

EMPOWERING YOUTH LEADERSHIP TO TACKLE INSECURITIES IN OGWASHI-UKU AND IBUSA IN ANIOCHA SOUTH AND OSHIMILI NORTH L.G.A, DELTA STATE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Article History

Received: 14 / 09 / 2025

Accepted: 18 / 11 / 2025

Published: 29 / 11 / 2025

Abstract: The issues of insecurity in the Niger Delta, particularly in communities such as Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa in Aniocha South and Oshimili North, respectively in Delta State has experienced persistent threats including kidnapping, cult-related violence, armed robbery, and other forms of criminal activity and these insecurities are largely attributed to factors such as political exclusion and limited economic opportunities for the youth, which collectively contribute to social instability and community fragility. This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the nexus between youth development and insecurity reduction. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample size of 400 respondents, derived from a target population of 72,000 youths using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error. Out of the 400 questionnaires, 370 were validly completed and returned. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, while hypotheses were tested through the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS (version 27) at a 5% significance level. The first hypothesis test revealed a significant and strong positive correlation ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.00$, $n = 370$) between youth empowerment initiatives and insecurity reduction. The second hypothesis test demonstrated a moderately strong positive relationship ($r = 0.592$, $p < 0.01$, $n = 370$) between youth leadership engagement and the reduction of cult-related activities. The study concludes that youth-focused strategies are vital to addressing insecurity in the Niger Delta. It recommends targeted leadership and peacebuilding training, alongside expanded entrepreneurial and skills development programs to mitigate the socio-economic drivers of crime.

Keywords: Youth leadership, empowerment, insecurity, community policing, youth livelihoods.

How to Cite in APA format: Okwudiri, M. O., Ihuoma, A. N., Chinelo, S.N., & Francisca, N.E. (2025). Empowering Youth Leadership to Tackle Insecurities in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa in Aniocha South and Oshimili North L.G.A, Delta State: Opportunities And Challenges. *IRASS Journal of Economics and Business Management*. 2(11), 30-37.

1.1 Introduction

Nigeria, known as the "giant of Africa," has experienced unprecedented levels of insecurity, ranging from Fulani herdsmen activity, Boko Haram insurgencies, armed robber attacks, kidnapping, political and religious unrest, murder, Niger Delta militants destroying oil facilities, child abduction and trafficking, and a lot more as stated in (Stella, Priscilla, & Ifeoma, 2022). These multifaceted challenges have made national security a central concern, compelling the government to divert substantial resources from developmental priorities to security interventions. The persistent decline in Nigeria's economic, political, social, and religious stability vividly illustrates the pervasive nature of insecurity across the country.

As Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria exemplifies the opportunities and risks inherent in a youthful demographic. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) reports that youth unemployment exceeds 33 per cent, while underemployment rates

remain substantially higher. Despite the presence of oil wealth in Delta State, economic opportunities remain limited in many communities, such as Ogwashi-Uku, comprising nine quarters (Ikeli, Umudei, Ogbe Ubu, Ogbe Aho, Agidiase, Agidiehe, Azungwu, Ogbe Umu Okwuni, and Ogbe Ihago) and Ibusa (Igbuzo), which consists of ten quarters (Umueze, Umuekea, Umuodafe, Ogbeowe, Umuidinisagba, Anyallabum, Umuwagwu, Umuehea, Umuezeagwu, and Ogboli). The paradox of resource abundance amidst widespread poverty has long been identified as a major driver of youth restiveness and insecurity in the Niger Delta. According to Nwagbala et al. (2021) considering the growing inconsistencies in administration, it seems that efforts to stop the ugly tide have not been successful, policies, open grazing, security issues, climate change, and global warming, even while the state has agencies and policies in place to address these challenges as cited in (Nwagbala, Uzodike, Anizoba & Ejike, 2021).

