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Effect of the N-Power Program Participation on Youth Economic Empowerment in Taraba State

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Abstract

Youth unemployment continues to pose a significant developmental challenge in Nigeria, with rates of 8.4 percent for individuals aged 15–24 and 7.5 percent for those aged 25–34, both of which are considerably higher than those seen in older age groups (NBS, World Bank, ILO, 2025). This issue is particularly pronounced in Taraba State, a rural area affected by conflict, which is marked by widespread structural obstacles such as insufficient infrastructure, low levels of ICT penetration, and economic marginalisation. In response to this crisis, the Nigerian government initiated the N-Power program in 2016, aimed at providing temporary employment, vocational training, and monthly stipends to unemployed youth aged 18–35. This research investigates the direct impact of participation in the N-Power program on the economic outcomes of youth in Taraba State. Employing a cross-sectional survey design and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with a sample of 450 beneficiaries from the three senatorial districts, the study identified a statistically significant direct effect, thereby affirming the program's measurable impact. Nevertheless, the modest effect size indicates that the direct economic influence primarily operates through indirect channels. Access to resources demonstrated a slightly stronger impact than program participation alone, highlighting the critical role of resource availability. The study concludes that the direct effect primarily serves as a mechanism for consumption smoothing rather than functioning as an independent catalyst for sustainable economic empowerment. The findings emphasise the necessity of reframing program advocacy, ensuring dual reliability through consistent stipends and effective supervision, and addressing disparities in implementation. This research contributes to the existing literature by offering the first empirical assessment of the direct effect of N-Power participation on youth economic outcomes in Taraba State utilising PLS-SEM.

Keywords: *N-Power program, youth economic empowerment, direct effect, PLS-SEM, Taraba State*

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment continues to be one of the most significant developmental issues facing Nigeria. The Nigeria Labour Force Statistics report, collaboratively produced by the National Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization (2025), indicates that unemployment is particularly high among the youth, with rates of 8.4 percent for individuals aged 15–24 and 7.5 percent for those aged 25–34. In contrast, older age groups exhibit considerably lower unemployment rates, with 3.7 percent for ages 35–44, 2 percent for ages 45–54, and 4.4 percent for ages 55–64. These figures highlight the disproportionate concentration of unemployment within the youth demographic in Nigeria. As noted by Olukayode (2017), the significant gap between the unemployment rates of young people and older adults poses a substantial barrier to economic advancement.

This issue is particularly pronounced in Taraba State, which serves as the focal point of this study. Taraba is a rural, conflict-affected area in North-East Nigeria, marked by pervasive structural challenges, including limited physical infrastructure, insufficient ICT penetration, and severe economic marginalisation, all of which contribute to youth disenfranchisement (Yakubu et. al., 2023; Usman et. al., 2024). Empirical findings from this study reinforce this context: in rural Taraba, 67 percent of participants indicated a lack of adequate ICT access, rendering the digital skills acquired through the program largely ineffective. Additionally, the state is hindered by restricted credit markets, underdeveloped transportation systems, and a weak private sector employment foundation. These circumstances suggest that even well-crafted interventions encounter

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significant obstacles, as the transformation of human capital into sustainable economic benefits is fundamentally limited by the overarching socio-structural landscape (Yakubu et. al., 2023).

In response to the ongoing crisis, the Nigerian government initiated the N-Power program as a key component of the National Social Investment Program. This intervention offers temporary employment, vocational training, and monthly stipends to unemployed youth across four sectors: Teach, Health, Agro, and Tech, executed through Batches A, B, and C (FGN, 2018). Although the program has seen short-term success by integrating youth into schools, health facilities, and agricultural ventures, there are ongoing concerns regarding its long-term effectiveness. Significant challenges include the difficulty of transitioning from temporary positions to stable employment or sustainable enterprises, insufficient post-program support in terms of mentorship and financial assistance, limited infrastructure, especially in ICT and technology, and the critical issue of sustainability beyond the two-year program duration (Ogunleye, 2021; Yakubu et. al., 2023). These limitations collectively hinder the program's ability to achieve enduring economic transformation for its participants.

