

Open and Distance Learning as a Strategy for Human Capital Development: Issues and Challenges

Olugbenga David Ojo

National Open University of Nigeria,
14/16, Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria
olugbenga-ojo@gmail.com, gbenga_ojo2001@yahoo.com

Abstract

Human capital everywhere in the whole world is the mainframe that upholds the development of both government and private establishment structures that sees to the growth and continued existence of all services that make the country a habitable place for her citizens. They are the people that plan, coordinate, organise and also manage whatever is being put together for the development of their nation be it health, education, economic and infrastructure development. They are those behind all the policy formulations and executions. For the purpose of progress and improvement in the societal development of all available structures in the society, there is need for proper education, training and retraining of this workforce.

This paper therefore showcases the option of an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system as an inevitable strategy for human capital development.

Keywords: human capital development, human capital formation, open and distance learning, human resources

Abstrak

Di seluruh dunia sumber manusia adalah tunggak yang menyokong pembangunan kedua-dua sektor awam dan swasta yang menentukan pertumbuhan dan kesinambungan kesemua perkhidmatan yang menjadikan sesebuah Negara itu sesuai untuk penghidupan rakyatnya. Mereka adalah orang yang merancang, mengkoordinasi, menganjur dan mengurus segala keperluan dan dasar untuk pembangunan Negara mereka, sama ada ianya kesihatan, pendidikan, ekonomi mahupun prasarana. Merekalah yang memainkan peranan penting di belakang tabir yang menentukan dasar dan pelaksanaannya. Untuk tujuan kemajuan dan penambahbaikan kesemua lapisan struktur masyarakat, maka perlulah diadakan pendidikan, latihan dan latihan semula ke atas tenaga kerja ini.

Kertas kerja ini mempamerkan pilihan suatu sistem Pendidikan Terbuka dan Jarak Jauh (ODL) sebagai satu strategi yang, tak boleh tidak, perlu untuk pembangunan sumber manusia.

Kata kunci: pembangunan sumber manusia, pendidikan terbuka dan jarak jauh, tenaga kerja

Introduction

Open and Distance Learning system is innovative in nature. It is an attempt to bring education to the doorstep of all and sundry in order to make illiteracy a thing of the past and by extension reduce the problem of poverty among the people through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence that put growth and development on the structures of developed nations. There is no alternative these days to the ODL institutions through which human capital made up of men and women, young and old are taught to confront the world in rational scrutiny, to acquire knowledge and skills that permit contemporary technology, if need be, to function and to progress, and beget those social attitudes that (will) enable (the) organised world to cope with a sense of direction. The inter-link between human capital development and ODL is a sine qua non to poverty alleviation, growth and structural development of the developing nations and its people. ODL goes alongside development and it is an essential tool to bring development about. According to Human Development Report (1990), 'human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible'. This paper therefore looks into the impact and influence which ODL has on the development of human capital.

General Overview

Open and Distance education is an avenue for learning through which the socially induced constrain (such as boundary and space) of education are eliminated. This paradigm allows the worker and those with financial difficulties to acquire education and training because of its flexibility and

operation. Open education is based on the policies and practices that permit entry to learning with none or minimum barriers with respect to age, gender, or time constraints and with recognition of prior learning.

Open and Distance Learning are two sides of a coin but with only a permeable membrane separating them instead of a metal. 'Distance' conveys a message that has to do with the mode of operations, while 'Open' conveys the kind of and processes involved and service (education). Openness is measured and seen in terms of flexibility and lack of conventional restrictions on transactions, which is observable in the conventional (traditional) educational institutions. In other words, distance education is an educational approach which involves the quasi separation of the tutor and learners, while open learning defines the philosophic construct which can be seen in terms of flexibility of access to learning and removal of restrictions on transactions which characterizes the conventional (traditional) educational institutions.

The Open Distance Learning or training delivery method conspicuously shows the characteristics that exist between the learners and the teacher or trainer. The teaching or training is done with a variety of mediating processes used to transmit content, to provide tuition and to conduct assessment or measure outcome. Learners learn at their own pace, in their homes and indeed, anywhere. Self learning/teaching materials specially prepared for each course and programmers are given to the students while high premium is placed on the use of electronic media – radio, television, audio/video materials, telephone and computer (inter and intranet) for teaching and learning purposes.

The Place of ODL in Human Capital Formation

Human Capital represents the knowledge, skills and attitudes that make it possible to do their jobs. The development of human capital potentials entails recruiting, supporting and investing in people, using varieties of means including: education, training, coaching, mentoring, internship, organisational development and human resources management. It is an avenue for the development of career paths because the training received allows for skill acquisition for better performance and ipso facto position advancement and education. The importance of human capital formation is established in the development literature (Chenery et al., 1975) and the

endogenous growth model have provided theoretical and empirical support for the thesis that human capital has positive and significant effects on economic growth. Endogenous development sees human capital as the set of skills that increases an individual's value in the market place. Schultz (2003) felt that, like other types of capital, human capital could be increased through investment in commitment to human factors such as education, training and healthcare. It is on record that adoption of the endogenous theory has led to increased investments in human capital and also in the emergence of research and development policy, computer-based tech industries and entrepreneurship.

Many studies have found a strong [positive] correlation between the human capital (of the domestic population defined by the set of skills that increase an individual's importance in the market structure) and the levels of social and/or economic performance of many nations. This over time has made it a task for the developing nations to consider how human capital required for their development will be defined, cultivated and sustained. Moreover, Development in all ramifications conjures many meanings but it is known majorly to mean a sense of growing to reach one's full potential or a finite goal.