These localized patterns of violence underscore that insecurity in Nigeria is not only a national or regional phenomenon but also a community-based issue rooted in weak governance structures, socio-economic marginalization, and ineffective leadership. Youth leadership, therefore, plays a crucial role in determining security outcomes because when young people are excluded from governance, decision-making, and leadership spaces, they are more susceptible to recruitment by violent or criminal groups (Igbokwe, 2021). Conversely, when youths are empowered through leadership development, livelihood opportunities, and institutional support, they can become proactive agents of peacebuilding, mediation, and trust-building between communities and security actors (Adesina & Abiola, 2022).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Insecurity remains one of the most profound and persistent challenges confronting Nigeria, and Delta State is not an exception. Communities such as Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa have experienced recurrent episodes of cultism, armed robbery, political thuggery, and communal disputes crimes predominantly driven by unemployed and marginalized youths. Reports from security agencies and conflict monitoring systems reveal that the majority of perpetrators involved in these violent acts are young men between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

Moreover, the existing youth leadership structures within communities like Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, such as youth associations, vigilante groups, and town unions, often lack adequate training, funding, and institutional recognition. These limitations undermine their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of insecurity or in mobilizing collective community action. The absence of structured capacity-building and leadership mentoring further weakens the potential of youths to serve as credible agents of peace and stability. Many of these initiatives brought by the government focus on short-term palliatives and handouts rather than sustainable, skill-based empowerment that can generate lasting economic and social transformation. Consequently, many young people continue to face poverty, unemployment, and limited opportunities for civic participation, and breaking this cycle requires a deliberate focus on empowering youth leadership as both a preventive and corrective mechanism.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study include:

- i. Examine the relationship between youth empowerment initiatives and insecurity reduction in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa.
- ii. Assess the relationship between youth leadership development and cultism reduction in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa.

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Understanding Insecurity

The term “insecurity” is multidimensional, encompassing conditions of instability, fear, and vulnerability that threaten the safety and well-being of individuals and communities. It implies the absence of protection, certainty, or peace, and is often used to describe situations characterized by danger, hazard, and unpredictability (Okpako, 2018). In a broader sense, insecurity denotes a state of exposure to threats, whether physical, economic, social, or political, that undermine human security and societal

cohesion (Adebayo, 2023). Insecurity extends beyond conventional notions of crime and violence to include structural and systemic challenges such as poverty, corruption, unemployment, and political exclusion (Okoli & Nnamani, 2021). According to Chinelo and Ejike (2022) as the government is under unstoppable pressure to ensure the safety of its citizen's lives and property, insecurity is continually increasing and affecting all Nigerians.

In the Niger Delta, insecurity manifests primarily through militancy, oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, and youth restiveness. Although the 2009 amnesty programme reduced large-scale militancy, localized insecurity persists in many communities (PIND Foundation, 2022). At the community level, insecurity in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa takes unique forms as Ogwashi-Uku frequently experiences cult-related violence, youth gang clashes, and kidnapping, exacerbated by its proximity to Asaba, a rapidly urbanizing hub that attracts criminal spill-overs. In Ibusa, communal land disputes and political thuggery, especially during elections, serve as major sources of tension. The persistence of these threats is largely attributable to high youth unemployment, limited policing, and the absence of sustainable livelihood opportunities (Okolie & Akpan, 2022).

In both Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, community security committees are dominated by elders, leaving young people excluded from decision-making, which fosters resentment and disillusionment (Nwosu & Eze, 2022). Additionally, poor police-community relations, low public trust, and the inadequacy of law enforcement capacity, reflected in Nigeria's substandard police-to-citizen ratio compared with UN benchmarks, further compound insecurity (Adesina & Abiola, 2022). These gaps have prompted the rise of informal youth-led vigilante groups that often operate outside legal frameworks and sometimes contribute to violence themselves. Peer pressure, drug abuse, and the quest for social identity also drive youth involvement in cult groups, deepening the cycle of insecurity (Okonkwo & Ijeoma, 2023).

2.1.2 Youth Leadership

Youth leadership refers to the active engagement of young people in decision-making, governance, and community development processes, where they exercise influence, mobilize peers, and contribute to shaping social outcomes that directly affect their lives and communities (Chikere & Nwachukwu, 2022). It embodies the capacity of young individuals to initiate, organize, and lead efforts aimed at achieving positive change within their environments. Youth leadership, therefore, extends beyond participation in formal political structures to include leadership in informal spaces such as community associations, religious organizations, civil society movements, and youth-led advocacy networks.

