
Human Capital Development: A Driver for Educational Improvement in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *This article explored the potential of human capital development as a driving force for educational improvement in Nigeria. The analysis delved into the fundamental principles of education, human capital development, and how the synergy between these elements can foster improvements in the Nigerian educational landscape. The implications for education are manifold, with a particular focus on the importance of providing practical training, enhancing infrastructure, and implementing effective workforce planning to mitigate issues of unemployment and underemployment. The paper concluded by advocating for a collaborative effort between the government and curriculum developers to equip students with the necessary skills and independence for sustainable educational growth in Nigeria. Furthermore, it emphasized the critical aspects of quality education and human development, including equity, contextualization, child-centered teaching, and sustainability, as essential components for ensuring the longevity of the education system in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: education, human capital, human capital development, educational improvement, sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major objectives of many developing countries including Nigeria has been to attain stability, material prosperity, educational advancement, peace, and social progress. However, this has not been fully attained as a result of internal problems such as inadequate human development, primitive agricultural practices, weak infrastructure, uninspiring growth of the manufacturing sector, a poor policy and regulatory environment, and mismanagement and misuse of resources (Dauda, 2010). In the past, prominence had been placed on amassing physical capital to the detriment of human capital in Nigeria's quest for rapid socio-economic progress. A country's competitiveness in the 21st century is strongly connected to the quality of its human capital. Hence human capital development is undoubtedly the pivot for any meaningful programme of economic and educational development of Nigeria and indeed of any country (Ejere, 2011).

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Education in the contemporary globalized and knowledge-driven society significantly shapes the destinies of individuals and communities. It stands as a pivotal element of human capital development by furnishing individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, and principles necessary for personal growth and societal progress (Takdir et al., 2020). It enables individuals to acquire the essential skills and knowledge to navigate through a constantly evolving labour market, enhancing their productivity and ingenuity. Moreover, education fosters entrepreneurship and technological progress, propelling innovation and economic competitiveness. Additionally, education plays a crucial role in fostering social unity and peaceful coexistence by preparing individuals to be agents of change and active contributors to society.

Educational institutions, such as schools and universities, play a vital role in preparing individuals to become catalysts for change. These institutions provide knowledge and skills, but instil values and a sense of purpose in individuals, empowering them to contribute to positive social transformation. As educational systems continue to evolve and expand, there is a growing demand for highly qualified faculty and specialists who possess the ability to research educational upbringing processes, devise strategies for pedagogical development, design individualized routes for learners' professional growth, and effectively evaluate and adjust educational activities. Consequently, it becomes imperative to cultivate new skills and abilities, update outdated concepts, and integrate them into the practice of the new education system (Bayarystanova et al., 2014). Education is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills; it is also about shaping individuals into responsible and productive members of society. It has the power to transform lives, break the cycle of poverty, and promote social mobility. Education can also foster critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, which are essential for economic growth and development (Abolade, Ogbodo, and Maduewesi, 2019).

Furthermore, education plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and fostering a sense of national identity. By providing individuals with a common set of values and beliefs, education can help build a more inclusive and cohesive society. It also promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for diversity, which are essential for peaceful coexistence in a multicultural world. In addition, education is a powerful tool for promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to address these challenges, education can help create a more sustainable and equitable world for future generations. To cap it all, education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of progress and development. It is essential for the holistic advancement of any nation and must be prioritized by policymakers, educators, and society as a whole.

There can be no productive human capital without a functional education, hence Van Den-Berg (2021) opined that countries that are at the forefront of technological advancement equally have the most educated population. This assumption is probably borne out of the view that the purpose of quality education is to create critical thinking that brings about the development of new

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK technologies and new methods of production in line with the demand of the new dispensation. Educated people possess more skills and can perform their jobs effectively. They are also better suited to more complex jobs, which are often associated with high rates of pay and greater economic benefits.

It is not surprising that the focus on millennium development goals has transitioned towards ensuring the sustainability of these goals, with education being a top priority. Countries aspiring to progress in line with global advancements have consistently implemented proactive measures to enhance their education systems. It is widely acknowledged that a substantial investment in human capital is essential for achieving high-quality education, ultimately leading to economic advantages by improving efficiency and productivity within the country's economy. Without sufficient human capital development, significant economic growth in any society would be unattainable.

