

Higher Education as a Tool for Human Capital Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper focused on the role of higher education as an instrument for improving on human capital development in the country. Emphasis was laid on how higher institutions in the country can be repositioned for the development of human capital. The concept of higher education was explained as well as the meaning of human capital development which means improving on workers efficiency in the work place. The factors that influence human capital development such as government policies, level of technological advancement and enrollment level were pointed out. The challenges confronting human capital development in Nigerian higher institutions were highlighted and the strategies for overcoming such challenges. The paper concluded that higher education in the country is an important tool for the development of human capital in the country. It was therefore recommended that all educational stakeholders in the country should contribute towards the improvement of higher institutions in the country.

Keywords: Development, Education, Nigeria, Institutions, Challenges

1.1 Introduction

Labor in most organizations whether skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled is one factor of production which is of great importance in the success of the organization. This is because labour serves as an important factor of production which determines the level of productivity in the organization. The quality and quantity of labour is positively related to the productivity level until the law of diminishing return sets in.

The importance of labour to a nation especially developing economies like Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. More often, the strength of a nation is usually determined by the quantity and quality of her workforce. Physical and mental strength is a necessity for a nation to be great and gain respect and recognition from other countries around the world. Nigeria today is regarded as the giant of Africa because of her numeral and physical strength while America remains a world giant due to the quality of her skilled population.

The fact that a nation is endowed numerically does not necessarily mean that such a nation will be more developed than others. According to Oyedepo (2011) in Olaseni and Alade (2012:66) “qualitative education is a major determinant of the stock of human capital. It has proved to be the vehicle for national transformation in human history and no nation ever rises above her investment in education”. Physical strength is therefore not a yardstick for development; rather the quality of knowledge acquired through education is important for development to take place. Without quality education, physical strength will be more of a liability than an asset. On his part, Gyang (2011:70) stated that “the growth of tangible capital stock of a nation depends to a considerable degree on human capital development.” Therefore, for labour to be relevant to the needs of the society, there is need to continually expose the citizens to training and education so as to allow them contribute meaningfully to development in the various sectors of the economy.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Concept of Higher Education

The term ‘higher education’ as the name implies literarily refer to that class of education which is among the apex in the educational system of a country. It is the level of education which supersedes all other in the educational hierarchy of a nation. Walsh (2013) posited that it is that post-18 learning acquired in universities, colleges and other institutions which award degrees, professional qualifications and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) modules. It means that an institution can only form part of the higher education system when it is empowered to produce individuals and certification that is of top priority in the nation’s educational system.

Higher education is sometimes used interchangeably with the term ‘tertiary education’ in most educational literatures. Both concepts have always been used to refer to the highest educational level in the country. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), tertiary education comprises of education after secondary school such as universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotronics and other institutions awarding corresponding courses. Any educational system therefore which comes after the secondary level of education is generally referred to as higher education or tertiary education.

2.1.2 Meaning of Human Capital Development

The major resources that are needed to manage any organization efficiently and effectively are human, financial and material resources (Obasi & Asodike, 2007). Although these resources are all necessary for the sustenance of the organization, however, the most important of them all is human resource. This is because human resource is needed to be able to effectively manage the other resources within the organization. Human resource is a term that is used in most organization to also mean human capital; this is because it is an indispensable resource that is needed to achieve productivity in any organization. Obi (2007) advised that human resource vis-à-vis human capital should be properly managed such that it can be of importance in the future. On his part, Yunus (n.d.) suggested that in order to effectively manage any public institution, there is the need to build a quality group of highly qualified, able and motivated human resources. It is this group of professional individuals that form the human capital in an organization. Their efforts also contribute immensely to the success recorded in the organization.

Human capital on the other hand refers to the set of skills and abilities which an employee employs in the organization to get work done. Manda (2013) noted that human capital refers to those set of skills that an employee acquires on the job through training and experience. It is similarly a collection of all the new ideas and knowledge which an employee acquires while working which helps to increase on-the-job efficiency and effectiveness. It is therefore imperative that in order for an employee to continuously become relevant in the work environment, he or she must continue to develop new methods of doing work. It is these individuals with the needed expertise to work in an organization and contribute to its growth and development that are referred to human resource or human capital.

Since the work environment is very dynamic and prone to continuous change, workers in the organization needed to be exposed to constant training; it is this constant empowerment of workers to make them relevant to the work environment that is referred to as human resource development or human capital development. Human capital development deals with the process of strategizing how to improve workers efficiency in the place of work. The concept of human capital development according to Aluko and Aluko (2012:166) “is a way to fulfill the potential of people by enlarging their capabilities and this necessarily implies empowerment of people, enabling them to participate actively in their own development.” Similarly, Kern (2009) stated that investment in human capital development is a strategy for achieving greater output. Therefore, improving individuals for personal and organizational efficiency and effectiveness is the focus of human capital development.