Scholars increasingly recognize youth leadership as a crucial determinant of sustainable peace, social inclusion, and community resilience, particularly in societies characterized by fragility and weak governance (Akinyemi, 2021). The significance of youth leadership lies in its transformative potential as effective youth leaders serve as bridges between generations, fostering intergenerational dialogue, mentorship, and collaboration. They channel youthful energy, creativity, and innovation toward solving communal problems while promoting democratic participation and civic engagement (Edeh & Nnamani, 2023). When youths are entrusted with leadership responsibilities, they not only develop critical life and management skills but also serve as role models

capable of inspiring peers to embrace constructive and lawful behaviour.

In Nigeria, where over 60 percent of the population is below the age of 35, developing youth leadership capacities has become a matter of national importance (African Union Commission, 2021). The challenges of insecurity, unemployment, and socio-political instability underscore the need to invest in leadership development programs that empower young people to participate meaningfully in governance. Evidence from various Delta State communities indicates that when youths are provided with leadership training, mentorship opportunities, and institutional recognition, they are more likely to engage in peacebuilding initiatives and reduce their involvement in cultism and other antisocial activities (Nwosu & Eze, 2022).

2.1.3 Addressing Insecurity: The Role of Youth Leadership

Studies across Nigeria demonstrate that when youths are deliberately integrated into community security frameworks, rates of crime and violence tend to decline. Adesina and Abiola (2022), for example, observed that the inclusion of youth leaders in neighbourhood watch committees and local security initiatives led to measurable reductions in criminal activities across several Delta State communities. Nwosu and Eze (2022), found that youth leadership training and empowerment programs not only enhanced civic participation but also reduced cult-related violence by improving communication and mediation skills among young leaders.

Youth leadership thus represents more than an auxiliary component of peacebuilding; it is a strategic necessity in addressing insecurity in regions such as Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa. Empowered youth leaders are capable of mediating disputes, providing early-warning signals, and mobilizing their peers away from violent networks toward constructive community engagements. Their proximity to grassroots realities allows them to detect brewing tensions, interpret local grievances, and promote inclusive solutions long before conflicts escalate. Moreover, youth leaders often serve as intermediaries between security agencies and community members, facilitating trust and cooperation in areas where state institutions are weak or distrusted, because when properly equipped with leadership skills and institutional legitimacy, these leaders can organize community dialogues, initiate anti-cultism campaigns, and lead awareness programs on peace education and civic responsibility (Edeh & Nnamani, 2023). The transformative potential of youth leadership also lies in its ability to redirect youthful energy and social influence from deviant behaviours to positive, socially responsible actions. However, by leveraging peer influence, young leaders can discourage involvement in drug abuse, political thuggery, and cultism, replacing these with peer mentoring, entrepreneurship, and community service initiatives (Omotola & Alumona, 2021).

2.1.4 Youth Leadership and Security Governance

The persistence of insecurity across Nigeria has underscored the inherent limitations of top-down security approaches that rely heavily on military operations and policing while neglecting grassroots engagement. These centralized strategies often fail to address the structural causes of insecurity, such as unemployment, inequality, and community disempowerment (Adesina & Abiola, 2022). In many parts of Delta State, young people have begun to assume critical roles in

security management through the formation of vigilante groups, neighbourhood watch committees, and youth associations that complement the efforts of formal law enforcement agencies. These informal security structures, though sometimes unrecognized by the state, have proven effective in intelligence gathering, early warning, and community mediation. Adesina and Abiola (2022) noted that communities with active youth involvement in security governance record lower incidences of violent crime and greater collaboration between citizens and the police. In Ogwashi-Uku, youth leaders are actively involved in providing intelligence to community elders and security agencies, identifying strangers, monitoring suspicious movements, and mediating minor disputes before they escalate. In Ibusa, youth associations work closely with traditional rulers and town unions to maintain public order during cultural festivals, elections, and communal ceremonies. Such activities illustrate the potential of youth leadership to localize security responses, thereby bridging the gap between state security institutions and grassroots communities.

