



WORLD YOUTH SKILLS DAY 2026

What Young People Told Us

Skills, gaps, and the systems standing in the way.

A COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT

YouthXcel Africa · 87 respondents · July 2026

We built this survey because we didn't want to guess.

YouthXcel Africa exists to close the distance between talented young people and the systems that should be helping them forward. The surest way to design that work badly is to assume we already know what stands in the way.

So in the days leading up to World Youth Skills Day 2026, we asked. Eighty-seven young people, most of them in Nigeria, gave us honest, often long, sometimes difficult answers. What came back confirmed some of what we expected, and corrected a few things we didn't.

This report is our attempt to represent what they told us faithfully, without softening it and without overstating it. It is not a comprehensive study of African youth unemployment, there are better-resourced institutions doing that work well. It is a close, honest snapshot of one community, gathered by an organization still early in its own journey, and shared in the belief that even a small, honest dataset is more useful than a comfortable assumption.

If you are a young person reading this and you recognize yourself in these numbers, you are not alone in it, and that is largely the point of what follows. If you are a partner, funder, or fellow practitioner, we hope this report gives you something real to work from, whether or not that work involves us directly.

Abdulazeez Musa

Founder & Executive Director, YouthXcel Africa



87 RESPONDENTS

Not a story about ambition. A story about follow-through.

Eighty-seven young people told us, in detail, what it actually takes to build a skill in their context right now. The pattern that emerges is not a story about ambition. It is a story about follow-through.

57%

started learning a new skill in the last year and didn't finish it

64%

named the cost of training or materials as their biggest barrier

70%

are unaware or unsure whether a relevant opportunity exists for them

94%

want to stay connected to what YouthXcel Africa builds next

Read together, these numbers describe a community that is already trying. Most respondents have already attempted to build a skill in the past year. Most already rate themselves confident they could find the right opportunity if one existed. What's missing is not motivation, it is the infrastructure around the attempt: affordable access, visible opportunity, and someone to see the attempt through with them.

This report sets out seven findings from the survey, what they mean when read together, and where we believe partners, funders, and fellow practitioners might recognize an entry point of their own.

Who is behind this report

About YouthXcel Africa

YouthXcel Africa is a youth-centered organization working to expand access to the opportunities, networks, skills, and platforms that young people need to develop their capabilities and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Registered in Nigeria and operating with a continental outlook, the organization sits at the intersection of four interconnected areas of practice: opportunity access, agency and leadership development, youth visibility, and ecosystem building.

We are an organization at an early stage, and we say that plainly. What we bring to this work is not a long record of established impact but a clear sense of what we believe, a realistic account of where we're starting from, and a considered view of what's possible if we build carefully, in conversation with the young people we exist to serve.

OPPORTUNITY ACCESS

AGENCY & LEADERSHIP

YOUTH VISIBILITY

ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

About This Report

This is a pulse check, not a scientific study. It reflects the honest responses of 87 young people, gathered over roughly a week through YouthXcel's own community and networks ahead of World Youth Skills Day 2026. It isn't a claim about all African youth. It's a close, honest look at one community's reality, and the first of what we intend to make a recurring listening exercise.

85 of the 87 respondents are based in Nigeria, concentrated in Kogi, Kano, and the FCT, with two responding from Uganda and Pakistan. The sample skews slightly toward young women (56%) and toward respondents aged 22 to 30 (77%), most of whom have completed or are completing a first degree. Every figure in this report reflects only what respondents told us directly, and where questions allowed more than one answer, percentages add up to more than 100, noted wherever it applies.

The sample, in plain terms

87

young people responded



Nigeria, 98%

Kogi, Kano and the FCT lead the sample



81% degree level

60% hold a Bachelor's degree, 21% are completing one



56% women

77% of respondents are aged 22 to 30

Nigeria led the sample overwhelmingly (98%), with Kogi and Kano each accounting for roughly a quarter of respondents and the FCT close behind. Education levels were high across the board: 60% hold a Bachelor's degree and a further 21% are currently completing one. That matters for how the findings should be read, this is a relatively educated slice of youth still struggling to convert that education into paid, sustainable skill, which is arguably a more urgent signal than if the barriers were purely about access to schooling.

