

Assessing the Role of Human Resource Development in Achieving National Greatness in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's aspiration for national greatness hinges on the effective development of its human resources, as human capital remains the most critical driver of economic growth and productivity. This study examines the role of human resource development in achieving Nigeria's greatness by assessing the impact of government expenditure on education, health, and related social services on economic growth between 1991 and 2023. Using secondary data obtained from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the study employed the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach to determine both short-run and long-run relationships among variables. The results reveal a significant long-run co-integrating relationship between gross domestic product (GDP) and human capital indicators such as education, health expenditure, gross fixed capital formation, and school enrollment. Findings indicate that education and health investments have a substantial positive effect on economic growth, while school enrollment at all levels contributes to productivity, though with varying impacts. However, challenges such as underemployment, brain drain, and skill mismatch continue to limit the full potential of human capital in driving sustainable development. The study concludes that Nigeria's path to greatness lies in prioritizing human resource development through increased investment in education and health, skill-based learning, and curriculum reform emphasizing technical and practical competencies aligned with national industrial needs.

Keywords: Human Capital Development, National Greatness, Economic Growth, Education, Skills and Strategies

Introduction

Nigeria's development aspirations hinge on leveraging human capital. Human capital which connotes the work force or employees are arguably the most important assets of a nation. It has been stressed that the differences in the level of socio-economic development across nations is attributed not so much to natural resources and endowments and the stock of physical capital but to the quality and quantity of human resources. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic, and political organizations, and carry forward national development (Eigbiremolen & Anaduaka, 2015). Therefore, investment in human capital development should be of great importance to a country who aspires to be great.

Investment in human capital has been shown to be positively related to economic growth and development of a nation (Adofu, Abdulsalam, & Agama 2015). It has been argued however that human capital development raises the income of the poor in a nation, thus raising the income spread between the poor and the rich which is a worldwide objective of macroeconomics. A simplified implication of this is that human capital development promotes equity and reduces poverty besides aid in the efficient allocation and civilization of scale resources. It has also been argued that human capital development is closely tied to the issues of education and economic growth and development. Economic growth and development is largely a function of human capital, which is an embodiment of good health, education, knowledge, skills, attitudes, expertise and technological known-how (Ogunleye, Owolabi, Sanyaolu & Lawal 2017).

Human capital theorists are of the view that education as an investment in human capital pays off in the form of higher lifetime earnings of the individual as well as enhancing the efficient productive capacity of the nation's economy. Adelakun (2019), Nigeria as a nation wishes to be among the twenty (20) most developed countries in the year 2020. However, the country is still underdeveloped and experiencing great economic meltdown in the year 2024. To give effect to this, one of the pre-requisites is to ensure that capable manpower is available in various areas of social, political, institutional, technological and economic endeavors which drive the process of growth, development and industrialization (Akpogheli, 2016).

However, empirical review indicates that in the past decades, thus, education and training are the most important factors in human resource development. The quality of human resources connotes the state of education and other human capabilities that can raise productivity when increased. Hence, this research examines the nexus between human capital and national greatness.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to the role of human resources development in achieving Nigeria's greatness. Specifically;

- i. To examine the impact of government health expenditure on economic growth in Nigeria
- ii. To examine the impact of government education expenditure on economic growth in Nigeria

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Every country has different resources it can use to achieve its goals and maintain economic growth. The resources include but not limited to capital, machines, people (human resources) and other fixed assets, however, chief among these resources is people who possess the talent needed to achieve greater productivity that will enhance growth (Howard, 2018)

According to Almaaitah, Alsafadi, Altahat and Yousf (2020) human resources has become one of the most vital pillars which countries rely on in achieving their strategic vision, not to mention that the demand for it has increased. The pioneering work regarding human capital development and economic growth is the growth rate of human capital, which also depends on the amount of time allocated individuals to acquire skills. Rebelo (2021) later extended the model by introducing physical capital as an additional input in the human capital accumulation function. However, the model of endogenous growth by Romer (2020) assumes that the creation of new

ideas is a direct function of human capital which manifest in the form of knowledge. As a result investment in human capital led to growth in physical capital which in turn leads to economic growth. Other studies that supported human capital accumulation as a source of economic growth include (Barro & Lee, 2023; Romer, 2021; Benhabib & Spiegel, 2014). Some studies have examined different ways through which human capital can affect economic growth.