Today's workplace environment where human capital is actually required emphasises management skills and technological automation; it also places the demand for higher educational qualifications on the labour force of the developing nations. Strong human capital attracts and encourages growth and not the other way round. An educated population leaves an enduring positive effect economically with a larger tax base and socially through political involvement. Therefore, an investment in human capital should be a part of any development that will be worthwhile.

As part of this paradigm shift in education and training, ODL has the potential to respond effectively to industrial growth and marketing of its courses/programmes, among several other characteristics that makes it a welcome education policy worldwide. The potentials of ODL also find expression in the fact that it floats courses, training and programmes that build in individual specialised skills and capabilities, therefore giving valid recognition to prior learning achievements. It is this access to education or training that helps to develop and sharpen the workers who would not be able to leave their place of work for a full time education and

training for capacity building. This is corroborated by Tsui et al. (1999) who have asserted at various instances that Open and Distance Learning plays a significant role in human development hence the economic increase in the numbers of institutions and learners while lots of other resources are being invested in the field. Pritchett (1996) considering the same trend, also remarked that expanding access to education and training has been a tenet of growth and development strategies of most countries.

The developing countries on the other hand are confronted by most of the problems that could limit the capacity of expansion in education to stimulate growth and development. Problems like quality of education, unemployment, surplus/absorptive capacity, shortages, regional imbalances and brain drain have continued to bedevil many developing economies, causing a great imbalance in the overall development process. Human Capital Development revolves around investment in education, training, health and of course in the services that increases the production capacity of the workforce. Without competent and adequate human resources, there cannot be any significant growth in the economic development of the nation.

Okojie (1995) in this light sees the concept of human capital to be the activities and skill of the human resources of a nation. He observed that express of its formation is the acquiring and increasing of the member of persons who have the skills, education and experience that are critical for the economic growth and also the political development of a country. It is for the reasons of availability of skillful workforce that can move the developing countries forward that ODL institutions are springing up in the African countries where poverty and illiteracy are endemic.

Since all developing countries of the world have their peculiarities, the reasons for using Open Distance Learning for human capital development includes among others the fact that ODL is one of the many cost-efficient and effective strategies for providing human capital building in developing countries. It has an edge over face-to-face education and learning. It is a powerful channel for personal individual self-development, renewal and improvement of workers skills, abilities and competences where-ever it is provided as an institution of learning. In other to do this effectively, however, the process of deploying an open and distance learning system approach to education must be properly structured. This will enable the

community and the environment where it is available to be able to tap maximally all the overt and covert benefits it possess. As rightly observed by Rumble (1992), where the necessary infrastructures, equipment, and expertise are available it caters for all types of people regardless of their age, gender, citizenship, social standing, commitment, social responsibilities and geographical location. Contributing to the discussion on the advantages of ODL, Verduin (1992) also remarked that it is appropriate for (i) education of a large pool of people from different levels and types of education whether basic, secondary or tertiary (ii) disadvantage people who are unable to enter conventional education for a variety of reasons. (iii) Training or retaining professional, technical and vocational workers who want to upgrade and update their skills, knowledge and attitudes. (iv) It also enables learners to study at their own pace. Open Distance Learning enables educational materials to be customized to suit local needs and priorities of learners (UNESCO, 2002).

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is a common knowledge that human capital plays a key role in the development of any nation. It is the quality and quantity of human resources that reveal the differences in the level of socio-economic development across nations and not natural resources, government, and the state of physical capital. The way out for nations generally is to recognise the ODL approach as an advantage and focus on its development for the integration of their citizens in terms of literacy and skills acquisition for the purpose of capacity building. Faculties and various workplace training centres of ODL institutions have great potential for dynamic programme and trainings. Young people and adults who are out of school can be given the opportunity to obtain formal qualifications through the distance or to attain skills for employment, self-development or Community service.

References

- Chenery, H., Syrquin, M. and Elkington, H. 1975. *Patterns of development (1950–1970)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garba, P. K. 2002. Human capital formation, utilization and the development of Nigeria: A systems analysis. Human resource development in Africa 2002 Annual Conference of the Nigeria Economic Society.
- Okojie, C. E. E. 1995. Human capital formation for productivity growth in Nigeria. *Nigeria economic and financial review*. June, 44–45.
- Pritchett, L. 1996. Where has all the education gone? Policy research working paper 1581. Washington D.C. The World Bank.
- Rumble, G. 1992. *The management of distance learning systems. Fundamentals of educational planning*. Paris: IIEP/UNESCO.
- Schultz, T. P. 2003. Human capital, schooling and health returns. Yale University Economic growth center discussion paper No. 853. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=392781> (accessed 19 October 2006).
- Tsui, C., Zhang, Weiyuan, Jegede, O., Ng, F. and Kwok, L. 1999. Perception of management styles of open & distance learning institutions in Asia: A comparative study. 13th Annual Conference of AAOU, Beijing, 14–17 October 1999.
- UNESCO 2002. *UNESCO Strategic framework for education in sub-Saharan Africa: Focusing on teacher and secondary through open and distance learning*. HEP, Paris: UNESCO.
- UNDP 1990. *Human development report*. New York & Oxford University Press, London.
- Verduin, J. R. 1992. *Distance education: Foundations of effective practice*. Oxford: Jossey-Bass Publishers.