS

➤ General Description of Variables

The study has one independent variable soft skills administration. Furthermore, the study had three sub-independent variables which are; communication skills, organization skills, problem-solving skills. Finally, the study dependent variable is; boosting youth capacity towards self-employment. The data for this study was obtained from a sample of 200 staff randomly selected University of Calabar, Cross River State.

➤ *Hypothesis-by-Hypothesis Presentation of Results*

Table 1: Summary Data on the Variables of the Study for Male respondents

S/n	Variable	No. of Items	N		SD
1	Influence of communication skills on self-employment	5	87	18.97	12.79
2	Influence of organizational skills on self-employment	5	87	18.95	12.78
3	Influence of problem-solving skills on self-employment in	2	87	19.57	13.28

Table 2: Summary Data on the Variables of the Study for Female respondents

S/n	Variable	No. of Items	N		SD
1	Influence of communication skills on self-employment in Unical	5	110	17.40	13.90
2	Influence of organizational skills on self-employment in Unical	5	110	17.30	13.89
3	Influence of problem-solving skills on self-employment in Unical	2	110	16.90	15.00

• *Hypothesis One*

There is no significant influence of communication skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State.

Table 3: T-Test of Statistical Difference Between Male and Female Response on the Influence of Communication Skills on Self-Employment in Unical, Cross River State.

Respondents	SD	N	df	Standard	Error	t-Cal	t-Critical	Decision
Male	18.97	12.79	87	163	0.89	1.75	1.65	Reject H_{01}
Female	17.40	13.90	110					

In table 3, the t – test indicates that the critical value of t with 163 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of statistical probability is 1.65. Since the calculated value of t is 1.75, being greater than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}). That is, significant statistical difference exist in the mean responses of male and female respondents on influence of communication skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State. Hence, communication skills can influence self-employment in Unical, Cross River State.

• *Hypothesis Two*

There is no significant influence of organizational skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State.

Table 4: T-Test of Statistical Difference Between Mean and Female Response on the Influence of Organizational Skills on Self-Employment in Unical, Cross River State.

Respondents	SD	N	df	Standard	Error	t-Cal	t-Critical	Decision
Male	18.95	12.78	87	163	0.89	1.84	1.65	Reject H_{02}
Female	17.30	13.89	110					

In table 4, the t-test indicates that the critical value of t with 165 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of statistical probability is 1.65. Since the calculated value of t is 1.84, being greater than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{02}). That is, significant statistical difference exists in the mean responses of male and female on the influence of organizational skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State. Hence, organizational skills can influence self-employment in Unical, Cross River State.

• *Hypothesis Three*

There is no significant influence of problem-solving skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State.

Table 5: T-Test of Statistical Difference Between Male and Female Response on the Influence of Problem-Solving Skills on Self-Employment in Unical, Cross River State.

Respondents	SD	N	df	Standard	Error	t-Cal	t-Critical	Decision
Male	18.57	13.28	61	163	0.62	1.81	1.65	Reject H_{02}
Female	16.90	15.00	104					

In table 5, the t-test indicates that the critical value of t with 163 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of statistical probability is 1.65. Since the calculated value of t is 1.81, being greater than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis

(H_{03}). That is, significant statistical difference exists in the mean responses of male and female on the influence of problem-solving skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross

River State. Hence, problem-solving skills can influence self-employment in Unical, Cross River State.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are discussed in line with the three research questions and three hypotheses.