Studies of the effects of human capital on growth, such as Mankiw, Romer and Weil (2012) and Barro (2021), were based on data sets pertaining to a very diverse array of (more than 100) countries during the post-1960 era. They used narrow flow measures of human capital such as the school enrolment rates at the primary and secondary levels, which were found to be positively associated with output growth rates. Barro reported that the process of catching up was firmly linked to human capital formation: only those poor countries with high levels of human capital formation relative to their GDP tended to catch up with the richer countries.

In a recent development, Gupta and Chakraborty (2021) develop an endogenous growth model of a dual economy where human capital accumulation is the source of economic growth. They argued that the duality between the rich individual exists in the mechanism of human capital accumulation. Rich individuals allocate labour time not only for their own production and knowledge accumulation but also train the poor individuals. In a different dimension, Bratti et al (2014) estimated a model of economic growth and human capital accumulation based on a sample of countries at a different stage of development. Their result revealed that the increase in the primary and secondary level of education contributes to an increase in productivity. They posit that human capital accumulation rates are affected by demographic variables. For example, they established that an increase in life expectancy at birth brings about an increase in secondary and tertiary education while a decrease in the juvenile dependence rate negatively affects secondary education. Finally, they added that geographic variables have a considerable importance in the human capital accumulation process. Nevertheless, studies differed on the impact of human capital on productivity growth.

As a source of productivity, Jaiyeoba (2015) examined openness and human capital as source of productivity growth for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. Controlling for fixed effects as well as endogeneity in the model, they found that while human capital significantly influenced growth, it has no underlying effect on productivity growth. Park (2014) empirically investigates the growth implication in terms of educational attainment levels.

Theoretical Review

Theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding how human resource development (HRD) contributes to national progress and sustainable growth. The following theories explain the relationship between human capital, productivity, and national greatness.

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964)

The Human Capital Theory, propounded by Theodore W. Schultz (1961) and further developed by Gary Becker (1964), is one of the most relevant frameworks for understanding human resource development. The theory posits that investment in people through education, training, and skill acquisition enhances productivity and economic growth. According to this theory, a nation's workforce is a form of capital that yields returns through improved efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness. In the context of Nigeria, the Human Capital Theory implies that the country's greatness depends largely on its ability to invest in its human resources by improving access to quality education, vocational training, and healthcare. A well-trained and

motivated workforce can drive industrialization, technological advancement, and sustainable national development.

Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, developed by Jay Barney (1991), emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage stems from the possession and effective management of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. Among these, human resources are considered the most critical. Applied to Nigeria's national development, this theory suggests that the nation's greatness lies not merely in its natural endowments (such as oil or minerals), but in the effective development and utilization of its human resources. When citizens are empowered through proper training, education, and skill enhancement, they can transform other resources into drivers of sustainable growth and innovation.

Systems Theory

The Systems Theory, introduced by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1945), views an organization or a nation as an interconnected system made up of interdependent parts that must work harmoniously for overall success. Within this framework, human resources are a crucial subsystem that influences all others, including economic, political, and technological systems. For Nigeria, the Systems Theory implies that the development of human capital must be integrated with other sectors such as education, industry, governance, and technology. National greatness, therefore, can only be achieved when all these sectors operate synergistically, supported by continuous human capacity development.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943), the Hierarchy of Needs Theory explains human motivation through five levels: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. When applied to human resource development, this theory highlights the importance of creating an enabling environment where individuals can achieve self-actualization through skill development, education, and productive engagement. In Nigeria's context, addressing basic needs such as security, fair wages, and access to education enables citizens to pursue higher levels of productivity and innovation. This process enhances both individual fulfillment and national greatness.

Human Development Theory

The Human Development Theory, developed by Amartya Sen (1999), emphasizes expanding people's capabilities and freedoms as the ultimate goal of development. According to Sen, development should focus on improving human well-being, not just economic growth. In Nigeria, this theory underscores that human resource development through education, health, and empowerment serves as the foundation for achieving greatness. When individuals have the freedom and capacity to realize their potential, they contribute meaningfully to economic progress, social stability, and democratic governance.

