

Human Capital Development Among Nigerian Youths and Gender Issues: A Critical Assessment

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Abstract

This article centers on the prospect of human capital development which hinge on the Nigerian government to see to the training of the youths which will attract scientific breakthrough and further improve the Nigerian economy. The developed countries are aware of the diverse benefits when their youths are being trained to sustain the gains of human capital development and bequeath it to the unborn generation. This development can be achieved if the Nigerian government pays adequate attention in making sure the youth have access to quality education where youths from indigent backgrounds can easily access scholarships and equal opportunities. Nigerian youth can thrive in any environment where meritocracy leads. This is visible in the music industry where Nigerian youths are showcasing Nigerian music on the global stage with Grammy Awards to their credits. This can also be seen among Nigerian students coming top in their various academic programmes in foreign universities. Same in the movie industry. The demand for Nigerian doctors, nurses, and other professionals who are youths in foreign countries is on the rise on daily basis, making the country suffer inadequacy or quackery due to brain drain. The role of the government is key in addressing the issues that bother human capital development and gender issues. Discrimination among the female folk is a bane to human capital development which can amount to the throwing of a spanner in the wheel of the country's progress. A reorientation of core values, a robust economy, and a conducive atmosphere driven by merit can see Nigeria on top of the world which will reflect in the country's growth and development.

Keywords: Human Capital Development, Quality Education, Nigerian Youths, Gender Issues, Merit system

Introduction

Human capital development is the process of training a particular set of people in society for them to become functional and productive. Developed countries prioritize human capital development programmes in their policies and projects. There is a consensus among scholars that education is the most potent instrument for the overall development of any country (Abolade et al., 2011). According to Van Den-Berg (2001), countries that are at the forefront of technological advancement equally have the most educated population. Human capital development encompasses many things ranging from education, learning a trade, farming, and other aspects that can earn livelihood for people and the betterment of society. In Nigeria, the Federal Government set up numerous organizations to properly train Nigerians on various aspects of life, but sustaining the organizations with funds is an issue. This is the reason why most of these organizations have gone moribund. The recent industrial action by Nigerian University Lecturers where universities in Nigeria were shut down for eight months was quite worrisome and did not befit a country that wants to propel the human capital development of its youths to be first among equals in the global arena.

Developed countries of the world keep sustaining whatever will make their youths have scientific breakthroughs and make global records and prepare them for international markets. This is the reason why there will ensure there are permanent seats at the level of the United Nations where critical

decisions can be taken at the expense of developing and poor countries that have refused to build the human capital of their youths or do not have cogent futuristic scientific programmes that can keep their youths to favorably compete at the global community. Nigeria falls among the countries without sustaining and introducing magnificent programmes that can make Nigerian youths vibrant within the global market and scientific community. Presently, Nigerian youths with requisite knowledge and skills are massively migrating to England, America, Canada, Australia, and other developed countries. Nigerian professionals are migrating to Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda, mostly lecturers with doctor of philosophy degrees. No country on the pathway of development would allow her youths to ply their trade in other countries. This is where the Nigerian government must sit up and begin to do the needful in all ramifications. On independence in 1960, Nigeria was among the newly independent countries that were projected to become great and probably join the League of Superpowers. The likes of Singapore, India, Taiwan, etc. are today classified among the developed countries because of their glaring achievements in science and technology, medicine, infrastructure, and other developmental indicators. These countries do not have rich natural and human resources like Nigeria, but the reverse is the case in Nigeria.

Wealthy Nigerians have continued to patronize medical tourism in India and other developed countries. The political class who are the real policy makers are not bothered by the near-total collapse of infrastructure and the poverty-stricken state of its citizens. According to Alo (2000), human capital development is seen as those activities geared towards improving knowledge, sharpening skills, instilling values, encouraging behavior necessarily, and actualizing the potential of the staff of the organization. Human capital development in any country includes the provision of learning, training, and development opportunities to improve individual, team, and corporate performance. It is not rocket science to posit that countries with creative and digital programmes for their youths are adequately prepared for future uncertainties. COVID-19 exposed the decay in the medical sector in Nigeria and the present interest for the elites to sponsor their children to have foreign education shows that public education in Nigeria is only being preserved from decaying like a corpse in the mortuary. Despite numerous complaints by experts on the failure to develop Nigerian youths, the government has done little or nothing in improving the lives of the youths.

