

Functional Higher Education And Sustainable Manpower Development In Nigeria

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Abstract

The potentials of functional education in enhancing sustainable manpower development in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised. This paper sees functional education as the one that takes cognizance of individual and societal needs through the inculcation of relevant knowledge and skills to learners as instrument for personal and sustainable national development. It conceptualises manpower development as the process of improving and developing the skills and potentials of the individual who in turn develop the organisation or country where they operate. Major obstacles identified as stumbling block towards manpower development in Nigeria are inadequate funding, insufficient professional development, poor implementation of educational policies, and poor curricula sustainability, among others. Human capital theory which underscores the significance of perpetual learning and the continuous development of skills throughout an individual's professional journey was adopted as the theoretical framework. The paper delves into the roles that higher education plays in achieving sustainable manpower development by equipping individuals with the essential skills and knowledge required in various organisations towards national development. Higher education actively engages in policy formulation and advocacy efforts by providing evidence-based research and expertise to policy makers and stakeholders. It concludes that leveraging higher education as a tool for manpower development is thus crucial in preparing individuals to tackle the challenges of a rapidly evolving world and contribute to sustainable national development. It is therefore pertinent that every possible effort should be geared towards providing functional education to Nigeria citizens to enhance sustainable manpower and national development.

Keywords: Manpower development, challenges, education, capital, sustainable.

Introduction

Education is the process of developing human capacity, skills, abilities, behaviours, and encompasses the social process of achieving competence, growth and development in an institutional or organisational setting. It is the bedrock for every segment of national development and an instrument designed for national advancement, particularly when it is relevant to the needs and aspirations of the nation. Thus, for education to achieve its objectives, it has to be functional. Functional education is aimed at inculcating relevant cognitive, psychomotor and affective knowledge and skills to learners as instrument for personal and national growth. It enables students to imbibe good character, attitudes, develop mental capacity and acquire physical skills that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to the society. Anunobi, et al (2021) assert that functional education is the cornerstone for economic development. Its relevant practical training components hold the key to surmounting the challenges bedevilling Nigeria's economic and national development.

Functional education is the key index for any meaningful economic and national development. A functional education will therefore take cognizance of the needs of the individual and society, and should be able to meet the needs of all levels of development, which also makes it a necessity for sustainable national development. Major objectives of functional education are to impart necessary skills to individuals to be self-reliant economically, enable graduates secure employment or set up their own businesses and foster rapid national development through production of sufficient trained man power in all areas of the national sector (Amede, 2018). Functional education has the capability to enhance human capital resources, fosters economic growth and raises the standards of living. Thus, for our education to achieve its desired objectives, government should address the impediments to functional education at

every level, which will eventually become the panacea to our declining economy.

Education has been recognized as a generic medium by which people in a given society acquire a social identity and skills to enable them perform certain basic human functions. For any organization, institution or even a nation to function effectively, there must be human and material resources. But among these resources, human resources are the most paramount, since other resources cannot be utilized without human beings. For this reason, these human beings who constitute the manpower resources in an organization, institution or nation must be well-trained, informed and groomed. The act of training, educating and grooming human resources connotes manpower development. The human capital essential to meet the challenges of the present and future can only be developed through functional, efficient, qualitative and effective education. Education is to develop individuals into morally and academically sound, effective and skilled citizens that are globally relevant.

Functional Education Conceptualised

The type of education that is tagged “functional” is the one that is able to liberate, stimulate and inform the individual and teaches him how to live right in the work force. Functional education is that education that is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the individual learner, which is based on the occurrence and changes in the learner's cultural setting. It prepares the individual to face his social goals, economic realities and future life challenges positively. It entails an education in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more emphasized. It equips the recipients with original practical skills and knowledge to harness their potentials, provides opportunities for individuals to develop their latent talents to the fullest without hindrances. 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.

Amede (2024) sees functional education as the kind of education that satisfies the yearnings of the government, the needs of the society and the desires of industries. The society regards education to be functional if the products can suit the job demands of industries and solve societal needs. It is a holistic educational experience that is focused on the identification of situational problems, gathering of information to make decisions in a world of challenges and realities of life, enhancing beneficiaries to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to showcase new concepts as a vehicle of globalizing, meaningful co-existence, sustainability and developments. Isiozor et al. (2021) posit that functional education should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines, and tools needed for local and international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases hitherto incurable and transform the nation from consumption to a manufacturing status. It is believed that through functional education, concrete and usable knowledge, insight and skills are acquired and it is the planned and guided application of these that engenders national development.