2.1.5 Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding

In Nigeria, where insecurity manifests through various forms such as insurgency, cultism, kidnapping, and communal clashes, youth leadership has emerged as a strategic instrument for promoting social stability and resilience (Omotola & Alumona, 2021). Empowering young people to take leadership roles in peace initiatives enables them to mediate disputes, promote tolerance, and rebuild trust within divided communities. In Ogwashi-Uku, for example, youth leaders have successfully intervened in conflicts between rival cult groups by facilitating dialogue among their members, religious leaders, and traditional authorities. These mediation efforts have contributed to a significant reduction in violent clashes and have enhanced intergroup relations. In Ibusa, youth associations have partnered with traditional rulers and community elders to address recurring disputes over land ownership and political representation by engaging in dialogue and advocacy. They have prevented several of these conflicts from escalating into violent confrontations.

These experiences demonstrate that youth leadership plays a transformative role in peacebuilding when provided with institutional legitimacy, capacity development, and community support. Youth leaders often serve as intermediaries between conflicting parties and as liaisons between local communities and government agencies. Their ability to mobilize peers and leverage social networks gives them a comparative advantage in identifying early warning signs of conflict and initiating preventive interventions (Adesina & Abiola, 2022).

Furthermore, youth-led peacebuilding initiatives foster a culture of civic responsibility and collective action. Through community outreach, awareness campaigns, and peace education programs, young leaders challenge the narratives of violence and retaliation that often dominate conflict-prone societies. These activities not only promote peace but also reinforce values such as empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity (Nwosu & Eze, 2022).

2.1.6 Youth Leadership and Empowerment

Empowerment constitutes the foundation of effective youth leadership as it involves enabling young people to acquire the skills, resources, confidence, and opportunities necessary to make meaningful contributions to their communities and to participate

actively in governance and development processes (Nwosu & Eze, 2022). Empowerment is therefore both a process and an outcome, one that transforms individuals from passive beneficiaries of development into active agents of social change and peacebuilding.

Empirical evidence underscores that youth empowerment has a direct correlation with reductions in community violence and crime. For instance, Adesina and Abiola (2022) reported a 25 percent decline in cult-related incidents in parts of Delta State following the introduction of vocational training and leadership workshops targeting unemployed youths. Similarly, empowerment programs that integrate mentorship and civic engagement components have proven effective in redirecting young people away from antisocial behaviour toward civic participation and peace advocacy (Omotola & Alumona, 2021). In Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, empowering youths through leadership development and capacity-building programs can strengthen their ability to organize community watch groups, mediate disputes, and collaborate with formal security institutions. Empowered youth leaders can act as role models for their peers, demonstrating that leadership grounded in service and responsibility offers a viable alternative to violence and crime.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory provides a useful lens for understanding the role of youth leadership in addressing insecurity within local communities. The theory emphasizes leadership that inspires, motivates, and transforms followers by articulating a shared vision, fostering trust, and promoting collective commitment to change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; reinterpreted in Edeh & Nnamani, 2023). Unlike transactional leadership, which depends primarily on reward and punishment mechanisms, transformational leadership focuses on intrinsic motivation and the long-term development of followers' potential.

Relating to this study of Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, transformational leadership underscores how visionary youth leaders can mobilize their peers toward peaceful and constructive engagement rather than violent or criminal activities. Through inspiration and mentorship, transformational youth leaders can cultivate shared community values, stimulate innovation, and foster resilience against insecurity and social decay. In community security settings, these dimensions empower youth leaders to build cohesive groups capable of mediating conflicts, discouraging cultism, and promoting civic engagement. Empirical studies in Nigeria reveal that when youths receive transformational leadership training, their vulnerability to cultism, drug abuse, and political manipulation significantly decreases (Okonkwo & Ijeoma, 2023).