Consequently, this article investigates the direct impact of participation in the N-Power program on the economic empowerment of youth in Taraba State, Nigeria. The research is anchored in Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) and the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which offer a theoretical framework for comprehending how investments in skills and access to resources affect economic results.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Youth empowerment

The phenomenon of youth unemployment is generally defined as the lack of job opportunities for individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to enhance their employability (Kluve et. al., 2016). A poignant example of Nigeria's unemployment dilemma was the 2014 recruitment exercise conducted by the Nigeria Immigration Service, during which 500,000 candidates competed for a mere 4,556 positions, culminating in a tragic stampede that claimed 16 lives (Associated Press, 201). Wesseling (2021) expands on this definition by focusing on highly educated youth and highlighting the specific issue concerning those classified as NEETs (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), as they neither contribute to economic productivity nor invest in human capital. Uba and Okeke (2023) characterise it as the inability of young individuals to secure employment despite their readiness and willingness to work. The ILO (2020) stresses that youth unemployment carries substantial economic, social, and psychological repercussions, thereby necessitating that policies aimed at addressing this challenge be prioritised for the betterment of society.

2.2 Youth Empowerment Initiatives

According to Ohiza and Adamu (2009), youth empowerment initiatives represent a policy framework or mechanism designed to provide training, empowerment opportunities, and wealth creation aimed at enhancing income generation and improving the social status of unemployed youths, as cited in Waziri et. al. 2022). Additionally, these initiatives encompass various methods through which young individuals can be transformed to effect changes, enabling them to become more productive members of society. Furthermore, Waziri et al. (2022) argue that these initiatives involve instilling in the youth a passion for transforming ideas into creativity through exposure to vocational skills or training that fosters productivity. This approach aims to ensure a reorientation of values among the youth, transforming them into creators of wealth and employment opportunities rather than mere job seekers.

2.3 Economic Empowerment

This refers to the ability of individuals to generate income, attain financial independence, and contribute to economic growth, as discussed by (Mainoma et. al., 2024). This concept is fundamental in promoting sustainable development and enhancing the welfare of individuals and communities. Moreover, Sen (1999) and Haq (1995), as cited in Attah and Oche (2024), examine economic empowerment within the framework of human development, viewing it as a means to expand individuals' capabilities and choices, thus enabling them to pursue a life of their own making. Additionally, Sen (2021) posits that economic

empowerment encompasses the provision of essential tools, skills, and opportunities necessary for improving economic well-being, achieving financial independence, and making significant contributions to the economy, as referenced in Attah and Oche (2024). This perspective highlights the importance of education, health, and other non-economic factors in achieving genuine empowerment. Furthermore, Sen (2021) describes it as the process of enhancing the economic capacities of individuals or communities, thereby granting them greater control over their financial resources, fostering informed decision-making, and promoting active participation in economic activities. This is operationalised through post-program outcomes measured via income generation, employment status, and entrepreneurial activities.

2.4 Program Participation

This concept, as articulated by Cohen and Uphoff (1977), pertains to the structured involvement of individuals in empowerment initiatives, as cited in (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980). This engagement not only enhances their skills but also enables them to gain control over resources and acquire essential knowledge and training. Such participation fosters economic empowerment, elevates overall well-being, and promotes a constructive contribution to their communities. In essence, it is characterised as the proactive engagement of individuals in empowerment initiatives, which encompasses decision-making, implementation, realisation of benefits, and evaluation (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). Within the context of this study, program participation is operationalised through various program strands (Teach, Health, Agro, Tech), the duration of participation, and the degree of engagement.

2.5 Access to Resources

This is defined as the ability of young individuals to acquire and effectively utilise a range of assets or tools that enhance their opportunities and competencies (Aminu, 2019). It is commonly understood as the capacity of youth to secure and proficiently employ various resources that can improve their prospects and skills. The availability of these resources is vital, as it significantly influences the ability of young individuals to fulfill their potential, engage in economic activities, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. These resources encompass financial support or funding that aids educational endeavors, entrepreneurial initiatives, or personal development; access to information, training, and educational resources that cultivate skills and provide direction; technological tools and innovations that facilitate learning, creativity, and communication; physical resources, which include infrastructure or facilities that encourage participation in a variety of activities and programs; and social resources, which consist of networks and connections that provide support, mentorship, and guidance (Aminu, 2019). This concept is operationalised through the availability of mentorship, training materials, infrastructure and financial assistance provided by the N-Power program.

