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Human Capital Development as a Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Nigerian Education System

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Abstract

This paper critically examined how human capital development could be a strategy or a catalyst for sustainable development in the Nigerian education system. The presentation by necessary implication involved an examination of the concepts of human capital development, sustainable development, quality education and of how an interplay between these can lead to the attainment of sustainable development in the Nigerian Education System. The educational implications are numerous and notably amongst them are provision of on-the-job training, improved infrastructure and proper manpower planning as improper manpower planning results in unemployment and

underemployment. The paper was concluded by recommending that to ensure quality and sustainable development in the education system in Nigeria, the government in collaboration with the curriculum designers should ensure that students are trained to be more skilful and independent. More so, the dimensions to quality education and human development such as equity, contextualization and relevance, child-friendly teaching and learning, sustainability etc. should not be taken for granted as this will ensure achievement of sustainability in the education system in Nigeria.

Key Words: Quality education, Human Capital Development, Economic Growth, Functional Education, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Quality education has become food for thought for all well-meaning individuals. Education is of great importance to every nation as it is quite obvious that the functionality of an individual in any nation is largely dependent on the quality of education that is imparted on that individual.

There is a general consensus among scholars that education is the most potent instrument for the overall development of any nation (Abolade, Ogbodo & Maduewesi, 2011). There can be no productive human capital without a functional education, hence Van Den-Berg (2001) 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 technologies and new methods of production in line with the demand of the new dispensation. Educated people possessed more skills and are able to 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.

No wonder the emphasis on millennium development goals shifted to how to sustain the goals of which education is at the fore-front. Government of nations that want to grow in terms of global trends have continuously taken bold steps in the development of their educational system. In fact, it is believed that high quality education is a result of huge investment in human capital for the purpose of yielding economic benefits, enhancing efficiency and productivity in the nation's economy. There can be no significant economic growth in any society without adequate human capital development.

The term human capital development can be defined as those activities geared towards improving knowledge, sharpening the skills, instilling the values, and encouraging the behaviour necessary to actualize the potentials of staff of the organization (Alo, 2000). Human capital development of an organization or school includes the provision of learning, training and development opportunities in order to improve individual, team

and corporate performance. According to Sullivan and Steven (2013), Human capital development is about recruiting, supporting and investing in people through education, training, coaching, mentoring, internships, organizational development and human resources management. Human capital development recognizes that the development and growth of people in organizations and business are an important and essential asset to the organizations future success. Healthfield (2011) defined human capital development as a framework for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge and ability. According to her, human capital development includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development, performance management and development, coaching, monitoring, etc.

From these statements, we can see that in order to develop and sustain various sectors of the economy, a country should introduce manpower planning for the development and sustenance of its human resources. Manpower planning indicates planning of human resources for meeting the developmental needs of the economy. In short, for proper utilization of manpower resources, a country should impart educationally to its population, train and retrain its labour force in technology, engineering, management, medicine and in many other fields connected with the development and sustainability of various sectors of the economy.

Concept of Sustainable Development

On September 25, 2015, one hundred and ninety-four (194) member states of the United Nations including Nigeria, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development tagged; “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The campaign, known also as “Project Everyone”, is part of the United Nations’ efforts to build a comprehensive development plan aimed at completing the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, and is intended to help communicate the agreed sustainable development goals to a wider constituency.

The Sustainable Development Agenda has 17 global goals with 169 targets. Topmost on the list of these goals are:

- ❖ the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.
- ❖ the achievement of Universal Primary Education.
- ❖ the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.
- ❖ the reduction of child mortality.
- ❖ the improvement in maternal health; etc.