2.2.2 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory provides a complementary framework for understanding how young people can be equipped to actively participate in security governance and community development. The theory focuses on the processes through which individuals and groups gain the skills, confidence, resources, and opportunities necessary to influence decisions that affect their lives and environments (Zimmerman, 2000; Perkins & Zimmerman, 2021). Empowerment extends beyond participation because it seeks a transformation of power relations, ensuring that marginalized or disenfranchised groups acquire the ability to

challenge systemic inequalities and contribute meaningfully to governance, development, and security.

In Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, empowerment theory explains how capacity-building, education, and access to resources reduce youth vulnerability to crime, cultism, and political manipulation. Empowered youths possess a sense of ownership, purpose, and agency that discourages engagement in antisocial or violent activities. Empowerment theory reinforces the argument that sustainable peace and security depend on addressing the structural drivers of insecurity, particularly exclusion, unemployment, and marginalization. When youth leadership is grounded in empowerment, it generates a ripple effect of social transformation that reduces the appeal of violence, promotes accountability, and strengthens community cohesion (Zimmerman, 2000; updated by Chikere & Nwachukwu, 2022).

2.3 Empirical Review

Usman and Bello (2023) conducted a quantitative study using a cross-sectional survey of 200 SME owners in Northern Nigeria, focusing on high-risk regions affected by banditry and insurgency. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different business sectors such as retail, manufacturing, and agriculture. Their findings indicated that SMEs in those regions faced increased operational challenges due to frequent threats to assets, theft, and vandalism. The study revealed that businesses unable to afford private security services experienced higher financial losses, making recovery from insecurity related disruptions difficult.

Nwagbala et al. (2021) conducted an empirical study on insecurity and food crisis in Ayamelum Local Government Area of Anambra State. Employing a descriptive survey design across eight communities, their research utilized chi-square analysis to determine the effects of herders' attacks on agricultural production. The results indicated that violent herder-farmer conflicts have had a devastating impact on food security, compelling farmers to abandon farmlands and hire private security, thereby increasing production costs. The study concluded that insecurity, particularly herdsmen attacks, directly contributes to rising food prices and declining rural livelihoods.

Chinelo (2021) examined the implications of insecurity on business sustainability in Nigeria using a qualitative research design. The study revealed that persistent insecurity discourages investment, disrupts production, and undermines both public and private sector performance. The author emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive governmental action to restore public confidence and create an enabling environment for business operations and economic development.

Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu (2019) investigated the impact of insecurity on industrialization and sustainable development in Nigeria. Using an exploratory research design, they analysed data sourced from documented materials and the internet. Their findings revealed that insecurity manifested through insurgency, kidnapping, and vandalism which significantly hinders industrial growth and national development. The authors concluded that addressing insecurity is fundamental to achieving sustainable economic progress, recommending that the Nigerian government prioritize good governance, social justice, and inclusiveness.

Opusunju, Akyuz & Ibrahim (2019) conducted a study on insecurity and business performance with keen focus on the

operation management challenge in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design using structural questionnaire administered to the respondents who are small business owners in Ikot Ekpene. The study adopted regression analysis and correlation. The study found that there is a positive significant effect of insecurity on small business performance and also there is a significant relationship between operation management challenge and small business performance in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State.

3.1 Materials and Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey design to facilitate the generalization of the result for the entire population of interest. Data collected from the field were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v27). Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, and means were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and opinions. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC), were employed to test the formulated hypotheses at a 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$). This statistical approach enabled the study to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between youth empowerment, leadership, and insecurity reduction in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa. The estimated population of these towns is about 120,000 residents, of which approximately 60% are youths (aged 15–35 years) as this translates to 72,000 youths across the two towns (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Therefore, a sample size adopted a Taro Yamane's (1967) formula. The study use a sample size of 400 respondents.

Table 3.1 List of Community

s/n	Community	Population	Percentage of total
1	Ogwashi-uku (Aniocha South)	200	50.0%
2	Ibusa (Oshimili North)	200	50.0%
	Total	400	100.0%

Field survey, 2025

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Data Presentation

The data used in the analysis of this project were obtained from the response of the respondents to the questionnaire administered to them by the researchers.