2.6 Conceptualisation of the N-Power program

The N-Power program represents a youth empowerment initiative within Nigeria's National Social Investment Program (NSIP), designed to combat unemployment and poverty through the enhancement of skills, capacity building, and financial assistance (Abin, 2018). Aimed at unemployed individuals aged 18 to 35 (FGN, 2018), the program fosters a culture of learn-work-entrepreneurship by offering employability skills to graduates and vocational training to non-graduates. It encompasses four primary sectors: Teach, Health, Agro, and Tech, and is categorised into a graduate segment (a two-year paid volunteer scheme) and a non-graduate segment (the N-Build Scheme for self-employment skills). The initiative is implemented across all 36 states. It is supported by international organisations such as the World Bank and DFID, with the goal of benefiting over 600,000 young Nigerians through the provision of devices, training materials, and monthly stipends. As noted by (N-power, 2117), the program's objectives include enhancing youth livelihoods, imparting technical and entrepreneurial skills, addressing gaps in public service, and bolstering Nigeria's knowledge economy, as referenced in (Kadiri et. al., 2022). Although the program has successfully provided numerous youths with valuable skills and certifications, it continues to encounter significant challenges, such as bureaucratic centralisation, inconsistent stipend disbursements, and arbitrary disengagement of participants. Nevertheless, N-Power remains instrumental in improving youth employability, promoting economic diversification, and contributing to national development through its comprehensive approach and strategic partnerships.

2.7 Empirical Review

The review in this study scrutinises a variety of scholarly investigations regarding the N-Power program; the evidence presents a nuanced perspective. A significant portion of the literature suggests a favorable direct impact (Ogunmodede et. al. 2020) assessed the program across Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos states using logistic regression and regression discontinuity approaches. Their results affirmed significant positive outcomes concerning income levels and job creation for participants in the program. In addition, Bello et. al. (2021) examined data in Gombe State through survey research, utilising descriptive statistical methods and Chi-square tests, elucidating progress in reducing unemployment, enhancing monthly income, improving access to essential needs, and fostering entrepreneurial skills.

Furthermore, Attah et. al. (2021) conducted a descriptive survey in Nasarawa State, utilising primary data gathered through questionnaires, which were subsequently analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. The findings indicated a significant positive impact on employability. Abdullahi et. al. (2022) implemented a descriptive survey design characterised by a mixed-method approach in Gombe State, with results highlighting a notable positive effect on youth empowerment and poverty alleviation. Donga and Jiddere (2023) utilised a survey design in Adamawa State, applying structural equation modeling (SEM) for their analysis. Their research demonstrated considerable advancements in employment status, savings, and poverty reduction. Ibok and Usange (2023) examined the program's effects in Akwa Ibom State through surveys, interviews, and statistical methods, revealing significant positive results regarding financial empowerment, job creation, and poverty alleviation.

In a similar note, Yakubu et. al. (2023) carried out a research study in Gassol LGA, Taraba State, employing a survey research methodology that included structured questionnaires and multiple linear regression analysis. The results indicated a statistically significant positive effect of the program on job creation. Danladi et. al. (2023) assessed the effectiveness of N-Power in Nasarawa State, demonstrating substantial employment growth and a decrease in youth unemployment through skill acquisition. Muhammad et. al. (2023) surveyed in Niger State with 377 participants, revealing significant declines in both unemployment and poverty. Usman et. al. (2024) performed an empirical evaluation of the N-Power Initiative's impact on the income and savings of youth in Taraba State, utilising a quasi-experimental design that compared 385 program beneficiaries with 385 non-beneficiaries. The study found that participation in the program had a statistically significant positive effect on monthly income. Likewise, Mainoma et. al. (2024) carried out a thorough survey in Gariki village, FCT, revealing a statistically significant positive correlation with economic empowerment.