Luckily, Nigeria as a country has vibrant youths who are have done so much in any endeavour, they find themselves. For instance, Nollywood (Nigeria's Movie industry) is popular in the global movie industry. While those in the music industry are doing excellently well and bringing glory to the country. Nigerian musicians have won Grammy Award which is the highest global award in the music industry and other musicians have won prestigious awards that have added value to the country. Other youths are giving a good representation of themselves in high-flying football clubs in Europe, while Nigerian youths are top-notch in various universities in Europe and America. The most unfortunate aspect of this reality is that these notable achievements were made without the support of the government. This is a clear indication that should the Nigerian government shun politics of prebendalism, tribalism, and nepotism the country would become great and outshine some of the developed countries in the world and even attain a permanent seat in the United Nations. This is the dream of Nigerian youths who want to be great. The human capital development and avoidance of gender discrimination is the answer to Nigeria's development with all alacrity.

The concept of human capital development

Healthfield (2011) defined human capital development as a framework for helping employees developed their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and ability. For Sullivan and Steven (2013) human capital development is about recruiting, supporting and investing in people through

education, training, coaching, mentoring, internships, organizational development, and resources management: Human capital development recognizes that the development and growth of people in an organization and business are essential assets of the organization. In this article, human capital development is confided into giving young people the required training for them to create opportunities for the betterment of society. The reason why Nigerian youths prefer to travel abroad to explore is because of the conducive atmosphere that can propel them in realizing their potential. It is a common consensus among development theorists that economic growth and development are significantly impacted by the quality of human resources (Martins & Olarinde, 2014). Harbison (1973) posits that what constitutes the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations are human resources, being that the development of a nation is carried forward, not by capital and natural resources which are passive factors of production but human beings who are active agents in the production process, accumulate capital, exploit natural resources and consequently build social, economic and political organizations. Human capital development ensures that a nation's labour force is improved on continuous basis to meet the challenges of the changing environment, with education being a critical element to the process (Yesufu, 2000). Numerous studies from scholars have found favorable correlation between investment in education and economic growth and it is for this reason that many policy frameworks encapsulate the critical role of education as a worthy trajectory (Martins & Olarinde, 2014). This has popularly demonstrated that, human capital development is a strategy of growth and development which must be embarked upon in order to achieve sustainable growth within a given time period (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008; Griffin & McKinley, 1992).

Education plays key role in human capital development because it inculcates knowledge that can stimulate growth and development in the society. The educational system is one way of analyzing the state of a country's human capital development (Martins & Olarinde, 2014). This clearly reflects on the platform that human capital is enmeshed in the individual's ability and efficiency to engage in the transformation of raw materials into greater values, the educational sector gives the way on which these skills can be transmitted (Martins & Olarinde, 2014). This has given rise to many studies on human capital development by experts that usually deals with such metrics as test scores (Hanshek & Woesswan, 2009). In the modern world emphasis is massively shifting from traditional approaches to poverty alleviation and capacity building to one where education is seen from a quantum of government investment in the sector is seen and considered as panacea to low living standard. Scholars have made meaningful change in the form of reforms or economic adjustments can occur in the absence of human imperatives (Adedeji et al., 1990). Outside education, there is informal platforms where Nigerian youths can be given opportunities to succeed. The government need to build the structures and make the environment conducive for youth activities to thrive. This article relates to gender issues which means that the female folk should be given adequate opportunity through human capital development for them also to succeed. According to Omini (2021) rural women should be given adequate consideration for skills acquisition programmes. This would give them the necessary empowerment for them to contribute to development of their local communities.