Table 4.1.1 Schedules of questionnaire and administered and returned

1	Number of questionnaire administered	400	100%
2	Number of questionnaire returned	370	92.5%
3	Number of questionnaire not returned	30	7.5%

Field survey, 2025

Table 4.1.1 shows that out of the 400 questionnaire given, 370 were completed and returned thus showing a response rate of 92.5 while 30 (7.5%) were not returned.

Table 4.1.2 Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	249	67.3%
Female	121	32.7%
Total	370	100%

Field survey, 2025

Table 4.1.2 indicate that the majority of respondents (67.3%) were male, (while 32.7%) were female. This distribution reflects the relatively higher participation of men in community and youth associations within the study area.

Table 4.1.3 Age Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15–20 years	65	17.6%
21–25 years	110	29.7%
26–30 years	115	31.1%
31–35 years	80	21.6%
Total	370	100%

Field survey, 2025

Table 4.1.3 above shows that (31.1%) respondents fall within 26–30 years, followed by (29.7%) fall within the age bracket of 21 – 25.

Table 4.1.4 Educational Qualification

Educational qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary(WASC/SSCE)	205	55.4%
Tertiary (B.Sc/H.ND)	140	37.8%
Postgraduate (M.Sc/P.hD)	25	6.8%
Total	370	100%

Field survey, 2025

Table 4.1.4 shows that 55.4% of respondents possess secondary education, 37.8% have tertiary education, while 6.8% hold postgraduate qualifications. This suggests that most participants are literate and capable of providing informed opinions on issues of youth empowerment and community security.

Table 4.1.5 Occupation Status

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	110	29.7
Artisan/Trader	85	23.0
Unemployed	150	40.5
Civil Servant	25	6.8
Total	370	100%

Field survey, 2025

Table 4.1.5 reveals that students constitute the second largest group of respondents (29.7%), followed by unemployed youths (40.5%),

highlighting the prevalence of joblessness among youths in the area, which may contribute to insecurity.

4.2 Analysis of Data Related to Research Questions

Decision rule

The decision in the analysis section would be determine by the average of the responses of respondents. Strongly agree (5

points), agree (4 points), undecided (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point). The average of the responses are $(5+4+3+2+1)/5 = 3.0$. Therefore, mean score below 3.0 would be considered as disagree and mean score of 3.0 and above would be considered as agreed.

Table 4.2.1 Analysis of Respondents responses to Youth Empowerment, Leadership and Insecurity

s/n	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	Unemployment and limited job opportunities exacerbate youth insecurity.	210 (56.8%)	83 (22.4%)	37 (10.0%)	25 (6.7%)	15 (4.1%)	3.42	Accepted
2	Armed robbery, theft, and cultism increase insecurity in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa	240 (64.8%)	52 (14.1%)	23 (6.2%)	35 (9.5%)	20 (5.4%)	3.31	Accepted
3	Poor infrastructure contributes to daily insecurity related to safety and mobility	180 (48.6%)	89 (24.1%)	41 (11.1%)	40 (10.8%)	20 (5.4%)	3.22	Accepted
4	Youth leaders face challenges mobilizing community support to address unemployment	170 (45.9%)	87 (23.5%)	48 (12.9%)	45 (12.2%)	20 (5.4%)	3.18	Accepted
5	Mentorship from elders empowers young leaders to address insecurity.	192 (51.8%)	91 (24.6%)	35 (9.5%)	37 (10.0%)	15 (4.1%)	3.13	Accepted
6	Youth leaders organize awareness campaigns against cultism and drug abuse.	171 (46.2%)	109 (29.5%)	22 (5.9%)	48 (13.0%)	20 (5.4%)	3.11	Accepted
7	Digital literacy and entrepreneurship training help youth combat insecurity.	267 (72.2%)	43 (11.6%)	23 (6.2%)	25 (6.8%)	12 (3.2%)	3.31	Accepted
8	Youth leaders collaborate with local government to mediate communal conflicts and peace-building.	190 (51.4%)	73 (19.7%)	55 (14.9%)	32 (8.6%)	20 (5.4%)	3.25	Accepted

Source: computation of respondents' response. Field survey, 2025

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and insecurity reduction in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa.