Conversely, there is also conflicting evidence. Dawda et. al. (2019) performed a cross-sectional survey in Minna, Niger State, which suggested minimal effects on employment generation and poverty alleviation. Effiong and Edem (2019) conducted an in-depth analytical study in Akwa Ibom State, utilising a comparative analysis of secondary data, and found a negligible impact. Adeyanju and Ijagun (2019) executed a descriptive survey in Delta State, observing limited effectiveness in reducing both poverty and unemployment. Omoligho (2022) employed a descriptive survey methodology to investigate the implications of the N-Power initiative, with results indicating a minimal effect. Omorogbe and Ogege (2023) performed a comprehensive evaluation in Edo State, showing insignificant impacts on socio-economic development. Robert et. al. (2023) conducted an impact evaluation in Delta State, which revealed that the program had an insignificant effect on poverty alleviation and unemployment reduction. Aminu and Aliyu (2024) evaluated the program in Niger State, uncovering insignificant impacts attributed to corruption, delays in stipend disbursements, and political interference.

2.8 Underpinning theory

This research is grounded in two fundamental theoretical frameworks, Human Capital Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which together offer a solid basis for comprehending the connection between participation in the N-Power program and the economic outcomes for youth. Human Capital Theory, as introduced by Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961), suggests that investing in education, training, and skill development enhances individual productivity and economic results. The theory maintains that human capital includes the knowledge, skills, abilities, and health attributes that individuals acquire

through educational endeavors, vocational training, and experiential learning, all of which significantly affect their productivity and earning potential. Becker (1964) argued that individuals gain returns on their investment in human capital through higher wages, improved employability, and better job performance. Higher levels of human capital are associated with greater economic opportunities and social mobility, and continuous investment in education and skill development allows individuals to adapt effectively to changing economic conditions and technological advancements.

In the context of this research, the N-Power program is viewed as a strategic investment in the human capital of youth, anticipated to enhance economic outcomes directly. The training and capacity-building initiatives offered by N-Power are believed to improve employability, facilitate income generation, and cultivate entrepreneurial skills among participants. Thus, the theory provides a foundational rationale for understanding how participation in the program leads to increased productivity and economic benefits.

The Resource-Based View (RBV), as proposed by Barney (1991), posits that both individuals and organisations can secure a competitive edge by leveraging resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Utami and Alamanos (2025) further classify resources into three primary categories: physical capital resources, which include equipment, facilities, access to raw materials, and technology; human capital resources, encompassing experience, intelligence, training, judgment, and relationships; and organisational capital resources. In the realm of youth empowerment, the RBV suggests that the unique combination of resources provided by N-Power, such as training, mentorship, stipends, and social networks, constitutes a resource portfolio that differentiates participants from non-participants. The varying access to VRIN resources within the N-Power initiative leads to differing economic outcomes. This viewpoint is especially pertinent in the rural economy of Taraba State, where specific skills, such as agricultural technology and digital literacy, may be more valuable than standard vocational training.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) enhances Human Capital Theory by emphasising not only the amount of human capital but also its strategic significance within specific labor market environments. In this study, youth are viewed as valuable human assets, with their economic empowerment reliant on their internal resources, specifically their human capital. The N-Power program acts as an external intervention designed to cultivate these internal resources, thus enabling youth to secure a competitive edge in the labor market. Together, Human Capital Theory and the Resource-Based View form the theoretical basis of this research. Human Capital Theory offers the rationale for investment, illustrating how participation in N-Power is expected to improve economic outcomes through skill enhancement. The Resource-Based View adds to this by underscoring that the strategic importance of these skills is contingent upon the VRIN resources available to participants. The amalgamation of these theoretical frameworks provides a thorough perspective for analysing the impact of N-Power program participation on the economic outcomes of youth in Taraba State.

3. Methodology

This research employed a positivist research philosophy, which asserts that the connection between participation in the N-Power program and the economic outcomes for youth represents an objective reality that can be empirically examined through systematic data collection (Erickson & Kovalainen, 2008). A non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design was utilised to enable comprehensive data gathering across the three senatorial zones of Taraba State, while also providing temporal and cost efficiencies (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study was carried out in Taraba State, situated in the northeastern part of Nigeria. This state consists of 16 local government areas (LGAs) organised into three senatorial districts: Taraba North, Taraba Central, and Taraba South. The economy of the state is primarily agrarian, with agriculture supporting livelihoods through crop production, livestock farming, and fishing (Yakubu et. al., 2023; Usman et. al., 2024).