Afolabi (2024) opines that functional education is the type of education that equips the recipient with the knowledge and skills needed for performance of productive task. It is an education that is active, brings out the ability and potential in an individual, stimulates and empowers an individual with saleable skills to positively solve immediate problems for an individual and the society. In the words of Fuandai et al (2007), in Oguru et al (2023), for higher education to achieve its purpose of being

functional, it must possess some basic features which include accessibility, empowerment, self-reliance, involvement of stakeholders in its design, equipping recipients to harness their potentials, emphasizing the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge for gainful self-employment.

Challenges of Functional Education in Nigeria

Higher education institutions encounter various challenges in fulfilling their critical roles in achieving manpower development for sustainable development. One major obstacle is the persistent issue of funding constraints, which often hampers their ability to provide quality programmes, conduct meaningful research, and invest in sustainable development initiatives. Budgetary allocations to education in Nigeria have consistently fallen below the UNESCO (2005) recommendations. According to Onuma (2016), educational institutions in Nigeria suffer in adequate funding and lack basic infrastructures and educational facilities needed for quality education.

Accomplishment of any educational goals and objectives depends mainly on the quality of available teachers who are the epicentre of the teaching and learning process. The number of well trained and professionally qualified teachers in Nigeria educational system is grossly insufficient and many of them are devoid of necessary skills, because they are not regularly exposed to professional development and training programmes. Poor implementation of educational policies is yet another challenge halting the process of functional education in Nigeria. Successive governments have established some programmes with the prospect of revamping our educational system, but contrary was the case due to poor implementation. Avurakoghene and Oredein (2024) posit that lack of a comprehensive focus on sustainability in curricula across disciplines limits students' exposure to essential knowledge

and skills in the field, hindering their potential to actively contribute to sustainability in their future careers.

Theoretical Framework: Human Capital Theory

Dynamic human capital theory underscores the significance of perpetual learning and the continuous development of skills throughout an individual's professional journey. It represents a theoretical framework that centres on the ever-changing nature of human capital (Liening, 2013). Merwe (2010), in Avurakoghene and Oredein (2024), asserts that it recognises the rapid evolution characterising our current world, necessitating individuals to continuously adapt and acquire fresh knowledge and competencies to remain competitive and make meaningful contributions to sustainable development. In the context of higher education, this theory serves as a powerful tool for fostering a skilled and adaptable workforce.

The emphasis on continuous learning within dynamic human capital theory derives from its acknowledgment that knowledge and skills inevitably become obsolete over time. In today's rapidly evolving world, this emphasis on lifelong education becomes indispensable for adapting to technological advancements and societal shifts. Besides, investing in human capital through higher education has the potential to generate a more proficient and innovative workforce, driving economic growth and development. Individuals with robust educational backgrounds are better poised to secure higher-paying jobs and positively impact their communities. Likewise, by equipping individuals with pertinent knowledge and skills, dynamic human capital theory reinforces sustainable development.

According to Gao, et al (2019), skilled workforce is better equipped to confront environmental challenges, embrace green technologies, and contribute to more sustainable practises. Merwe, (2010), in

Avurakoghene and Oredein (2024), posits that in terms of guiding institutional strategies, dynamic human capital theory offers valuable insights. Firstly, curriculum development plays a pivotal role as higher education institutions strive to align their programmes with the principles of dynamic human capital theory, offering courses that remain relevant and up-to-date. Secondly, promoting lifelong learning opportunities becomes imperative in a rapidly evolving job landscape. Encouraging individuals to participate in workshops, short courses, and online education empowers them to stay abreast of changing skill requirements and industry trends.

Higher education institutions can also make significant contributions to research and innovation. By fostering research endeavours, these institutions not only advance technological breakthroughs and economic growth but also address sustainability challenges, furthering the agenda of sustainable manpower development. More so, forging strong collaborations with industries is instrumental. Such partnerships enable higher education institutions to identify the skills and knowledge required in the job market, enabling them to tailor their programmes accordingly to meet industry demands. Besides, dynamic human capital theory can serve as a foundation for advocating policies that encourage investments in higher education, research, and skill development at both individual and institutional levels, bolstering the overall quality of manpower development.

Human Capital/Manpower Development in Nigeria

Manpower generally connotes the human resources or workforce of a company or the labour force of a country. It holds significant importance in economic productivity and development, as the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals directly contribute to the production of goods and services, thus playing a vital role in determining an economy's capacity and potential for growth.