On current situation, respondents split fairly evenly across students (29%), the self-employed (22%), those employed full-time (19%), and those actively job-hunting (19%), with a further 15% currently serving in the National Youth Service Corps.

CURRENT SITUATION

29%

Students

22%

Self-employed

19%

Employed full-time

19%

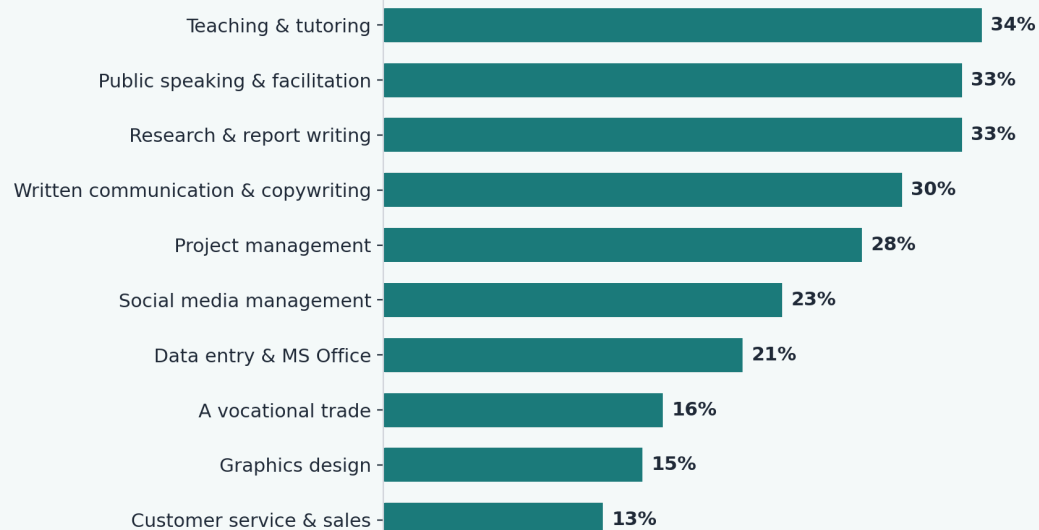
Actively job-hunting

15%

Serving in the NYSC

The Skills People Already Have

Teaching, public speaking, and research and report writing lead the list of monetizable skills respondents already hold, alongside strong numbers in written communication and project management. These aren't niche technical skills, they're broadly applicable, service-oriented capabilities distributed across the whole sample, not concentrated in one small group.



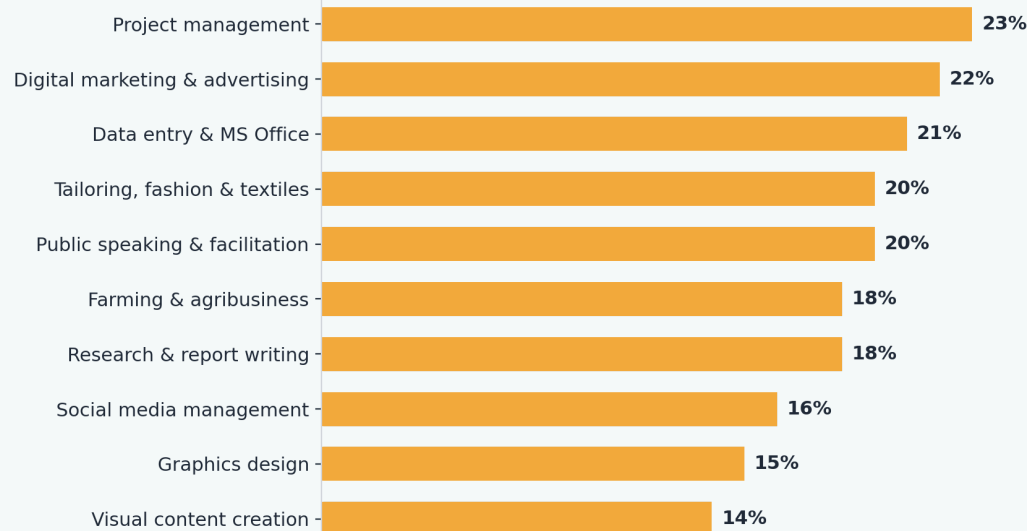
Which skills do you already have at a level you can monetize? Respondents could select more than one, so figures add to more than 100%.