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

Douglas McGregor (1960) proposed Theory X and Theory Y, which describe two contrasting views of human motivation. Theory X assumes that people are inherently lazy and require strict supervision, while Theory Y assumes that people are self-motivated and seek responsibility.

when adequately empowered. In relation to Nigeria's national development, Theory Y emphasizes that empowering, training, and motivating the workforce leads to greater productivity and innovation. Effective human resource development programs that adopt Theory Y principles can foster a culture of creativity, accountability, and self-driven excellence.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

The Two-Factor Theory, propounded by Frederick Herzberg (1959), distinguishes between hygiene factors (such as salary, job security, and working conditions) and motivators (such as achievement, recognition, and personal growth). For Nigeria to achieve greatness, policymakers must ensure that both sets of factors are adequately addressed. A conducive environment, fair compensation, and opportunities for growth will improve workforce morale and productivity, thereby fostering national advancement.

Empirical Review

Adelakun (2019) examined human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria. This study shows the relevance of capital development and economic growth in Nigeria by adopting a conceptual analytical framework that employs the theoretical and ordinary least square (OLS) to analyze the relationship using the GDP as a proxy for economic growth, total government expenditure on education and health; and the enrolment pattern on tertiary, secondary and primary schools as a proxy for human capital. The analysis confirms that there is a strong positive relationship between human capital development and economic growth, following the findings, it was recommended that stakeholders need to evolve a more pragmatic means of developing human capabilities since it is seen as an important tool for economic growth in Nigeria. Also, the proper institutional framework should be put in place to look into the manpower needs of the various sectors and implement policies that will lead to the overall growth of the economy.

Emeh and Pepple (2019) examined Education: as a catalyst for human capital development in science and technology in Nigeria over the years with time-series data of 1986 – 2017 which were sourced from Central Bank statistical bulletin. The variables were tested for unit root via ADF. Johansen cointegration test and ECM were also conducted. The result revealed the existence of a long-run relationship amongst the variables. The result also indicated that human capital development affects the administrative growth of the economy within the study period.

Adenike and Sherifdeen (2017) examined the interactive effects of the relationship between human capital investment components and economic growth in Nigeria for the period 1986 – 2014. The study employed secondary annual data on education expenditure, health expenditure, real gross domestic product and gross capital formation obtained from the Central Bank Statistical bulletin, 2014. The data were analyzed using the Fully Modified Ordinary Least Squares (FMOLS) technique. The results of the study showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the interactive effects of human capital components and growth in Nigeria.

Ogunleye, Owolabi, Sanyaolu and Lawal (2017) employed the Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis to examine the impact of human capital development on the economic growth of Nigeria, using annual time series data from 1981 to 2015. The empirical results revealed that human capital development has a significant impact on economic growth, as a proxy by the gross domestic product. In line with theory, the human capital development

indicators namely secondary school enrolment, tertiary school enrolment, total government expenditure on health and total government expenditure on education exhibit positive and statistically significant impact on the economic growth of Nigeria which implies that these indicators are indispensable in the achievement of growth in the Nigerian economy. However, life expectancy and primary school enrolment exhibit a negative and statistically insignificant impact on the economic growth of Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research design to provide empirical evidence on the role of human resources development proxied by total government expenditure on education, health, gross fixed capital formation, other social and community services, and school enrollment at all levels on Nigeria's economic growth. The population of the study comprised all Nigerian states richly endowed with human capital resources. Secondary data spanning 1991–2023 were obtained from various issues of the Statistical Bulletin and Annual Report and Statement of Accounts published by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The study utilized the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach to co-integration to examine the long-run and short-run relationships among expenditure on human capital, gross fixed capital formation, and output growth. The order of integration of the variables was determined using the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) and Phillips-Perron unit root tests, while the Wald (F-statistic) test was used to evaluate the existence of a co-integration relationship between gross domestic product and human capital formation variables. The error correction mechanism (ECMt-1) was included to capture the speed of adjustment toward equilibrium. The Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method was also employed for parameter estimation, while diagnostic tests such as the Cumulative Sum (CUSUM), Cumulative Sum of Squares (CUSUMSQ), and Durbin-Watson statistics were conducted to assess the stability, stationarity, and serial correlation of residuals, thereby ensuring the robustness and reliability of the model's estimates.