There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria like most other African countries has not been able to achieve many of its Millennium Development Goals and targets, talkless of making any concerted efforts towards the Sustainable Development of the little progress made in its education system. Some of the factors which have been identified as inhibitors to sustainable development in Nigeria, according to Eze (2017), include:

- ❖ lack of qualified people to develop and implement alternative technologies due to a poor educational system and brain drain.
- ❖ lack of education about finite resources.
- ❖ corruption, and
- ❖ internal conflicts.
- ❖ government policies and priorities which are often short-term and limited only to meeting the basic needs of the present day – provision of shelter, food, portable water, healthcare and education, without any significant long term development plans for sustainability of such policies.

These, no doubt, inhibit our march towards sustainable development as envisaged under the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But what is "Sustainable Development"? It must be understood that there is no single definition for Sustainable Development. In "Our Common Future" also known as The Brundtland Commission Report, the term Sustainable Development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"

Another view from the United Kingdom Government website is to the effect that sustainable development means "a better quality of life now and for generations to come". According to Eze (2017), while there is a diversity of viewpoints on the concept of sustainable development as well as specific policy and practice options for achieving it, there is agreement on some of its core principles such as:

- ❖ meeting basic human necessities fairly and efficiently;
- ❖ preserving options for both present and future generations to meet their needs;
- ❖ promoting community well-being based on broad participation and active citizenship.
- ❖ Linking various aspects of sustainability (i.e. economic, ecological and social).
- ❖ Managing and utilizing resources with prudence and precaution, maintaining a holistic perspective and fostering cooperation and shared responsibility.

It could thus, be seen from the foregoing that at the core of sustainable development is an approach to development that seeks to balance different and often competing needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations which we face as a society. Put differently, the concept of sustainable development is about finding better ways of doing things both for the present and the future. By way of summary therefore, it could be safely stated that Sustainable Development is the ability to preserve the existing resources of the state for the collective use of the citizens while

conscious efforts are made to conserve the resources for the use of future generations. It is about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society – one which involves meeting the diverse needs of all people in present and future generations, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion/inclusion and creating equal opportunities.

Human Capital Development Strategies for Sustainable Development of the Nigerian Education System

The following have been identified as human capital development strategies for the sustenance of the education system in Nigeria:

- **Quality Education**

Quality education entails the promotion of equitable lifelong learning opportunities to see that major progress is made for education access, specifically at the primary school level, for both boys and girls. However, access does not always mean quality of education; or completion of primary school. Currently, many youths worldwide still lack basic literacy skills and that is why the SDGs for education states that by 2030 all girls and boys complete true, equitable and quality primary and secondary education. This is in tandem with the concept of sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Eke (2009) said, “it is planned positive change, lasting progress and literally generated growth overtime according to a set of prescribed economic, democratic and other indices that clearly manifest in better quality of life for all”. It is that which is enduring. In this sense, it is beneficial to the present while paving the way for future benefits without adverse repercussion to the beneficiaries.

According to UNICEF (2016), a quality education is defined by five elements, the learner’s outside experiences, learning environment, content of education; learning processes, and education outcomes. Learners must be healthy, well-nourished and supported by their families and communities. The learning environment must be safe, healthy and stimulating. Appropriate education content is relevant to the learner and presented in a well-managed classroom.

A good quality education is one that provides all learners with capacities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being. (Sydney & UNICEF, 2012). The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context but at the end of the basic education cycle must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy, basic scientific knowledge and life skills including awareness and prevention of disease. Capacity development to improve the quality of teachers and other education stakeholders is of crucial importance in the process.

It is believed that education leads to empowerment; is a process of strengthening individuals, organizations and communities so that they get more control over their

own situations and environments. Quality education is a crucial factor in combating poverty and inequality in society (Obanga, 2009). Six dimensions to quality education according to Obanga (2009) are:

- ❖ Equity – This refers to non-discrimination and equity. Equity in education means that personal and social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to achieving educational potential and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills.
- ❖ Contextualization and Relevance – Quality education cannot be based on a blue print that is applicable in all situations. Solutions and adaptations of education systems must be based on the real needs of a country and /or community.
- ❖ Child Friendly Teaching & Learning – Quality education puts the child in the centre and helps him or her to reach his or her full potential. Equality education requires children's active participation.
- ❖ Sustainability – Educational change processes often need time to be realized.
- ❖ Balanced Approach – Quality education aims at developing a balanced set of capacities of children which they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being.
- ❖ Learning Outcomes – After completing a certain level of education, children must have developed a minimum standard of skills. Quality education requires a result oriented approach.