Okonkwo, et al (2022) assert that manpower encompasses a diverse pool of individuals within a particular population or labour market who are actively seeking employment or are already employed, varying in backgrounds, ages, genders, and education levels. Investing in manpower development through education and training is of paramount importance for enhancing the quality of the workforce, leading to innovation, productivity, and economic growth. Therefore, manpower development refers to the process of optimising and enhancing the human resources within an organisation, community, or nation. It involves a range of activities, programmes, and strategies aimed at improving the knowledge, skills, abilities, and overall capabilities of individuals to meet the present and future needs of the organisation or society. According to Afzal et al (2013), the ultimate goal of manpower development is to create a competent and skilled workforce that can effectively contribute to the success and growth of the entity.

Manpower development strategies can take the form of employee training, which provides formal and informal education to enhance job-specific skills and knowledge. This can be achieved through various methods, such as workshops, seminars, on-the-job training, online courses, and other learning programmes (Al-Riyami & Banu, 2019). Furthermore, manpower development focuses on skill enhancement, encompassing technical skills, soft skills, and leadership skills, tailored to meet the specific requirements of various roles or tasks. Encouraging individuals to pursue formal education or advanced degrees to gain specialised knowledge and expertise in their respective fields is another important aspect of manpower development.

The importance of manpower development for organisations and national development cannot be over-emphasised. According to Igbokwe et al (2017), it enhances productivity because skilled employees perform tasks more efficiently, and a well-developed workforce

can readily adapt to technological advancements and changes in the market, ensuring the organisation's sustainability. Mutua (2019) asserts that investing in employee development fosters talent retention, reducing turnover costs, and a skilled workforce enhances innovation, driving the organisation forward. Generally, manpower development contributes to a country's economic growth by attracting investment and encouraging entrepreneurship by creating a highly skilled labour force.

Human capital development, according to Njoku and Onyegbula (2017), are 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. It entails the provision of learning, training and development opportunities in order to improve individual, team and corporate performance. Sullivan and Steven (2013) opine that it is about recruiting, supporting and investing in people through education, training, coaching, mentoring, internships, organizational development and human resources management. It recognizes that the development and growth of people in organizations and business are essential assets to the organizations future success.

Healthfield (2011) defines human capital development as a framework for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge and ability. According to her, it includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development, performance management and development, coaching, monitoring, etc. Among the basic human capital development strategies identified by Njoku and Onyegbula (2017) is quality education which entails the promotion of equitable lifelong learning opportunities to meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is such an education

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.

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.

For higher education to effectively produce the needed manpower for national development, such education must be of high quality. Consequently, some of the reasons advanced to explain the increasing interest on quality of higher education by World Bank 2021, in Adedeji (2022), are:

- ✓ Higher education system is operating in an exciting age- an age of discovery, of expansion of frontiers of knowledge in a highly globalised community. Pressure for efficient utilisation of public funds and concern for product quality are the most significant forces impinging on the contemporary higher education system.
- ✓ Societal concern about the increased public expenditure in general and

consequently the necessity for defining priority of education relative to other socially desired activities.

- ✓ The expansion of the higher education system and rapid growth in the student body.
- ✓ Increased openness in most sectors of the modern societies, which forces higher education institutions to show the society at large what they are doing and how well they are doing it.
- ✓ Increased international mobility of teachers, researchers and students, and internalisation of the education labour market. There is a growing need to be able to assess the equivalence of qualifications, standards, and credits.
- ✓ Extrinsic values of higher education, the services it provides for society have come into focus, relative to the intrinsic values, such as search for truth and pursuit of knowledge.

Functional Higher Education as a Tool for Manpower Development

Functional higher education influences manpower development in Nigeria through the country's tertiary education entrusted with the role of ensuring manpower development for adequate resources needs of the society for national development. The goals of tertiary education as stipulated in the Nigeria Education Policy document, in Ernest-Ekwe and Emerengwa (2023), are among other things, to contribute to national development through high level manpower training, develop the intellectual capacity of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment, and acquire both physical and intellectual skills which enables individual to be self-reliant and useful members of the society. Assessing these stated goals entails that the major role of tertiary education through its institutions is that of

manpower development, which involves the task of inculcating the skills, aptitude, attitude, knowledge, morals, values, creative ability, etc.

Higher education plays a vital and multifaceted role in achieving sustainable manpower development. It serves as a crucial training ground, equipping individuals with the essential skills and knowledge required in various organisations. This education goes beyond mere technical expertise as it also fosters sustainability-oriented mind-sets in students, instilling a sense of responsibility towards the environment and society. Furthermore, higher education institutions contribute significantly to research and innovation, which are indispensable for sustainable practises. Through cutting-edge studies, they drive breakthroughs in renewable energy, waste reduction, and conservation, thereby advancing the implementation of sustainable solutions on a larger scale.