The Skills People Say They Need Most

Project management tops the list of skills people feel they're missing, alongside digital marketing, data and office tools, and tailoring and agribusiness for a meaningful minority. Project management, public speaking, research and writing, and graphics design all appear on both lists, claimed as a current skill by some and named as an urgent gap by others.

THE SO WHAT

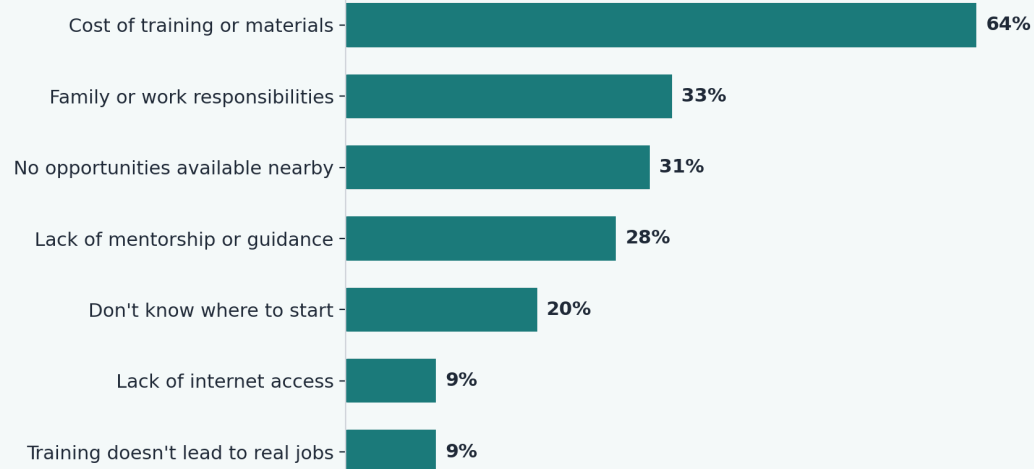
Read together, these two charts point to something more specific than a simple skills gap. This looks like a depth problem as much as an access problem: people have working exposure to a skill but not the level of it that actually pays. Someone who can “manage a project” informally and someone who can run one professionally for a client are answering the same survey question very differently, and the data can't fully separate them.



Which skill do you feel you need most right now, but haven't been able to get? Respondents could select more than one.

What's Actually in the Way

Cost dominates. Nearly two in three respondents (64%) named the cost of training or materials as a barrier, well ahead of everything else, including time, distance, and confidence. Almost nobody framed their struggle as a lack of motivation or interest, that framing simply doesn't match what people are telling us.



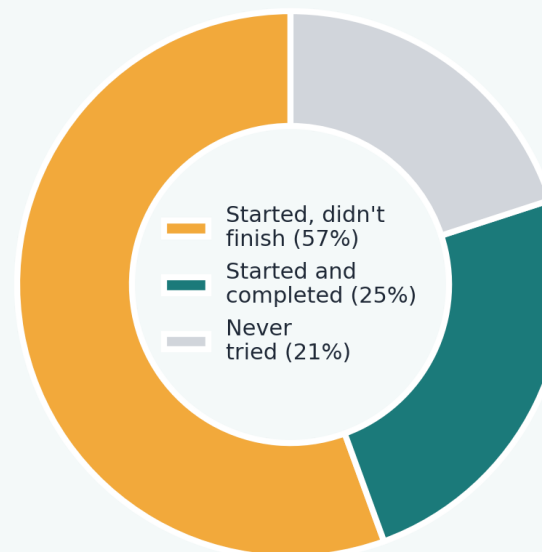
What's mainly stopping you from getting the skill you need? Respondents could select more than one.

The Completion Problem

This may be the single most important finding in the whole report. More than half of respondents (57%) started learning a new skill in the last year and didn't finish it. Only a quarter completed something. This isn't a story about young people who won't start. It's a story about a system that doesn't help them finish.