Quality education as model for human capital development of the youth

There is no doubt that investment in functional education is one of the bedrocks of modern growth and development. Education is the ready source of human empowerment which has the capacity of alleviating poverty through skill acquisition and promotion, self-employment and greater opportunities in a fast-transforming global environment (Martins & Olarinde, 2014). Developed countries of the world ensure that quality education is maintained and improved upon as the world become complex and ensured that the best is given to the youths in order to sustained development and lead the world in science, information and communication technology, medicine and art among

others. It is generally accepted by researchers that quality education is the key that drives human capital development, the importance of which has been articulated in various documents including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Right 1966 and the African Charter of Human and People's Right 1981. With all these charters and declarations investment in human capital through the provision quality education is viable to the development of the society. Human capital development is the bridge that propelled necessary development. Numerous studies have displayed consistently positive relationship between the education of the workforce and labour productivity (Trostel et al., 2002). People with skillful education that meet up with global standard can stimulate well paid employment at the global market.

The reason why elites in Nigeria send their children to study in Europe and America is for them to acquire quality education. Considering the fact that the educational system in Nigeria suffer funding from primary school to university. It is no longer news that Nigerian universities used to be the best in Africa and compete favorably with Ivy League universities is almost living on past glory. In 2022 Nigerian universities were shut down by lecturers because of the revitalization of the universities, poor funding, poor remuneration and mode of payment platform. Actually, the umbrella body university lecturers, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria has played key role in the survival of the Nigerian educational system by working assiduously in unconducive environment to produce reputable graduates that preferred to work abroad. In the early 1970s and 80s graduates from Nigerian universities were sought after like hot "balls of akara" globally. In fact, Europeans were studying in Nigerian universities because of the quality of lecturers and conducive environment. According to Henry (2012) posited that, Nigerian universities used to be a place suitable for academic pursuit that attracted foreign students from India, Pakistan and many other countries. He further emphasized that American and British born Nigerians came home in drove for a shot at good and quality education laced with cultural indoctrination. Then the quality of education was challenging and the environment was robust and inclusive. It was a period where a first degree holder from Nigerian university can be compared with a masters or Ph.D holder from some foreign universities (Henry, 2012). It was a period when graduates from Nigerian university could secure jobs without stress.

The glory days of the Nigerian university system was a period where the government adequately funded university and lecturers were adequately paid, which propelled them to put in their best and conduct sophisticated researches that solved global problems. The reverse is the case presently. Primary and secondary school education have almost gone moribund in terms of conducive environment for learning. Primary school pupils' study under dilapidated buildings without the requisite facilities that can give a child a better future. This is quite unfortunate for a country that want to be great and first among equals in the global community. For any nation to succeed in technology, natural sciences, art, social and humanities, the educational sector must be appropriately put in place with the requisite facilities. According to Sustainable Development Goals Report (2022), providing quality education for all is fundamental to creating a peaceful and prosperous world. Education gives people the knowledge and skills they need to stay healthy, get jobs and foster tolerance. Quality education specifically entails measures such as appropriate skills development, gender parity, provision of relevant school infrastructure, equipment, educational materials and resources, scholarship and teaching among others. These measures drive quality education and give the youth the sense of belonging and make them have confidence and believe in the government.

Ritche & Mispy (2018) posited that sustainable development goal 4 aims to provide children and young people with quality education and easy access to education and other learning opportunities. One of its targets is to achieve universal literacy and numeracy. A major component in acquiring

knowledge and valuable skills in the learning environment. The United Nations that is the umbrella body of all the independent countries in the world is not left out in ensuring that the world has quality education which is the bench mark for science and technological breakthrough, thus every country in the world must do the needful for her citizens to have access to quality education.

Apart from the conventional formal education, there are other aspect of informal training that the government must either put in place or revive the existing structure for training. For instance, skills acquisition centers must be revived with immediate effect. Research conducted by Inemesit et al. (2021) on feminization of skill acquisition and human capital development among rural women in Nigeria in Covid-19 era, recommended that rural women should henceforth be given adequate consideration for skills acquisition. Skillful education prepares young people for self-employment, expansion of businesses and even create jobs. Technical secondary schools must be revived by providing the requisite facilities for young Nigerians to have that sense of belonging to a technologically driven world.