Conceptualization of Human Capital and Human Capital Development

The concept of human capital refers to the knowledge, abilities, health, and skills that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of a country. In contrast, human capital development refers to the process of acquiring and increasing the number of persons who have the skills, education, and experience that are critical for the economic growth and development of a country's economy (Okojie, 2005). Also, Ejere (2011) posited that human capital refers to the human factor in the production process; and consists of the combined knowledge, skills or competencies and abilities of the workforce. Of all the factors of production, only human beings are capable of learning, adapting or changing, innovative and creative.

The sum of an individual's knowledge, abilities, and assets is referred to as their human capital. Investing in education and human capital development has been recognized as a fundamental driver of educational progress, economic growth, and social progress. Without substantial investment in human capital, no country can achieve sustainable economic and educational development (Ebisine, 2015). Moreover, human capital development goes beyond mere economic considerations because it enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world around them, improving their quality of life and providing broad social benefits for individuals and society (Febriyanti and Ihsani, 2019). Human capital is essential for driving innovation, increasing productivity, and ultimately contributing to economic growth. It is a key factor in determining an individual's earning potential and career advancement opportunities. Investing in human capital through education and training programs can lead to higher levels of productivity and competitiveness in the workforce. Companies that prioritize the development of their employees' human capital often see higher levels of employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Overall, human capital plays a crucial role in shaping the success and prosperity of individuals, organizations, and economies. Due to its all-embracing and multi-dimensional nature as the outcome of investment in education, health, training, experience, and migration, it has often proved

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difficult to capture the concept of human capital by a mere definition. However, for this article, there are a few definitions that will suffice.

Amaechi (2024) explains the concept of human capital as the human element in the organization which includes: the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that gives the organization its distinctive character and the human elements of the organization are those that are capable of learning, changing, innovating and providing the creative thrust which if properly motivated can ensure the long-term survival of the organization. In other words, human capital encompasses the capacities and abilities acquired by individuals, groups, and societies that enable them to carry out assigned responsibilities for the attainment of predetermined goals. The notion of ‘human capital’ became popular in economic literature as a result of the realization that physical capital alone was not sufficient to bring about long-term development. Many economists later explain that human capital was the most important factor that created development in the sense that with minimal physical capital, human capital could stimulate or cause substantial progress to happen. On the other hand, without human capital, nothing would ever happen. Indeed, it is known that plants, offices, computers, automated equipment, intranets, systems, internet, websites, and all other facilities that any organization may install remain unproductive except for human efforts and direction. Human capital development, according to OECD (2021), can be seen as the deliberate and continuous process of acquiring requisite knowledge, skills, and experiences that are applied to produce economic value for driving sustainable national development. The significance and relevance of human capital development in the achievement of meaningful and sustainable economic growth and educational development have been widely acknowledged in various studies. In the absence of substantial investment in the development of human capital in any country, sustained economic growth and educational development would only be a mere wish, never a reality. Therefore, the place of human capital development in educational development cannot be overemphasized.

Human capital development is summarised as the process of nurturing and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals (Bayarystanova et al., 2014). This process is essential for individuals to thrive in the modern labour market and contribute effectively to economic development (Febriyanti and Ihsani, 2019). According to the World Bank, fast economic growth requires three fundamental factors. These factors are natural capital, physical capital, and human capital. Of these three factors, however, human capital has a major share in generating economic growth (contributing 64 percent). This point was aptly captured by Bartolucci, et al., (2023) when they wrote that human resources, not physical capital, not income or material resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production, human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital; exploit natural resources; build social, economic, and political organizations; and carry forward national development. A nation that is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else. The above statement implies that no country can make any meaningful economic progress without developing the

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knowledge, skills, and capabilities of its citizens to manage available resources. It is an incontrovertible fact that human capital constitutes the most precious asset of any nation. This therefore underscores the imperative for building requisite human capital for sustainable educational development.