To meet the numerous challenges facing how to sustain quality education and human capital development in Nigeria, we require an in-depth training, re-training and better education of the citizens of our nation that is regarded as the giant of Africa. Meanwhile, Nigeria as a nation is finding it difficult to harness its natural resources because it has not been able to appropriately utilize education as a tool for human capital development because of the following cankerworms in the education system:

- ❖ Poor funding of schools
- ❖ Poor infrastructural facilities
- ❖ Emphasis on paper qualification
- ❖ Brain drain syndrome
- ❖ Inadequate curricula
- ❖ Poor motivation of the work force
- ❖ Poor quality teaching force
- ❖ Dearth of research.

One is inclined to say that the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is partly a fore-runner to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in relation to education. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was introduced in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria as a reform programme aimed at providing greater access to, and ensuring quality of basic education throughout Nigeria. The UBE Programme objectives include:

- Ensuring an uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education by providing FREE, and COMPULSORY basic education for every child of school-going age under:
 - (a) six years of primary education.
 - (b) three years of junior secondary education, providing Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE).
- Reducing school drop-out and improving relevance, quality and efficiency; and
- Acquisition of literacy, numeracy, life skills and values for lifelong education and useful living.

Human Capital

Human capital represents the human factor in the organization, the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that give the organization its distinctive character (Mayo, 2001). 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 system.

The quality of human capital in any nation depicts that nation's developmental process because technological developments are going on at a very fast rate and countries of the world that do not want to be left behind must brace up with the challenges of the new technologies. The presence of these new technologies have given rise to demands for developing human capital through training and retraining of individuals in new skills in the existing and new occupational areas in order that people might fit into today's and tomorrow's world of work.

It is no gainsaying the fact that human capital needs are dynamic and not static. The increasing rate of change that the average worker will need may be at least three new sets of skills during a working life. This points to the rationale for the huge investment in human capital hence, Babalola in Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) advanced reasons for the need for human capital development as:

- The new generation must be given the appropriate parts of knowledge which has already been accumulated by previous generation.

- New generations need to be taught new existing knowledge which should be used to the development of skills, to introduce new processes and production methods and social services and
- People must be encouraged to develop entirely new ideas, products, processes and methods through creative approaches and these will go a long way in sustaining the improved education sector.

Intellectual Capacity – Quality Human Capital

The concept of human capital is associated with intellectual capacity with flows of knowledge in an individual and can be regarded as the tangible and intangible resources associated with people (money and physical assets).

Quality human capital has become one of the front burning issues in Nigeria today because for this country to cope with the current global and natural developmental goals, it means that the nation's professionals must be adequately trained. Labour is often talked about as a uniform, well understood input into production. According to Anugwom (2012), the quality of human capital has several aspects, one of these involves improvement of health and longevity of the population. Quality human capital helps to reduce illness, accidents and absenteeism and increase productivity. This is in line with one of the sustainable development goals. A study conducted by Ranis and Stewart (2010) on the relationship between human capital and economic growth shows that human capital development was very important and needs to be properly addressed by countries that want to keep abreast with global challenges especially in the education sector because it is the only concept that sustains the education system.

Human Capital Development Through Quality Education

The relationship between education and human development is no longer in question because Brown (2014), states that “the main link between education and economic development is the knowledge and skills it produces in the labour force”. Greater assets for nation building are human resources. Obviously, education empowers man in generic terms to understand himself, how his body functions and his relationship with his environment. It empowers man economically, morally and socially. It offers him more opportunities for self-actualization and makes him know his right and privileges. An educated man has greater occupational mobility. Many have argued that without a well-trained, well developed, well appreciated, and well managed human resources, most countries cannot meet the challenges of change, growth and technological advancement in the globe. It is quality education that helps a human being to derive knowledge from networks which adds to improve man's relationships within and outside the education system. This concept of social life in the education system has been defined by Putman (2013) as the feature of life – networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.