WHY THEY STOP

Among those who started but didn't finish, the most common reasons were losing internet access or a device partway through, losing interest as the programme dragged on, and simply not feeling supported, no community, no guide, nobody checking in. None of these are motivation problems. They're structural ones, the kind a well-designed programme can solve.



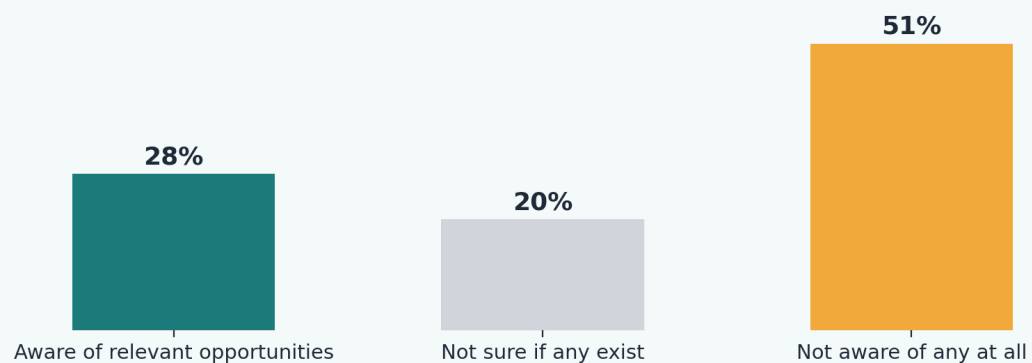
Have you tried to learn a new skill in the last 12 months?

Confidence Is High, Awareness Is Low

A genuine paradox sits in this data. Asked how confident they are that they could find the right opportunity to build the skill they need, 80% rated themselves a 4 or 5 out of 5. Asked whether they're actually aware of any youth skills programmes currently available to them, 70% said no or weren't sure.

THE SO WHAT

Confidence isn't the bottleneck. Visibility is. Young people believe they could find the right opportunity if it existed and they knew about it, they simply don't know it exists. That's a discoverability problem, not a mindset one, and it calls for a very different kind of intervention than most youth programming is built to provide.



Are you aware of any youth skills programmes or opportunities currently available to you?

Why People Don't Apply, Even When They Find Something

Of those who came across an opportunity and chose not to apply, 40% said they didn't feel qualified or experienced enough, a third found the application process too complicated, and 23% said they had no one to guide them through it. This suggests the drop-off isn't only happening at the awareness stage. Even when the door is visible, many young people back away from it alone, without anyone to tell them their experience is enough, or to help them get the paperwork together in time.

The door is open. What is missing is the person standing next to it, saying your experience is enough.



40%

didn't feel qualified or experienced enough



A third

found the application process too complicated



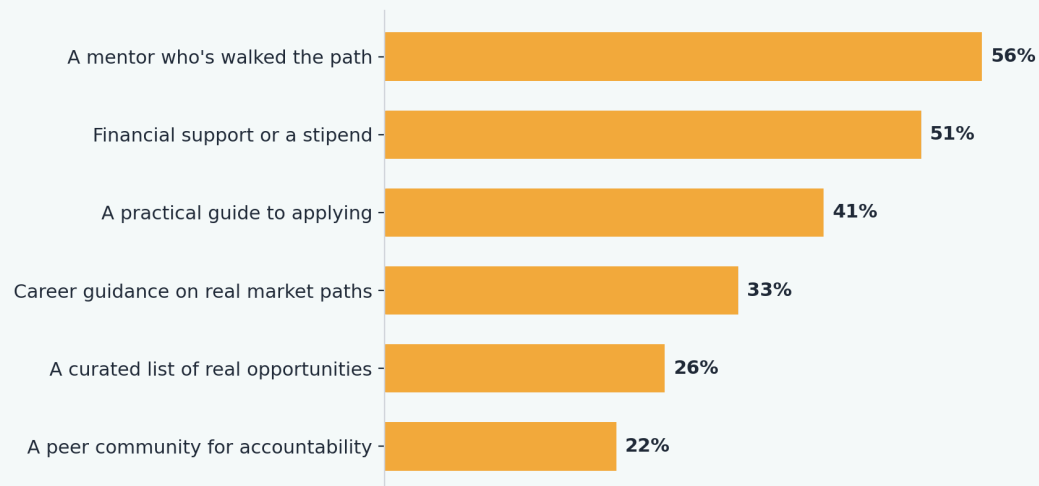
23%

had no one to guide them through it

Reasons given by respondents who saw an opportunity and decided not to apply. Respondents could select more than one.