Model Specification

Using two models that explain the various forms of human capital development can be functionally expressed as follows:

MODEL 1: $GDP = f(TEE, TEH, GFCF, SCS)$

MODEL 2: $GDP = f(PSE, SSE, TSE)$

Where: GDP is Real Gross Domestic Product

TEH = Expenditure on the health sector by the federal government

GFCF = representing Gross fixed capital formation

PSE = Primary School Enrolment

SSE = secondary School Enrolment

TSE = Tertiary School Enrolment

TEE = Total government expenditure on education

SCS is other social and community services expenditure which captures the federal government expenditure on poverty eradication, provision of portable water, irrigation and environmental protection.

A combination of these enhances the living standard of people and hence higher productivity.

Equations (1) and (2) can be transformed into a log-linear form as:

$LnGDP_t = b_0 + b_1LnTEH_t + b_2LnSCS_t + b_3LnGFCF_t + \alpha_1LnTEE_t + U_t$

$$\text{LnGDPt} = b_0 + b_1\text{LnPSEt} + b_2\text{LnSSEt} + b_3\text{LnTSEt} + U_t$$

Where U_t is a random term assumed to be orthogonal to all determinants that are normally distributed with constant variance and Ln is natural logarithm. The bounds procedure according to Tang (2003) is based on ARDL model for test of co-integration relationship. Following this lead, the two models as analysed by this research is specified as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{DLnGDPt} = & b_0 + \sum b_1\text{DLnTEHt-1} + \sum b_2\text{DLnGDPt-1} + \sum b_3\text{DLnSCSt-1} + \sum b_4\text{DLnGFCFt-1} + \\ & \sum b_5\text{DLnTEEt-1} + b_6\text{DLnTEHt-1} + b_7\text{DLnGDPt-1} + b_8\text{DLnSCSt-1} + b_9\text{DLnGFCFt-1} + \\ & b_{10}\text{DLnTEEt-1} + \\ & \Psi\text{ECMt-1} + U_t \end{aligned}$$

$$\text{DLnGDPt} = b_0 + \sum b_1\text{DLnPSEt-1} + \sum b_2\text{DLnSSEt-1} + \sum b_3\text{DLnTSEt-1} + \sum b_4\text{DLnGDPt-1} + b_5\text{DLnPSEt-1}$$

$$+ b_6\text{DLnSSEt-1} + b_7\text{DLnTSEt-1} + b_8\text{DLnGDPt-1} + \Psi\text{ECMt-1} + U_t$$

Where D is the first difference series (i.e. $\text{LnXt} - \text{LnXt-1}$)

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data used for analysis are annual and covered the period 1991 to 2023. The dependent variable is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the explanatory variables include Total Expenditure on the health sector by the federal government (TEH), Total government expenditure on education (TEE), social and community services expenditure (SCS) which captures the federal government expenditure on poverty eradication, provision of portable water, irrigation and environmental protection, Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), Primary School Enrolment (PSE), secondary School Enrolment (SSE) and Tertiary School Enrolment (TSE). Federal government expenditure on education (TEE), expenditure on health (TEH), PSE, SSE, and TSE represent the basic human capital determinants of the economy in the models. However, in the conventional measure of economic output, health and education contributions are measured essentially by expenditures on medical facilities and schools respectively. (Appleton & Teal, 1998).

PSE, SSE, and TSE are used in a separate model for comparative purpose with so that we can determine which of these variables impact more significantly on output growth. GDP is used to measure economic growth. It is expected that variation in PSE, SSE, and TSE would positively impact aggregate output level. The data were sourced from various issues of the statistical Bulletin and Annual Report and Statement of Accounts published by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The use of annual data finds justification in Hakkio and Rush (2006) and Davidson and Mackinnon (2000). These authors argue that increasing the numbers of observations (by using monthly and quarterly data) does not add any robustness to the results of co-integration and that seasonal adjustment of quarterly or monthly data in analysis may be biased.

Unit Root Tests

The order of integration of variables is determined using the Augmented Dickey Fuller (ADF) and Phillips Perron (PP) unit root tests. Table 1 reports the results of the unit root tests. The statistics for the ADF and PP at levels for output growth and the explanatory variables (TEE, TEH, GFCF, SCS, PSE, SSE and TSE) do not exceed the critical values (in absolute terms). Taking the first difference of each of the variables however, both the ADF and PP statistics are found higher than their respective critical values (in absolute terms). The conclusion is that the variables are integrated of order one or $I(1)$.