The Role of Human Capital Development in Improving Educational Outcomes and Workforce Readiness in Nigeria

Human capital development is of utmost importance in the improvement of education as it enhances the practices of teachers and the learning of students. Effective professional development programs enable teachers to acquire new knowledge, skills, and teaching strategies that directly influence their instructional practices. Consequently, this leads to the implementation of more engaging and effective teaching methods, resulting in improved educational outcomes. Educational institutions play a vital role in this process by providing teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities. By doing so, they ensure that educators stay updated with the latest research on how children learn, emerging technology tools for the classroom, and new curriculum resources. This continuous learning empowers teachers to adapt their teaching methods to effectively cater to the evolving educational landscape and the diverse needs of their students. Effective professional development programs help to develop leaders within the education system who can build a culture of high expectations. When school leaders believe in the potential of all students to learn, it positively influences the entire educational environment. These leaders can inspire and motivate both teachers and students, creating a more conducive atmosphere for learning and growth. Nwachukwu (2023) asserts that the professional development of teachers allows them to acquire needed skills such as stress management.

Furthermore, the development of human capital serves to enhance the school community through a cascading effect. As educators acquire advanced training and knowledge, they gain access to fresh insights and more efficient tools to impart to their students. This not only elevates the standard of teaching but also fosters a culture of perpetual learning within the educational institution, benefiting both instructors and learners alike. Investing in the professional growth of teachers is imperative for the progress of education, as it directly influences teaching methodologies, student academic achievements, and the overall cohesion of the school community. By providing teachers with the necessary resources and guidance, educational institutions can ensure that they are adequately prepared to address the evolving needs of their students and equip them for triumph in their academic pursuits and future endeavours.

Theoretical Framework and Practical Realities

Human capital theory offers a conceptual structure for comprehending the significance and worth of individuals in achieving organizational triumph. It underscores the notion that people are valuable resources whose competencies can be enriched through educational pursuits and training programs. As per this theory, allocating resources toward human capital development results in heightened productivity, creativity, and overall organizational efficacy. Moreover, the theory

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK underscores the significance of education in nurturing human capital, commencing from the early stages of life and persisting through formal educational channels. By imparting individuals with pertinent knowledge and proficiencies, education serves as a pivotal element in augmenting human capital and nurturing economic progress (Petchko, 2018).

Human capital theory, developed in the early 1960s by Gay Becker and Theodore Schultz plays a significant role in understanding the value of education and career development. This theory aims to explain why merely having physical resources such as coal or machinery is insufficient for economic growth and development. It emphasizes that investing in **human capital**, which includes education, training, and skill development, is crucial for enhancing productivity, innovation, and overall economic progress. By improving the knowledge and skills of individuals, human capital contributes to their ability to contribute effectively to the economy (Becker, 1975).

Furthermore, human capital development is closely linked to the concept of education. As the world accumulated more and more physical capital, the opportunity cost of going to school declined. Education became an increasingly important component of the workforce (Becker, 1975). Therefore, the theoretical underpinnings of human capital development underscore the pivotal role of education in shaping individuals' capabilities and enhancing their contribution to society and the economy. Several theoretical underpinnings support the importance of human capital development including Humanistic Purpose which sees education as a means to develop the virtues and potential of individuals, allowing them to reach their full extent both individually and collectively; Civic Purpose which sees that education plays a crucial role in enriching the public sphere and promoting engagement in democratic communities; Economic Purpose which sees that education equips individuals with intellectual and practical skills that make them productive and enhance their living conditions, as well as contribute to society's economic growth; and Social Purpose which sees that education fosters social cohesion, harmony, and mutual understanding by promoting values such as tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity (Hooley, 2021).

In practice, human capital development as a catalyst for educational advancement involves investing in educational programs and initiatives that enhance individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies. This investment goes beyond traditional classroom learning and includes opportunities for continuous learning, skill development, and lifelong education. By focusing on the practical application of human capital theory, educational institutions, and policymakers can design programs that cater to the diverse needs of learners and align with the demands of the evolving job market (Corral, 2021).

Practically, human capital development involves various strategies and initiatives aimed at improving education systems, promoting lifelong learning, and providing individuals with the necessary tools to succeed in the labour market and society. These strategies may include: increasing access to quality education, investing in teacher training and professional development,

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK promoting STEM education and digital literacy, and implementing inclusive and equitable education policies. Organizations that prioritize human capital and invest in the development of their workforce often experience a competitive advantage. A study by McKinsey found that companies excelling in human capital management have lower attrition rates and higher job satisfaction among employees (Madgavkar, et al., 2023). They emphasized that countries that build human capital are more likely to propel their citizens into higher earning brackets throughout their careers. This indicates that valuing and developing human capital can lead to tangible benefits in terms of employee retention and overall organizational performance. Hence, efforts to advance education and human capital development are crucial for societal progress.