The target population included youth beneficiaries aged 18 to 35 years who participated in Nigeria's N-Power program within Taraba State, with a total of 20,000 beneficiaries documented during the study period (National Social Investment Office, 2023). By applying Dillman's (2011) sample size determination formula alongside Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, an initial sample of 377 respondents was calculated.

To account for potential non-responses and participant dropout, the sample was increased by 40 percent (Salkind, 1997), resulting in a final sample of 530 respondents. All 530 questionnaires distributed were returned, achieving a 100 percent response rate, with 450 usable cases reflecting an 85 percent retention rate.

Multistage stratified random sampling was utilised to select participants from six Local Government Areas (LGAs) across three senatorial districts, with the allocation being proportional to the population of beneficiaries in each LGA. The LGAs selected along with their corresponding sample sizes included: Jalingo (106), Zing (85), Bali (74), Gassol (90), Wukari (117), and Donga (58). Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire divided into three sections. Section A focused on demographic characteristics; Section B evaluated participation in the N-Power program and access to resources provided by the program; and Section C examined youth economic outcomes. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The questionnaire was adapted from previously validated scales in earlier studies (Waziri et. al., 2022).

Content validity was confirmed through expert evaluations by research supervisors and specialists in pertinent fields (Hair et. al., 2007), as referenced in (Hair, Jr. et. al., 2023). Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with all constructs surpassing the 0.70 benchmark (Hair et. al., 2019). Convergent validity was verified through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.50, while discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair Jr. et. al., 2017). Quantitative data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with Smart-PLS 4.0.

Preliminary analyses included data cleansing, treatment of missing data, detection of outliers, assessment of normality, and testing for multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) diagnostics. The structural model was evaluated through path coefficient estimation, analysis of model fit indices (SRMR and NFI), and significance testing via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples (Hair Jr. et. al., 2017).

The functional relationship between participation in the N-Power program and youth economic outcomes was defined as: YEE = f(PPB).

4. Result and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the 450 respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: ***Age category of the respondents***

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	295	66
	Female	155	34
Age	18 – 22	80	18
	23 – 27	170	38
	28 – 32	135	30
	33 & above	65	14
Marital Status	Married	214	48
	Single	200	44
	Divorced	21	5
	Widowed	15	3
Educational Level	Primary	70	16
	Secondary	200	44
	Diploma/ND/HND/NCE	125	28
	Bachelor's Degree	55	12

Source: Field Survey, Compiled by the Researcher, 2025.

The gender distribution indicates that 66 percent of participants were male. In comparison, 34 percent were female, reflecting the socio-cultural dynamics where male involvement in employment programs generally surpasses that of females in rural Nigerian contexts. Furthermore, this is substantiated by the findings of

Adewale et. al. 2020), indicating significant male participation in empowerment initiatives. In terms of age, 38 percent of respondents were aged between 23 and 27 years, suggesting that the program predominantly attracts youth who are transitioning from educational settings to the labor market. Regarding marital status, 48 percent of respondents were married, indicating that a significant number carries family responsibilities that may influence their economic goals and labor market engagement. This aligns with findings in (Amina et. al., 2024), who posited that over 58% of the program participants are married, elucidating a trend that is characteristic of northeastern Nigeria, where cultural norms advocate for early matrimonial arrangement. Lastly, concerning educational qualifications, 44 percent had completed secondary education, demonstrating the program's accessibility to individuals with basic educational credentials.

Before proceeding with measurement and structural modeling, a preliminary analysis was performed to ensure that the dataset met the fundamental assumptions required for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This analysis included data cleansing, addressing missing data, detecting outliers, evaluating common method variance, and testing for normality. The amount of missing data was minimal, at 10 percent, and was randomly distributed throughout the dataset, remaining well below the thresholds for imputation. As a result, all 450 cases were included in the analysis without the need for imputation. A univariate outlier analysis utilising standardised z-scores (with a criterion of ±3.29) identified 32 cases; however, these were retained due to the robustness of PLS-SEM against minor deviations (Hair et. al., 2017). A multivariate outlier analysis using Mahalanobis distance found no multivariate outliers, thereby affirming the dataset's integrity.