According to United Nations International Children Emergency Funds (2016) quality education is defined by five elements, the learners outside experiences, learning environment, content of education, learning processes and education outcomes. Quality education provides all leaners with the capacity they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhanced well-being (Sydney & UNICEF, 2012). The relationship between education and human, capital development is clear, like Brown (2014) states that, the main link between education and economic development is the knowledge and skills it produces in the labour force. In similar vein, Imoke (2010) emphasized that education has proven to be the single and most powerful factor for social development and transformation. Quality education would propel high human capital value and sustainable development requires a curricular which addresses the challenges of the sustainable development goals.

Thriving meritocracy system without discrimination and “godfatherism” syndrome

Enthronement of merit in the Nigerian system will enhance human capital development. The reason why many young Nigerians are migrating to America and other European countries is because of the political patronage and lack of merit system in Nigeria, while in developed countries where there is thriving merit system, Nigerian youths are topnotch in education, medicine, engineering, nursing and other aspect of human endeavors. Federal government appointments are characterized with political patronage, nepotism, prebendalism, ethnicity, religion and regional politics whereby the most qualified are left out because no godfather is speaking for them. It is very common in Nigeria that securing a job need the assistance of politicians. In fact, most government jobs are given based on recommendations from, politicians. Any country with this kind of system is bound to collapse, experience low productivity, create room for corruption and incompetence to thrive. In the Nigerian system the Federal character principle is to ensure that government jobs and appointments represents the entire thirty-six states of the federation even when the people are not qualified. This policy has discouraged many young Nigerians from applying for jobs in Nigeria.

In developed countries where productivity is high, employment is designed to ensure fairness and open to all and sundry and free from political influence and other non-merit system. According to Everest – Philips (2015), meritocracy can promote social mobility and can benefit individuals and society at large. He used Singapore as a case study that turned meritocracy into a development factor. Development is closely linked with building a civil service meritocracy state and fostering public administration through motivation, promotion, the rule of law, integration and non-tolerance of

corruption (Everest – Philips, 2015). Scholars like Tong, Jeffrey and Walter (1999) emphasized an important element in reforming by applying a merit system in human resource management. This includes evaluating performance by rewarding employees and imposing sanctions on non-performing employees. For Ko and Walter (2013) human resource management in practice has a significant contribution to organizational commitment, organizational behaviour and encourage performance of the organization. In Indonesia, merit system is the policy for the management of all the aspect of governance (Septiana & Com, 2018). In Indonesia, selection into public or private service is devoid of background, rule, color, sex or mental status, but strictly based on competence and performance.

Countries with deep and massive underdevelopment background in the past are currently competing with the most developed and industrialized nations. These are countries that reinforced meritocracy in all the aspect of the economy. Singapore that was a mere fishing community can be counted among the industrialized nations in the world. Therefore, for Nigeria to have a successful future must allow merit system to thrive without discrimination or the influence of “godfatherism”. The enthronement of merit system gives the younger generation hope and confidence about the country. Israel is an example of a country where merit thrives, this is the reason young Israelis are ready to die for their country. Young Nigerians have lost confidence in the country and are ready to betray the system with impunity. One can easily ask, how come about the crude oil theft in the Niger Delta? This is an act of sabotage for Nigerians to connive with foreigners to steal crude oil that affects revenue generation. A country where merit is relegated will witnessed massive violence, social decadence, immorality and other inimical behaviour exhibited by the youths.

The essence of this article is for the Nigerian government to manage her human capital and gender issue for a better country that can compete with the most developed countries in the area of medicine, technology, science, leadership and other field of human endeavors, Nigeria is strategically positioned to lead Africa and the entire black race considering the fact that Nigeria is much blessed with abundant natural and human resources.

Nigeria is failing and collapsing in religious crises, ethnic wars, nepotism, political patronage, corruption, youths without future. This is a country that is sixth producer of crude oil in the world, but perennial fuel scarcity has suffocated the economy occasioned by fraudulent fuel subsidy regime. Nigeria has all it takes to compete among the superpower and have permanent seat at the level of the United Nations. This can be achieved with clear cut thriving merit system and a future for the youths who are the drivers of the Nigerian system. This would further reduce the brain drain and migration syndrome that have bedeviled the success of Nigerian youths.