What Would Actually Help

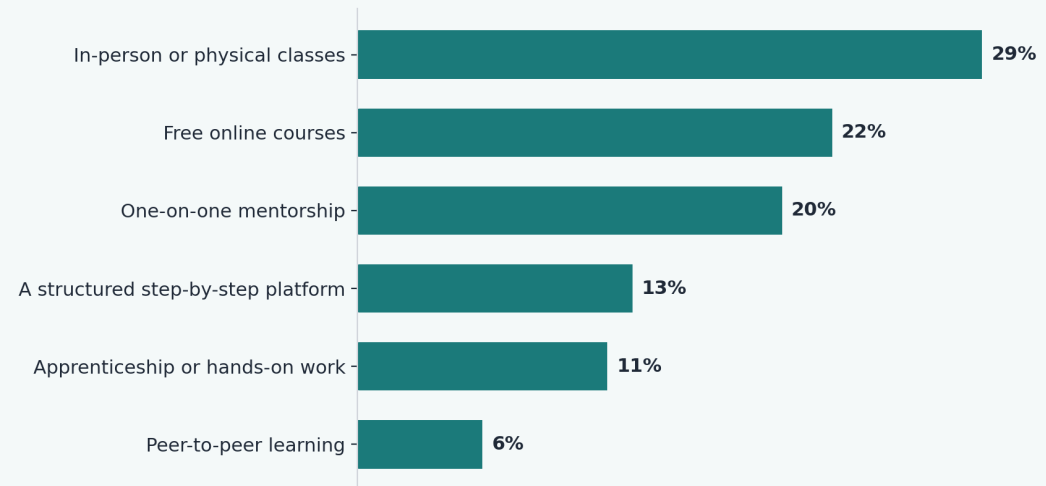
Asked directly what kind of support would make the biggest difference right now, mentorship led clearly, more than half want a mentor who has walked their path. Financial support was close behind. Notably, a purely informational fix, just a list of opportunities, ranked lowest of the six options offered. People aren't asking for more information. They're asking for people.



What type of support will make the biggest difference in your skills and opportunity journey right now? Respondents could select more than one.

How People Want to Learn

In-person classes remain the single most preferred learning format, ahead of free online courses and one-on-one mentorship, worth sitting with given how much youth programming defaults to purely digital delivery. The community is telling us it still wants rooms, not just links.



How would you prefer to learn a new skill?

Four gaps run underneath all seven findings. None of them close through information alone.



The Awareness Gap

Seventy percent of respondents don't know whether an opportunity relevant to them exists. This is not a knowledge deficit on their part, it is a visibility failure on the part of the ecosystem around them. Confident, capable young people are making decisions in the dark, not because the opportunities don't exist, but because the systems meant to connect people to them aren't reaching the people who need them most. Closing this gap requires deliberate, ongoing outreach into the communities least likely to already be in the room, not one-off broadcasts to an audience that's already listening.



The Follow-Through Gap

Fifty-seven percent start and don't finish. The drop-off isn't concentrated at the beginning, it happens in the middle, when a device breaks, when the material stops feeling relevant, when nobody checks in. Closing this gap means building for completion from day one: structured pathways with built-in accountability, not single-point access to a course or a link.



The Human Gap

Given six kinds of support to choose from, respondents ranked a curated information list last and a mentor first. This is a clear, direct signal that the missing piece in most youth programming isn't more content, it's relationship. Guidance that comes from a real person who has walked the path does something a resource library cannot: it makes the process feel survivable.



The Cost Gap

Cost is not one barrier among several, it is the barrier, named by nearly two-thirds of respondents ahead of every other option combined. This is the one gap no single organization closes alone. It requires funders, training providers, and employers thinking together about how to lower the price of entry into skill-building for young people who are already stretched thin.