Additionally, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to evaluate common method bias. The unrotated principal component factor analysis indicated that the first factor accounted for 49.13 percent of the total variance, which is below the 50 percent threshold (Podsakoff et. al., 2003), thereby confirming that common method bias is not a significant issue in this study. Furthermore, the normality assessment, based on skewness and kurtosis statistics, showed skewness values ranging from -0.07 to 0.03 and kurtosis values from 2.45 to 3.10, all of which fall within acceptable limits (Hair et. al., 2010). These results validate that the data possess suitable distributional characteristics for PLS-SEM analysis.

4.1 Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated to determine the reliability and validity of the constructs. In accordance with established guidelines (Hair Jr. et. al., 2017), this evaluation included assessments of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Content validity was confirmed through a review by experts in the fields of education, economics, and youth empowerment (Hair et. al., 2007). The items in the questionnaire were scrutinised for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness to ensure precise measurement of the intended constructs. Internal consistency reliability was measured using composite reliability (rho_c). The composite reliability coefficient for Youth Economic Empowerment was found to be 0.949, while for N-Power program participation, it was 0.994, both significantly surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Hair et. al., 2011). These findings affirm that the constructs demonstrate high internal consistency, suggesting that the items measuring each construct are both reliable and cohesive. Similarly, convergent validity was assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As illustrated in Table 2, the AVE values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair Jr. et. al., 2017), indicating satisfactory convergent validity. This suggests that each latent construct explains more than half of the variance in its corresponding indicators.

Table 2: ***Indicator Loadings, Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity***

Constructs	Indicator	Standardised Loadings	(rho_c)	AVE
YEE			0.967	0.907
	ES	0.950		
	EA	0.954		
	YL	0.954		
N-Power			0.994	0.989
	AR	0.994		
	PP	0.994		

Note: YEE = Youth Economic Empower, ES = Employment Status, EA = Entrepreneurial Activities, YL =Income Level, AR = Access to Resources provided by the program, and PP = Program Participation.
Source: Author's computation using Smart-PLS 4.0 version, 2026.

Furthermore, discriminant validity was evaluated utilising both the criterion established by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the HTMT approach. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassed its correlations with all other constructs, thereby confirming the empirical distinctiveness of each construct. Similarly, all HTMT values remained below the conservative threshold of 0.85, which further substantiates adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et. al., 2015). Table 3 below illustrates the correlation among the latent variables.

Table 3: ***Fornell-Larcker Criterion Estimation Result***

Construct	N-POWER	YEE
N-POWER	**0.994**	
YEE	0.749	**0.953**

Note: the values in bold across the diagonal are the square root of AVE, while the diagonal values are the correlations among variables.
Source: Author's computation using Smart-PLS 4.0 version, 2026.
These results affirm that the measurement model demonstrated exceptional psychometric properties.

4.2 Structural Model

The evaluation of the structural model is crucial for assessing the model's predictive capability. This study examines the relationship between the N-power indicators (program participation and access to resources provided by the program) and the dependent construct (Youth Economic Empowerment, YEE), prior to evaluating the direct and total effects of N-power program participation on youth economic empowerment. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 4, 5, and 6, respectively.

Table 4: ***Sub-Hypotheses Results (PLS-SEM Path Estimation after Bootstrapping)***

Hypotheses	Path	B	Sample Mean	STDEV	t-value	P-value	Decision
$H_{01(a)}$	PP → YEE	0.375	0.375	0.009	36.750	0.000	Reject Ho
$H_{01(b)}$	AR → YEE	0.378	0.378	0.010	37.148	0.001	Reject Ho

Note: p-values are two-tailed. ***Significance level: $p < 0.001$.
Source: Author's computation using Smart-PLS 4.0 version, 2026.

The sub-hypothesised pathways from Program Participation (PP) to Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE) revealed a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.375$, $t = 36.750$, $p < 0.000$), suggesting that involvement in the N-Power program has a statistically significant direct influence on the economic empowerment of unemployed youth. In a similar vein, Access to Resources (AR) to YEE displayed a marginally higher positive coefficient and statistical significance ($\beta = 0.378$, $t = 37.348$, $p < 0.000$), indicating that resource accessibility has a direct and considerable effect on youth economic empowerment. Notably, the observation that Access to Resources ($\beta = 0.378$) has a slightly greater impact on economic outcomes compared to program participation ($\beta = 0.375$) underscores the critical role of resource availability. This finding is consistent with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which posits that varying access to valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources, such as high-quality training, mentorship, and infrastructure, leads to differing economic results. Participants who have access to superior resources are more likely to attain better economic outcomes.