Reorientation of Nigerian youths on core values and gender issues

Unfavorable environment through government wrong policies have negatively affected Nigerian youths and crippled the opportunities for them to realize their potentials and make the nation great have motivated them to indulge themselves in all manner of criminalities and social vices that are tarnishing the image of the country and scaring foreign investors to invest in the country. Unemployment and poverty among Nigerian youths are quite alarming to the point that some youths would take the risk to use horrendous Libya route to travel to Europe. It has been reported on international media on the numerous deaths recorded by Nigerian youths and other migrants in the Mediterranean Sea enroute to Europe. These are youths capable of making any nation great with their skills. It is quite unfortunate that Nigerian government is yet to come to terms with the “Japa” syndrome.

At this juncture, reorientation of Nigerian youths on core values is necessary if Nigeria is to be counted among the developed countries by 2030. Reorientation here means repositioning of citizens to where they ought to be in the future, therefore, the reorientation of value system is a conscious development of human resources through ideological appeals, planning, training, productivity and efficiency in achievements through corporate culture (Njoku, 2006). Youth empowerment and value reorientation are key to building strong and peaceful nation as Obasanjo (2012) noted that youth empowerment and value reorientation promotes social and group relationships. It trains individuals to relate to and interact meaningfully with others in the society and to appreciate the importance of effective organization for human progress. A strong and peaceful nation is that nation that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position in order to enhance the growth of the society (Afolabi & Loto, 2012). When youths are empowered and effectively given the needed orientations, this promotes mutual co-existence among the different individuals in the society or community, develop strong and positive attitude towards one another, leaders and elders or government of the day (Armstrong et al., 1981).

The reorientation Nigerian youths need at this particular point in time is purposeful and exemplary leadership from the political leaders. Leaders that emerged through free, fair and transparent elections. Leaders that are ready to promote strong institutions, that are ready to protect the law-abiding people and punish offenders. Leaders who are corruption free, leaders with the mind of objectivity devoid of ethnic, political and religious sentiments. For Jummai (2020) youth empowerment and value re-orientation is the road map to strong and peaceful nation. Nigerian youths must have the orientation that foreigners cannot build Nigeria, the responsibility of making Nigeria great and first among equals depend on them. Every act of sabotage against the country must be jettisoned and allowed rationality and sense of reason to take place towards the things that will make Nigeria a better country attractive to investors from all over the world. Average Nigerian youths that migrated out of the country never wanted it if the country is a better place, if the country become a better place there would definitely return home to contribute to the development of the country.

Almost on daily basis the achievements of Nigerian youths in foreign countries are glaring to the global community. Even at that, they are still treated as second class citizens and even killed in some instances. These are honest Nigerians with their skills can make Nigeria to become a developed country. Value reorientation promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same in the improvement of the existing skills and techniques of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts (Obasanjo, 2012). The government should be able to demonstrate honest governance and let the youths know that crime do not pay rather hard work and sincerity are hallmark to nation building.

Discrimination against the women folk must be shunned in all ramifications and opportunity given to them to make Nigeria great. Culture and traditions that are inimical to the female folk should be invalidated using civil law and the National Assembly act. In the past women like Fumilayo Rasom Kutu, Margret Ekpo, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Dora Akunyile, Chioma Ajuwa, etc have made Nigeria great in their chosen field of endeavors. Therefore, anything that may want to inhibit and dwindle the progress of young girls must be shielded with immediate effect. This will lead Nigerians on the path way to massive development.

Gender Issues on Young Women in Nigeria

Across the world, young women continue to face gender-based discrimination, marginalization and violence, including unequal access to education and opportunities for leadership and participation.

With the prevalence of gender discrimination and social norms and practices, girls become exposed to the possibility of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, child domestic work, poor education and health, sexual abuse, exploitation and violence. Many of these manifestations will not change unless girls are valued more.