2.1.3 Factors that Influence Human Capital Development

As stated earlier, the essence of human capital development is to train workers to become relevant in their place of work for individual and organizational relevance. However, the development of human capital in various sectors of the economy is usually influenced by one or more of the following factors:

Government Policies: The policies of government either at the federal, state or local government level plays a significant role in determining the options and opportunities available for workers to develop their abilities at work. UNCTAD (2000) suggested that the extent to which transnational

corporations upgrade their technology and skill base depends on the interaction of host-country government policies. In the same way, government policies determines to a great extent the type and level of skills and technical knowledge acquired by the citizens. The establishment of the right atmosphere through appropriate government policies is needed for the development of human capital.

Level of Globalization: Another factor that influences human capital development is the level of globalization. The amount of rapport between citizens and other advanced countries also provide an opportunity for an enhanced human capital development. Globalization assists in the transfer of new and efficient knowledge for individuals within and outside the country.

Level of Competition: The level of completion in the various industries within the country also determines the level of human capital development. Competition in the business environment encourages research; and research result to the development of new knowledge. It is therefore important to note that the height of competition in the various sectors of the economy will contribute to the improvement of the value of human capital within the society.

Technological Advancement: Since the inception of the 21st century, technology is becoming a very important tool for meeting human needs. Similarly, with the instruction of the World Wide Web (WWW), the transfer of knowledge has become easier and more obtainable. However, the unavailability of internet facilities and other technological gadgets has militated against the ability of individuals to develop. Almendarez (2011) identified technological change as one of the factors that help to develop the economic relevance of human capital. The volume of information and idea gotten through modern technology helps to increase the relevance of human capital.

Religious and Socio-Cultural Demand: Religious, social and cultural demands also influence human capital development. Religion, culture and social beliefs usually determine willingness and access to the various opportunities utilized by individuals for their development. The culture of people as well as their religious inclination will either encourage or repel them from improving on their human capital.

Level of Enrollment: According to Egbue (2002) low rate of enrolment at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education poses human capital problem for both gender(s) in Nigeria. Education according to the National Policy on Education (2004) is important for individual and societal growth and development. The level of enrollment into any of the educational levels will contribute immensely to the development of human capital. Education is an important tool for the development of human capital. As such, the level of education and the quality of education acquired will contribute to the huge development of human capital.

2.1.4 Challenges Confronting Human Capital Development in Nigerian Higher Institutions

Despite the position of higher institutions in Nigeria as the most important instrument for the development of human capital in the country, very little progress has been recorded. Some of the factors that have limited the ability of higher institutions in contributing to the development of human capital in the country are as follows:

Mismanagement: One of the challenges that is ravaging most sectors of the Nigerian economy is that of mismanagement. According to Auty (1993) most countries with plenty of natural resources

are usually less developed economically than others due to the mismanagement of resources. Human, material and financial resources available in higher institutions are used for other purposes aside that of human capital development. Sometimes, resources available in higher institutions are used for selfish interest or misappropriated. This trend will negatively affect the move for the development of human development.

Poverty: Aderounmu (2007) pointed out that poverty remains one of the biggest problems confronting Nigerians. Poverty is the inability of a person to carry out the basic necessities of life. This includes the inability of a person to acquire enough money required to acquire formal education. When such important programmes cannot be achieved, most of the citizens will remain irrelevant in a changing environment. Most students in the school system are so poor that they cannot afford a good meal. As such, the ability to acquire textbooks, computers and other learning materials becomes a mirage.

Inadequate Infrastructures: Dike (2012:17) stated that “Any person familiar with Nigeria would agree that among the challenges facing the economy is ineffective institutions and dilapidated infrastructure (bad roads, erratic power supply, limited access to potable water and basic healthcare, and ineffective regulatory agencies, et cetera”. All of these facilities are important in the self development of students. When the appropriate facilities are provided, it will create an enabling environment for students to on self development. These infrastructures include computer laboratories, workshops and well equipped libraries.

Inadequate Funding: Fund is a very important resource that is needed for the procurement of basic resources needed for developing human capital. Funding is needed for the purchase of all that is required to acquire those human and material resources that are needed to development the status of other human resource. The inadequacy or unavailability of fund will forestall the growth and development of human resources in various higher institutions in the country. when funds are unavailable, it will be difficult for most higher institutions in the country to carry out plans, projects and programmes that will enhance students and community development.

Low Level of Individual Interest: Individual interest in developing their abilities plays a significant role in determining the level of human capital development in the country. The willingness of students in acquiring quality education will contribute to the development of their relevance. However, when students are unwilling to change, it will result to a slow or total absence of development of the quality and quantity of human capital within the country. Students in the nation’s higher institutions need to develop a passion for self development before change can occur.