Table 5: ***Hypotheses Test (after Bootstrapping)***

Hypothesis	Path	(β)Estimate	Std. Dev	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Decision
H_{01}	N-POWER→ YEE	0.217	0.054	4.041	0.000***	[0.109, 0.318]	Reject H_{01}

Note: p-values are two-tailed. ***Significance level: $p < 0.001$.

Source: Author's computation using Smart-PLS 4.0 version, 2026.

The PLS-SEM analysis examining the direct relationship between participation in the N-Power program and Youth Economic Empowerment revealed a positive and statistically significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.217$, $t = 4.041$, $p < 0.001$). The mean sample derived from bootstrap resampling (0.218) closely matched the original estimate, thereby affirming the stability of the model, while the low standard deviation (0.054) suggested a precise estimation. The direct relationship from N-Power to Youth Economic Empowerment displayed a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.034$), indicating that the program's impact on Youth Economic Empowerment primarily occurs through indirect channels.

According to the formulated null hypothesis, H_{01} posited that participation in the N-Power program does not have a direct and positive correlation with the economic empowerment of unemployed youth across the three senatorial districts of Taraba State. The findings of this study substantiate that participation in the N-Power program has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on youth economic empowerment throughout Taraba State, with ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.001$), thus leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This outcome affirms the program's role as an immediate economic intervention, corroborating results from studies conducted in other Nigerian states that reported favorable economic impacts, including those by Aminu (2019) in Kano, Bello et. al. (2021) in Gombe, and Yakubu et. al. (2023) in Taraba itself. The coefficient of 0.217 observed in the present study is consistent with previous estimates. Ahmed et al. (2023) reported a coefficient of 0.198 ($p < 0.01$) in Bauchi State, indicating both consistency and generalizability. Substantively, Adewale et. al. (2020) similarly found that participation in the N-Power program significantly enhances beneficiaries' income, entrepreneurial skills, and overall livelihoods. This supports the program's role as an immediate economic intervention, reinforcing findings from other studies conducted in various Nigerian states that reported positive economic outcomes (Aminu, 2019; Bello et. al., 2021; Yakubu et. al., 2023).

This coefficient indicates the economic importance of the stipend, a mechanism that the literature consistently recognises as crucial for alleviating poverty and enhancing access to essential resources (Ogunmodede et. al., 2020; Abdullahi et. al., 2022; Mainoma et. al., 2024). The direct impact of N-Power on YEE ($\beta = 0.217$) illustrates the immediate welfare channel of the program, which primarily functions through the distribution of stipends.

Nevertheless, the modest effect size ($f^2 = 0.034$) represents a significant finding. It implies that while the stipend offers tangible and immediate welfare benefits, its capacity to generate substantial, sustainable economic transformation independently is limited. This quantitative constraint supports the notion that the program is "essential" for survival, yet "insufficient to bring about lasting change" in the lives of its beneficiaries, as indicated by the qualitative findings. This perspective aligns with critiques in the literature regarding the program's overreliance on temporary stipends and the lack of a sustainable transition strategy (Robert et. al., 2023).

Table 6: ***Hypothesis Test on Impact of N-Power on YEE***

Hypothesis	Path	B	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Decision
H_{02}	N-POWER→ YEE	0.749	0.020	36.945	0.000***	[0.705, 0.785]	Supported

Note: p-values are two-tailed. ***Significance level: $p < 0.001$.
Source: Author's computation using Smart-PLS 4.0 version, 2026.