Table 4.2.2 SPSS output for Pearson Correlation between Youth Empowerment and Insecurity Reduction

		Youth Empowerment	Insecurity Reduction
Youth Empowerment	Pearson correlation	1	0.684
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
Insecurity Reduction	Pearson correlation	0.684	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

From table 4.2.2 indicated significant and strong positive correlation between youth empowerment and insecurity reduction with ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.00$, $n = 370$). Since the p-value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between youth leadership and cultism reduction in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa.

Table 4.2.3 SPSS output for Pearson Correlation between Youth Leadership and Cultism Reduction

		Youth Leadership	Cultism Reduction
Youth Leadership	Pearson correlation	1	0.592
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	370	370
Cultism Reduction	Pearson correlation	0.592	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	370	370

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

From Table 4.2.3, the second hypothesis demonstrated a moderately strong positive correlation between youth leadership and cultism reduction ($r = 0.592$, $p < 0.01$, $n = 370$). Since the p-value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

4.3 Summary of Findings

- The Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.684$ indicates a strong positive relationship between youth empowerment and insecurity reduction. The significance value ($p = 0.000$) is less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This means that as youth empowerment increases, the level of insecurity in the study area tends to decrease significantly. This finding supports Adediran & Olalekan (2021), who established that youth empowerment initiatives reduce violent crime rates in Delta State (South-South) Nigeria. It also aligns with Adebayo (2023), who argued that when youths are empowered with tangible opportunities, they shift from being security threats to peacebuilders.
- The correlation coefficient of $r = 0.592$ shows a moderately strong positive relationship between youth leadership and the reduction of cult-related activities. Since the significance value ($p = 0.001$) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that effective youth leadership structures significantly contribute to lowering cultism in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa. This finding resonates with Nwosu & Eze (2022), who demonstrated that youth leaders act as mediators in community conflicts and can help dissuade peers from cult-related activities. This also aligns with Ibrahim & Musa (2024), who emphasized that empowering credible youth leaders reduces the influence of cult groups on vulnerable adolescents.

From the correlation analyses, one major insight emerge:

- Youth empowerment ($r = 0.684$) demonstrates a stronger influence on insecurity reduction compared to youth leadership ($r = 0.592$). This suggests that while leadership is essential for mobilization and coordination, empowerment provides the economic and psychological foundation that sustains effective leadership and long-term security outcomes. In other words, empowerment equips youths with the tools to lead responsibly, while leadership channels those tools into organized and impactful action.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of youth empowerment and leadership in addressing the persistent problem of insecurity in Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, Delta State. The

results reveal that insecurity, in its various forms, cultism, armed robbery, political thuggery, and communal violence, is closely linked to youth unemployment, marginalization, and limited access to sustainable livelihood opportunities. The study concludes that youth empowerment serves as a fundamental strategy for reducing insecurity by equipping young people with the skills, resources, and motivation necessary to pursue lawful and productive activities. Empowered youths are more likely to participate constructively in civic life, resist involvement in violent or criminal networks, and contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and community development. The study therefore posits that empowerment and leadership are interdependent mechanisms: empowerment provides the structural and economic base for stability, while leadership ensures organized, collective, and sustained community action toward security and peace. One without the other is insufficient for achieving long-term security outcomes.

4.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The State government should scale up youth-focused programs in entrepreneurship, ICT training, agriculture, and creative industries, as such programs should be community-specific and sustained beyond election cycles.
- Empowered youths should be encouraged to participate in community policing and neighbourhood watch groups, complementing the work of formal security agencies and community-based rehabilitation programs should be developed for reformed cultists, focusing on reintegration through vocational training, counselling, and mentorship.

Suggestions for further studies

- The impact of long-term youth empowerment on insecurity reduction for peace continuity in north-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria.
- The role of social media platform in strengthening youth leadership roles in peacebuilding in Delta State Nigeria.

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