2.1.5 Strategies to Overcome the Problem of Human Capital Development in Nigerian Higher Institutions

The creation of an enabling environment for higher institutions to thrive in the country is highly instrumental for the development of human capital in the country. It is therefore important that the challenges limiting higher institutions from contributing to the development of human capital in the country should be addressed. This can be achieved through the following strategies:

Development of Appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Facilities: The use of ICT in improving the quality of service delivery in the various sectors of the economy is

gaining increasing attention. According to Epodoi (2003) ICT serves as an instrument which assists in increasing productivity and improving service delivery. It is therefore important that adequate ICT facilities be provided for the training of students and teachers for effective human capital development.

Review of Curriculum: Hershberg (1996) suggested that we should be comparing the human capital of our children to the skills required by the jobs of the twenty-first century global economy. However, in order for the skills and abilities of students to be developed, the curriculum of most of the higher institutions in the country needs to be reviewed to meet contemporary economic demands. This will help in enhancing the relevance of students in the 21st century.

On the Job Training: The need for constant training among employees in any formal organization cannot be over-emphasized. Developmental programmes and activities play a significant role in making employees more effective in the work environment. On-the-job training is one of the avenues through which the expertise of workers can be improved upon. Seminars, conferences, workshops and other training programmes need to be provided for lecturers to improve their quality. A student can hardly rise above the competence of the teacher; it is therefore necessary that lecturers in higher institutions should be exposed to on the job training to acquire modern teaching techniques.

Job Enrichment: The work environment should be equipped with modern and important facilities and equipment that will allow staff and students to go on knowledge search. Higher institutions in the country should be provided with the necessary human and material resources that will assist in the development of all educational stakeholders within the environment of the institution.

Organizational Restructuring: The structural arrangement of an organization can contribute to the success or failure of the organization. When people and activities are merged based on areas of strength, it will result into increased efficiency. The various faculties and departments in the school should be properly structured in such a way that new staff can learn from other experts in the faculty or department. Such an arrangement will assist in the improvement of the quality of service provided by the various staff. Also, it will assist in improving the skills and abilities of all lecturers. This will make them better-off than when they were initially employed. It will also help to improve the quality of their students.

2.1.6 How Higher Education Contributes to Human Capital Development in Nigerian Higher Institutions

The importance of higher institutions in developing quality manpower in the country cannot be over-emphasized. Higher institutions can contribute in the development of human capital in one or more of the following ways:

Empowering Students Attitude: Watson (1979) pointed out that one area of behavioral change is the social development of people. Building a good attitude is very important for a healthy social development. Higher institutions play significant roles in the building students who are responsible both in character and learning. Higher institutions should more than before take up the responsibility of reshaping the behavior of students towards the development of the society.

Quality Research in Relevant Areas: research is another area where the higher institutions contribute to the advancement of the society. It is therefore important that more research efforts should be developed by higher institutions in the country. This will contribute towards the development of new goods and service that will contribute towards the intellectual development of the society.

Community Development Services: Another area where higher institutions can contribute towards the building of human capital development is in the area of community development services. It is needful that frequent orientation should be given to the host community to enlighten and educate them on new findings that is important for their environment. Such knowledge will help to empower the community on how to carry out individual and societal development.

Production of Quality Manpower: One of the objectives of higher education as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) is the development of quality manpower. Similarly, the quality of manpower developed from the various institutions will also contribute to the society by transferring their knowledge to the other members of the society (Agabi, 1999). It is therefore clear that the quality of graduates from the nation's higher institution will to some extent determine the literacy level of the entire society.

Philanthropic Activities: Higher institutions in the country can also donate goods or services to individuals and institutions for self empowerment. Areas of needs may be identified by higher institutions in the country and necessary contributions made towards the alleviation of such problems. This will assist in the reduction of the level of dependence and incapability of individuals within the society.

3.1 Conclusion

The development of quality human resource is strategic to the development of the entire nation. No nation can rise above the quality of its work force. As such, all higher institutions in the country need to work hand-in-hand to contribute towards human capital development in the country. The relevance of quality human capital development cuts across the various sectors of the economy. It is therefore necessary that for the nation to acquire all round growth and development, the development of human capital must be given the desired attention.

4.1 Recommendations

The following are recommended in order to contribute towards the development of quality human capital development in the country:

1. Adequate finance should be provided for the various higher institutions in the country. This will improve on the ability of the various schools to procure basic resources needed for developing quality manpower in the country.
2. Government should ensure to create appropriate laws and policies at all level which will provide an enabling environment for all higher institutions in the country to improve the quality of human capital.

3. Basic infrastructures and amenities should be provided by both the government and other private individuals. This will help to create an appropriate environment for individuals self development in the country.

4. Adequate rapport should be established between higher institutions in the country and other developed economies. This will assist in the transfer of quality knowledge and information that will assist in the development of human resource that can meet with contemporary demand.

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