➤ *H1. There is no Significant Influence of Communication Skills on Self-Employment in Unical, Cross River State.*

Analysis of Hypothesis One, which posited no significant influence of communication skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State, revealed a statistically significant influence. The t-test results, with a calculated t-value of 1.75 exceeding the critical t-value of 1.65 (df=163, s=0.05), led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that communication skills do indeed influence self-employment in the region and that a significant statistical difference exists in the mean responses between male and female respondents. This finding aligns with Gideon (2024), who also found that communication skills influence self-employment opportunities, thus providing strong external validity. However, our study introduces a nuance not observed by Gideon (2024) by identifying a significant gender difference in the perceived or actual influence of communication skills on self-employment. The results also indirectly support Melvin (2018), emphasis on oral communication skills for competitive advantage, as self-employment requires similar interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, the findings are indirectly supported by Afolabi *et al.* (2017) and Olabisi (2017), who highlight the importance of entrepreneurship education and skills acquisition for self-reliance, with communication skills being a core component. Egwu (2017)'s focus on creative skills also complements our findings, as effective communication is essential for leveraging creativity in self-employment. In essence, the study strongly supports the notion that communication skills are crucial for self-employment success, particularly in Unical, while also highlighting the need for further investigation into gender-specific applications of these skills.

➤ *H2. There is no Significant Influence of Organizational Skills on Self-Employment in Unical, Cross River State.*

The hypothesis, "There is no significant influence of organizational skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State," was rejected based on the analysis of Table 5. The calculated t-value of 1.84 exceeded the critical t-value of 1.65 (with 165 degrees of freedom at a 0.05 level of statistical probability), indicating a significant statistical difference in the mean responses of male and female participants regarding the influence of organizational skills on self-employment. This finding suggests that organizational skills do indeed influence self-employment in the studied population. While directly comparable literature on organizational skills and self-employment is limited, the finding can be indirectly supported and contextualized by existing research on related concepts. For instance, Maric *et al.* (2015), found that organizational support positively influences career self-management, and while not

directly about self-employment, effective self-management often necessitates strong organizational skills. Similarly, Olufisayo (2016), highlighted the significant impact of leadership self-efficacy and motivation to lead on leadership behaviors. Given that self-employment inherently requires leadership and self-management, the underlying importance of skills that contribute to these behaviors, such as organizational skills, can be inferred. Amalia (2014), also explored the effect of self-efficacy on employee performance and job satisfaction. Although her study focused on employees within an organization, the concept of self-efficacy, which often encompasses an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute tasks, can be linked to the successful application of organizational skills in a self-employment.

➤ *H3. There is no Significant Influence of Problem-Solving Skills on Self-Employment in Unical, Cross River State.*

The null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant influence of problem-solving skills on self-employment in Unical, Cross River State, was rejected. As shown in Table 6, the calculated t-value of 1.81 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.65 (with 163 degrees of freedom at a 0.05 level of statistical probability). This indicates a significant statistical difference in the mean responses of male and female participants regarding the influence of problem-solving skills on self-employment, thereby confirming that problem-solving skills do influence self-employment in the region. This finding is strongly supported by the existing literature. Johnson (2016), directly highlighted problem-solving skills as a key element contributing to innovative behavior and adaptability in the entrepreneurial environment, directly influencing individuals' intentions to venture into self-employment. Similarly, Kim, Choi, Sung, and Park (2018), found a significant positive correlation between strong problem-solving skills and innovative behavior among budding entrepreneurs, asserting that adept problem-solvers are more likely to succeed in dynamic business environments, which directly translates to enhanced self-employment potential. Idris and Bello (2019), further corroborate this, showing that graduates with higher self-reported problem-solving skills were more inclined towards self-employment due to increased confidence in overcoming business challenges and adapting to market uncertainties. While Craig (2021), focuses on self-awareness and its mediation by problem-solving orientation in goal striving, the underlying principle of effective problem-solving for achieving personal goals (which self-employment inherently is) aligns with our finding. Patel and Ganzach (2019), provide a nuanced perspective, suggesting that while cognitive skill balance (including problem-solving aptitude) significantly increases earnings for those already self-employed, it might be a prerequisite skill for success rather than a primary driver for the initial decision to pursue self-employment for highly educated individuals. Overall, the consistent thread across these studies reinforces the crucial role of problem-solving skills for both the initiation and success of self-employment ventures.

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