In the words of a renowned Chinese Human Resource expert and reformer, Kaunchung quoted by Khatiwada (2014), “if you wish to plan for a year, sow a seed, if you wish to plan for ten years, plant trees! If you wish to plan for a life time, develop man”. This is why we have said that education plays an important role in sustaining the future of this country, in other words, we still maintain that sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is therefore believed that education is an engine of growth of any nation. It is only quality and functional education system that is necessary in this present dispensation that can improve the production capacity of a nation’s work force.

The type of education that is tagged “functional” today goes beyond the traditional goal of literacy and numeracy. It is the type of education that is able to liberate, stimulate and inform the individual and teaches him how to live right in the work force. This fact is further buttressed by Imoke (2010) when he noted that education has proven to be the single and most potent factor for social development and transformation. High quality education that will foster high human capital value and sustainable development requires a curricular which addresses the challenges of the sustainable development goals in the education sector in Nigeria and focuses attention on practical skills, knowledge and competencies which help to actualize the growth of the nation.

Quality education and human capital development produce trained entrepreneurs that can practically harness the natural resources that will propel our nation to a greater advancement in technology. All these can only be achieved by attracting employees with good formal education to reduce costs in training and retraining employees to increase their performance on their jobs.

Way Forward /Educational Implications

The most important factor in human capital formation is the development of skills and these skills formation are time consuming which at long last helps in sustainable development. Efforts should be made by the government to provide the following as enumerated by (Shaker, 2015 & Eze, (2017).

- Health facilities and services broadly concerned to include all expenditure that affect the life expectancy, strength and stamina, and the vigour and vitality of the people to pursue the needed skills in order to achieve the sustainable development goal in the education sector.
- Provision of on-the-job training, off-the-job training, in-service/ Refresher training, including aid type apprenticeships organized by employers, and educational policy makers.

- Study programmes for adults that are not organized by employers, including extension programmes notably skill areas. This will help teachers to be abreast of recent innovation in educational management and current methods used in imparting knowledge to pupils. Increase in education is the major factor of human capital formation, it should be provided by 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 man power planning as improper man power 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, proper ways of delivering lectures because the required facilities are in place; and adequate provisions of these lead to motivation which on the other hand leads to increase in productivity.
- Industrial Performance – Industrial sector is the second major sector of our economy. It is still backward, and only more investment and use of modern techniques of production are necessary for its improvement. Human capital formation is required for the development of industrial sector – knowledgeable people are required in this area who will be in a better position to train the trainees effectively.
- 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. Reduction in poverty is the greatest symbol of economic progress. It is therefore the responsibility of the education sector to see that man power is not lacked in the economy. This will be achieved through proper educational management and planning.

Conclusion

In order to remove economic backwardness of Nigeria, as well as to instil the capacities and motivations to progress, it is quite necessary to increase the level of knowledge and skills of the people. Without doubt, the role of functional education in the development of human capital cannot be over-emphasized. Proofs from claims of scholars in empirical studies and opinion papers like this very one have shown that education is a veritable tool for human capital development which results to economic growth, productivity and sustainable development which is the organizing principle for meeting the goals. This will at the same time aid in sustaining the ability of natural systems in providing the natural resources and eco system services upon which the economy and society depends. To ensure quality education through human capital development and

sustainable development in the education system in Nigeria, the government in collaboration with the curriculum planners should ensure that students are trained to be more skilful and independent which will be in consonance with the six dimensions to quality education in Nigeria. This is the only way out if the sustainable development goal in the education sector must be achieved.

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