Human Capital Development and Educational Improvement in Nigeria

Human capital development is crucial for educational progress in Nigeria as it enhances educational outcomes and improves workforce readiness. By focusing on investing in the growth and development of individuals, stakeholders can build a stronger education system that supports sustainable advancement. Developing the necessary human capital, which includes individuals with the appropriate skills, knowledge, competencies, mindset, attitude, and motivation, is essential for achieving sustainable development. This approach equips people with the capacity to mitigate the negative impact of society on the environment and safeguard the planet for future generations (Odekunle, 2019). Strengthening the role of education, particularly in sustainable development, through a multidisciplinary approach and providing training to a diverse range of stakeholders, including students and experts in various fields, such as political science, economics, environment, and agriculture, is key to creating a critical mass of requisite human capital. Accordingly, building human capital for sustainable development will require a reform of the educational system, especially at the university level because the university is the major and apex 'feedstock' for a country's human capital. The university supplies the human capital needs both for the other lower levels of the educational system (primary and secondary) and the non-educational organizations. The university therefore has a very critical role to play in the promotion and implementation of sustainable development.

Implications of Human Capital Development in Nigeria

Investing in human capital development can lead to improved educational outcomes in Nigeria by equipping teachers with innovative teaching methods, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and promoting leadership development within educational institutions. For example, initiatives like teacher mentorship programs and technology integration workshops have been successful in enhancing educational outcomes by ensuring that educators are well-equipped to meet the evolving students.

Furthermore, human capital development plays a critical role in improving workforce readiness by providing individuals with the necessary skills and competencies to excel in their careers. Skills training programs, professional development opportunities, and ongoing learning initiatives contribute significantly to preparing individuals for the workforce in Nigeria. However, challenges

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK such as limited resources, inadequate training facilities, and lack of support systems can hinder the effective implementation of human capital development programs for improving workforce readiness (Kyllonen, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Human capital development plays a crucial role in educational advancement by focusing on enhancing the knowledge, skills, and attributes of individuals. The theoretical underpinnings of human capital theory emphasize the value of investing in people to drive organizational success and economic growth. In practice, educational institutions can leverage human capital development to improve teaching practices, student learning outcomes, and overall organizational performance. By prioritizing human capital development in education, organizations can foster a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and growth that benefits individuals and society as a whole. In the context of educational advancement, human capital development serves as a catalyst for transforming the learning environment and improving teaching practices. By investing in teachers' professional development and implementing student-centered approaches, educational institutions can enhance the human capital of their workforce and educational outcomes.

Recommendation

Efforts should be made by the government to provide the following as enumerated by Shaker, (2015) & Eze, (2017).

- Provision of on-the-job training, professional development courses, off-the-job training, and in-service/ Refresher training, including aid-type apprenticeships organized by employers, and educational policymakers. This will help teachers to be abreast of recent innovations in educational management and current methods used in imparting knowledge to pupils. An increase in education is the major factor in human capital formation, it should be provided by the government at all costs. It is a major form of investment in human capital, which provides a key input in human resources development.
- There should be proper manpower planning as improper manpower planning results in unemployment and underemployment. This is where the experts in educational management and planning are required to make inputs.
- Improved Infrastructure – Human capital development will create more educated persons, trained doctors, and efficient engineers. All these will result in efficient management, and proper ways of delivering lectures because the required facilities are in place; adequate provisions of these lead to motivation which on the other hand leads to an increase in productivity.
- Reduction of Poverty – There is unemployment and poverty due to illiteracy, lack of skill, and shortage of training facilities. Poverty can be reduced through human capital development. Poverty reduction is the greatest symbol of economic progress. It is therefore the responsibility of the education sector to see that manpower is not lacking in the economy. This will be achieved through proper educational management and planning.

Additionally, educational institutions need to update outdated concepts and integrate them into the practice of the new education system. This may involve revising the curriculum, incorporating new technologies and teaching methods, and promoting a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. By investing in the development of highly qualified teachers and specialists, educational institutions can ensure that they are effectively preparing individuals to become catalysts for change. These individuals will possess the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to contribute to positive social transformation and make a meaningful impact in their communities.

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