Table 1

Variables	At Level	Remark	1 st Difference	Remark	Order of Integration
PSE	ADF = 0.046381 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -3.539775 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
SSE	ADF = -0.182376 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -2.803581 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
TSE	ADF = -1.122228 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -5.656474 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
SCS	ADF = 0.083406 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -4.413792 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
TEE	ADF = 0.060089 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -4.609811 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
THE	ADF = -2.032746 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -4.758261 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
GFCF	ADF = 0.276648 10% critical value = -2.6181	Presence of unit root	ADF = -4.758261 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)
GDP	ADF = -0.559341 10% critical value = -2.6168	Presence of unit root	ADF = -3.619930 10% critical value = -2.6200	Absence of unit root	I(1)

Table 2: ARDL Bounds Test for Co-integration Analysis

Critical value (F Statistic) for the bounds test: Unrestricted intercept and no trend

Computed F – Statistic	5% Critical Values	
	Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds
8.2301	2.86	4.01

From the computed F-statistic we can reject the null hypothesis of no co-integration at 5% significant level for output growth. The computed F-statistics, $F_{stat} = 8.2301$, is higher than the upper bound critical value of 4.01. Our main results of interest are the coefficients of the error correction variable (ECM) which is represented as RESID01 in the parsimonious model, and the human capital variables (i.e., the explanatory variables). The coefficients of the variables are interpreted as short run elasticity and the error correction variable (ECM) represents the speed of adjustments from short-run to long run equilibrium.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings from the data analysis reveal that all the variables used in the model Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Total Expenditure on Education (TEE), Total Expenditure on Health (TEH), Social and Community Services (SCS), Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF), and school enrollment levels (PSE, SSE, and TSE) were non-stationary at level but became stationary after first differencing, indicating that they are integrated of order one, $I(1)$. This implies that the data series exhibit long-run equilibrium relationships when modeled together. The Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) and Phillips-Perron (PP) unit root test results confirmed this property across all variables. Consequently, the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach to co-integration was applied, and the computed F-statistic value of 8.2301 exceeded the upper bound critical value of 4.01 at the 5% significance level. This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis of no co-integration, thereby confirming the existence of a long-run relationship between GDP and the explanatory variables, implying that human resource development indicators such as education, health, and capital formation significantly influence Nigeria's economic growth over time.

Furthermore, the results of the Error Correction Model (ECM) confirmed that short-run disequilibria in the system adjust toward long-run equilibrium at a statistically significant rate, highlighting the dynamic nature of the relationship. The positive and significant coefficients of education and health expenditures suggest that government investment in these sectors contributes substantially to economic productivity and human capital accumulation. Similarly, primary, secondary, and tertiary school enrollment rates exhibited positive effects on output growth, though with varying magnitudes, indicating that improvements in educational access at all levels enhance Nigeria's economic performance. Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) and Social and Community Services (SCS) expenditures also played important roles in stimulating productivity and welfare. These findings corroborate earlier studies such as Appleton and Teal (1998) and Hakkio and Rush (2006), which emphasize the vital contribution of human capital investment to sustained economic growth. Overall, the analysis establishes that human resources development remains a pivotal driver of Nigeria's path toward economic greatness.

Conclusion

The study concludes that while total expenditure on education, gross fixed capital formation, and social and community services positively influences output growth in Nigeria, total expenditure on health and school enrollment at all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) show negative relationships with economic growth. Overall, the findings indicate that the contribution of human capital to Nigeria's economic development remains low, largely due to persistent underemployment and unemployment among the educated labor force. The inefficient utilization of accumulated human capital has also constrained aggregate income and domestic consumption, thereby slowing economic progress. Furthermore, the limited competitiveness of local industries and the ongoing brain drain weaken the potential impact of human resource development on Nigeria's long-term economic growth and global competitiveness.

Recommendations

1. The government should increase investment in both education and health sectors, recognizing their indirect social and economic benefits. Although funding has improved slightly, it remains disproportionate to growth in physical capital, despite the strong complementarity between human and physical capital.
2. Adequate skill development should be prioritized to complement technological advancement. Investments in machinery and human resources must occur simultaneously, with a dynamic balance maintained between physical and human capital to ensure sustainable productivity growth.
3. The curriculum of higher education should be restructured to emphasize practical, technical, and engineering-oriented training. Greater focus should be placed on hands-on learning and on-the-job training that equip graduates with problem-solving skills relevant to real-life and industrial applications.

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