Taken together, these four gaps describe a consistent shape: young people who are already trying, already fairly confident, and already reasonably skilled in adjacent ways, held back not by a lack of will but by a lack of infrastructure around the attempt. **That is the gap worth building for.**

In Their Own Words

87 people answered honestly, and 84 of them agreed to let us share what they said, most by name. A handful of their answers, chosen to reflect the range of what came through, not just the most quotable lines.

“

For many young Nigerians, the biggest barrier isn't a lack of ambition or willingness to learn, it's the cost. Most valuable skills require paying for courses, certifications, internet access, devices, transportation, and time. People often say “just learn a skill,” as if it's free and accessible to everyone.

JUNE, KADUNA STATE

“

It takes a level of financial capability for basic things like data, power supply and laptops, that is painfully unavailable, making capital the real foundation for building sustainable skills.

ANONYMOUS, KOGI

“

Skills matter, but they do not exist in a vacuum. They become valuable only when they are matched with opportunities to practise them, mentors who can guide growth, and an economy capable of absorbing talent.

ANONYMOUS, KANO

“

You cannot learn a modern, sustainable digital skill if your power cuts out every two hours and data costs more than your lunch.

AYUBA, KANO

“

We keep telling young people to 'learn a skill,' but rarely ask whether they have the mental wellbeing, supportive environment, and opportunities needed to keep learning, practising, failing, and growing until that skill becomes sustainable.

ANONYMOUS, FCT

“

Too many young people struggle to build sustainable skills because they are unaware that opportunities exist, have limited access to mentorship, and lack the support needed to pursue those opportunities. Sustainable skills are built when young people can see a pathway forward and believe they belong.

KUDIRAT, KANO

“

A young graduate is likely to even miss opportunities because of age gaps. The system doesn't create an enabling environment. It can be depressing at times.

ABDULRAHMAN, KOGI

“

Digital skills advocacy has become crowded and confusing. Everybody wants their own market share of ed-tech, people are selling courses by people who haven't walked that path themselves. Nigerian youth need a straightforward skill set with a structured learning process.

JIMSS, KANO

“

I did love it when there is a real and serious community that holds youth accountable in their skills acquisition and guides them through the process, so they are not discouraged along the way.

JAMILAH, ABUJA

“

Young people are investing in themselves despite poor infrastructure, limited opportunities, and unpaid or underpaid work. If society truly wants a skilled generation, it must invest in creating pathways where talent is valued and given room to grow.

IBRAHIM, ABUJA

Where you might recognize an entry point of your own

We share this report publicly because we believe the findings are useful well beyond YouthXcel Africa. If you fund, design, or deliver youth programming anywhere in this ecosystem, a few entry points in this data may be worth your own team sitting with.



A funder focused on **digital inclusion** will recognize themselves in the 21% of respondents who told us digital marketing and data skills are what they need most, and in the meaningful share who named basic tools like Microsoft Office and reliable internet access as real, current gaps.



A funder focused on **mentorship, coaching, or community-based models** will recognize themselves in the clear, direct preference respondents expressed for a human guide over a list of resources.



A funder focused on **youth economic empowerment** will recognize themselves in the 64% who named cost, not motivation, not ability, as the single largest barrier standing between them and a skill that could change their income.



Any partner who has ever asked how to reach **young people who aren't already in the room** will recognize themselves in the 70% of our respondents who didn't know a relevant opportunity existed for them.

We don't share these findings to make a pitch. We share them because they're true, and because we'd rather the whole ecosystem build on accurate information than have each organization guess separately. If something here resonates with work you're already doing, or work you've been meaning to start, we'd welcome the conversation.



09 / CLOSING & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you for trusting us with what's actually going on.

To the 87 people who took the time to answer honestly, several of you at real length, thank you. This report exists because you trusted us with what's actually going on.

If you'd like to stay close for what we build next, job alerts, fellowships, scholarships, and future YouthXcel programming, join our WhatsApp community using the link below.

For partnership inquiries, press, or questions about this report and its methodology, reach us at info@youthxcelafrica.org or www.youthxcelafrica.org.

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