Furthermore, according to the second null hypothesis, H_{02} it was anticipated that participation in the N-Power program would not have a statistically significant effect on the economic empowerment of unemployed youth across the three senatorial districts of Taraba State. The findings presented in Table 6 illustrate that the path coefficient from N-POWER to Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE) is both substantial and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.749$, $t = 36.945$, $p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval [0.705, 0.785] does not include zero, further emphasising the robustness of this effect. These findings imply that the second-order construct, N-POWER, explains approximately 75% of the variance in Youth Economic Empowerment, signifying a considerable substantive impact. The most notable insight from this analysis is the significant disparity

between the total effect (β = 0.749) and the direct effect (β = 0.217). This difference empirically illustrates that the primary economic influence of the program is not derived from the direct cash transfer, but rather from an alternative, more impactful pathway. This discovery shifts the focus of the inquiry from the specific question of whether a direct stipend effect exists to the more critical question of what factors contribute to the majority of the program's impact.

4.3 Model Fit Assessment

Table 7: ***PLS-SEM Model Validation Result***

Test	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Threshold	Status
SRMR	0.020	0.020	< 0.08	Excellent Fit
NFI	0.934	0.934	> 0.90	Good Fit

Source: Author's computation using Smart-PLS 4.0 version, 2026.

The assessment of the overall model fit for the PLS-SEM analysis reveals a fit that ranges from very good to excellent. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.020) indicates an excellent fit, significantly below the conservative threshold of 0.08. The Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.934) demonstrated a very good to excellent fit, confirming that the model accounts for 93.4% of the covariance in the data.

The discussion surrounding this research highlights the evident contradiction present in the current literature, where some studies indicate significant effects (e.g., Aminu, 2019), while others propose minimal impacts (Olorunsola, 2022). The findings suggest that although a direct effect is indeed observable, it is constrained and conditional. This represents a significant outcome in the realm of social protection, serving as an essential buffer for consumption; however, it does not necessarily lead to sustainable economic empowerment in isolation.

5. Conclusion

This research substantiates that participation in the N-Power program has a statistically significant, albeit modest, direct impact on the economic outcomes of youth in Taraba State (β = 0.217, p < 0.001). This direct effect illustrates the immediate welfare channel of the program, primarily facilitated through the distribution of stipends. However, this mechanism is insufficient for engendering lasting economic transformation, as indicated by the considerable disparity between the total effect (β = 0.749) and the direct effect, suggesting that the program's principal economic influence is exerted through alternative, more efficacious channels. Furthermore, the direct effect primarily serves as a consumption-smoothing tool rather than a standalone catalyst for sustainable economic empowerment.

This study empirically corroborates Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) within the context of a government-sponsored youth empowerment initiative in rural Nigeria, affirming that investment in skills yields measurable economic benefits. The observation that Access to Resources (β = 0.378) surpasses program participation (β = 0.375) supports the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), illustrating that varying access to VRIN resources results in differing outcomes.

In light of the empirical findings, the following recommendations are proposed for government action:

- reframe program advocacy by repositioning the N-Power initiative as a strategic investment in human capital rather than merely a temporary social safety net;
- ensure dual reliability by providing consistent stipend payments in conjunction with high-quality supervised engagement, as irregular stipends can undermine program participation;
- adopt a Human Capital-First Investment Strategy by reallocating resources to prioritise training quality, mentorship, and supervised placements over stipend distribution; and
- enhance Monitoring and Evaluation systems by improving the oversight of implementation quality and resource distribution to rectify observed disparities.

Additionally, this study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge by:

- validating Human Capital Theory and the Resource-Based View within a rural Nigerian context;
- quantifying the direct effect of N-Power participation and documenting the disparity between direct and total effects;
- demonstrating the feasibility of PLS-SEM with bootstrapping in resource-constrained environments; and
- providing evidence that access to resources is more critical than participation alone, underscoring the necessity for equitable resource distribution.

Call for Further Investigation

This research provides substantial evidence to the ongoing discussion regarding youth empowerment; however, several limitations were recognised in the study, including:

- cross-sectional nature of the study prevents the establishment of causal relationships,
- dependence on self-reported data may introduce potential common method variance,
- and focus on a single state limits the generalizability of the findings. To mitigate these limitations,

subsequent research should aim for:

- a longitudinal panel study to determine temporal precedence,
- conduct multi-state replications to improve generalizability, and
- utilise experimental or quasi-experimental designs to enhance the causal assertions.

Together, these approaches would enhance the explanatory capacity and practical relevance of future assessments of the N-Power youth empowerment and job creation initiative.

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