Gender issues include all aspects and concerns related to women and men lives and situation in the society, to the way they interrelate, their differences in access to and use of resources, their activities and how they react to change, interventions and policies. The gender issues in this context are the concern of young women in Nigeria who are part of human capital development. Unfortunately, some issues have limited them from being part of human capital development. These concerns are child marriage, gender-based violence and child labour, maltreatment of young widows and feminization of poverty, among others. These are issues that needs to be addressed by the Nigerian government, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and the society.

According to United Nations Programmes on HIV/AIDS (2019) in Sub-Saharan Africa, four out of five new HIV infections among 15–19 years old are young girls. Survey under UNAIDS estimates during 2011-2016 showed that more than half of rural women aged 15-24 in sub-Saharan Africa had been pregnant before their 18th birthday (UNAIDS, 2019). Studies on gender inequality in global health has focused on factors operating at the individual level (age of marriage, literacy etc.) young women in Nigeria are confronted with poverty, early marriage, literacy issues and some tradition that are inimical to young women development. Gender issues in Nigeria is influenced by different cultures and beliefs. In most areas in Nigeria, women are considered subordinate to their male counterparts, especially in northern Nigeria as well as in other sectors including the Nigeria music industry, politics and education sector. For Agarwal (1970) gender inequality is said to have penetrated all aspects of Nigerian society, stated that existing data show a consistent, extensive gulf amidst men and women, employment opportunities and income-generating in nearly all Nigerian economies. Feminists and advocates have since the United Nations declaration of 1975 through 1985, "decade for women" continued the movement for gender equality as a way to end gender discrimination against women.

Onwnah et al. (2019) on the other way, even though existing situations that create discrimination against women remain unresolved, new and frightening challenges, seem to be emerging (Adebiyi et al., 2017). For twenty-four years democracy has been in practiced, unfortunately male dominated violence and male political party leadership have discouraged young women from taken active participation in politics. Build up to the 2023 general election the Women Leader of Labour Party in Southern Kaduna was killed. Most of the women who tried to contest have faced serious election malpractices. Early marriage is another issue bedeviling the human capital development of young women. Both the North and Southern Nigeria, there are communities where girls who are young as sixteen years of age were given out for marriage and probably in Nigeria. Young Nigerian extraction have been seen trafficked to other African and European countries. Intelligent and smart girls that would have contributed to the development of Nigeria are trafficked for the sake of prostitution. Many young girls have lost their lives in the course of being trafficked or contract HIV.

Others are denied access to education in the 21st century. Young girls and women are being visible on Nigerian streets hawking during school hours. Education is the bedrock of human capital development, this denying female folk access to education portend danger for the country. Young widows in some Nigerian communities are subjected to maltreatment when their husband died. Some are made to drink the water used in bathing the husband corpse to death. Other women are denied

access to their husband property in the event of death and the most painful aspect is that the Nigerian government have not done much in protecting the young women on these issues.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to showcase how human capital development among Nigerian youths and gender issues can make Nigeria great and become developed like countries in Europe. Nigeria has the potentials to become greater than America. Nigeria is the sixth crude oil producing country and have enough human and natural resources. A vibrant economy with robust infrastructural development and value orientation would prevent the migration of the youths to other country, rather they would remain in Nigeria and display their talents of greatness. Quality education cannot be ruled out in making Nigerian youths to have that sense of belonging and make them contribute to the development of the country. Also, the female folk must be allowed to compete favourably and any act of discrimination against them must be put to a stop through civil process.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhanced human capital development and address gender issues:

- i. The government of Nigeria must be led by leaders who are free from corruption, devoid of political, ethnic and religious chauvinism. America is characterized with race, but this has not caused division in the country, rather it is seen as strength to develop America. This is achievable because of honest and purposeful leadership.
- ii. The educational system in Nigeria must be improved to meet global standard. Skills acquisition also should be part of Nigeria's educational system. This would enable Nigeria youths create job instead of seek for white collar jobs. Priority should be given to the educational sector with constant funding and better remuneration to teachers.
- iii. The government should ensure that investment into educational sector must be followed with empirical researches being turned out from the system, to solve societal issues and also improve the society.
- iv. The government in collaboration with the private sector should make Nigeria conducive and attractive to Nigerians and foreigners. This would encourage foreigners to invest and developed the economy.

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