Gao, et al (2019) assert that higher education actively engages in policy formulation and advocacy efforts. By providing evidence-based research and expertise to policy makers and stakeholders, these institutions influence the adoption of sustainable practises both at the governmental level and within organisations. Higher education's impact extends beyond its campuses, as it actively engages with local communities. By collaborating with these communities, institutions address specific sustainability challenges and work towards mutually beneficial solutions, thereby creating a positive ripple effect on society. In line with fostering sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship, higher education supports the development of green industries. By nurturing environmentally conscious entrepreneurs, they contribute to the growth of businesses that prioritise sustainable practises, thus furthering the cause of sustainable development. Also, one of the most significant outcomes of higher education's efforts is the emergence of a network of experts and stakeholders dedicated to

sustainable manpower development. Graduates with a strong understanding of sustainable principles and practises become valuable contributors to global initiatives. They address critical challenges such as climate change, poverty, and inequality, leveraging their knowledge and skills to make a positive and lasting impact on society and the environment.

Functional higher education is indeed the bedrock of development of any society and this can only be achieved when the needed manpower are produced, trained and made available. The importance of education for manpower development cannot be over emphasized neither would it be an over statement to state that education remains an instrument for the harmonious functioning of the citizens of any society which translates to economic, social and political growth and development of the society. Asserting the essence of education on manpower development, Olaniyounu and Gbenu (2016) aver that education is the process of training and developing the knowledge, skill, mind and character of people, and the process by which latent abilities of individuals are developed so that they can be useful to themselves and the society at large.

Functional education equips individuals with adequate skills and knowledge to contribute towards the sustainability and improvement of the human conditions in their environment. Ololube (2017) observes that the theme of education should be able to bring about desirable changes in behaviour as well as acquisition of skills and competences. This implies that education either formal, informal in any given society is expected to help an individual acquire the necessary knowledge, build the right attitude and skills that will enable him/her fit properly into the society. Functional education for sustainable national development aims at helping people to develop the attitudes, skills, perspectives and knowledge to make informed decisions in their socio-economic activities and act upon them

for the benefit of themselves and others, now and in the future. It also helps the citizens of the world to learn their way to a more sustainable future (Ohia, 2018).

Ajonuma (2010) sees education as the process of developing human capacity, skills, abilities, behaviours, and encompasses the social process of achieving competence, growth and development in an institutional or organizational setting. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) clearly stated that education is oriented towards inculcating certain values in meeting the societal demands. They include among others acquisition of competences necessary for self-reliance, respect for the worth and dignity of individuals, shared responsibility for the common good of the society. 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.

Conclusion

The pivotal role of higher education as a powerful tool for achieving manpower development in a rapidly evolving world for sustainable development cannot be over-emphasised. Leveraging higher education as a tool for manpower development is thus crucial in preparing individuals to tackle the challenges of a rapidly evolving world and contribute to sustainable development. It is therefore pertinent that every possible effort should be geared towards providing functional education to Nigeria citizens. This is germane as it has been well documented that educationally developed nation is invariably a developed nation. With educated manpower, the nation will adequately harness her natural

endowed resources for an overall national development.

Functional education should develop knowledge economy and apply research to the need of the society and industries. Teachers should be adequately qualified and professionally prepared, pedagogically skilled and well-motivated to be able to facilitate functional education. They should be sufficiently trained to be able to impart knowledge. Higher institutions should be well equipped with learning and teaching tools and only qualified teachers should be employed to impart knowledge to students. Emphasis should also be placed on functional education that is more quality rather than quantity oriented to equip youths with skills needed for self-sustenance and thus enhance manpower and national development. Government should take the issue of funding education very serious in order to provide educational infrastructures and other resources for enhance functional education and improve national development. Governments and non-governmental bodies should ensure adequate funding of the tertiary institutions and such funds should be prudently utilized to enable it meet the financial requirement for adequate manpower training.

Higher education curriculum should be drafted in such a way that it addresses the current industrial needs and challenges of the modern economy to keep pace with global development and societal needs. Emphasis on paper qualification should be discouraged and rather skills acquisition that can solve societal problems should be encouraged. Continuous staff professional training and development programmes are indispensable for managing functional tertiary education for sustainable manpower and national development. Thus, efforts should be made by governments to provide adequate training and re-training of teachers who are the primary implementers of the school curriculum because any educational effort that fails to recognize the importance of the teachers in its implementations is bound to fail. Academic staff should also be ready to

adapt functional and global practices of teaching-learning processes and programmes to meet the challenges of changing technological advances and current needs.

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