

Higher Education as a Tool for Manpower Development in a Rapidly Evolving World for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper examines the pivotal role of higher education as a powerful tool for achieving manpower development in a rapidly evolving world, with a focus on sustainable development. It explores the concept of sustainable development, higher education, and manpower development, emphasizing how specialized training, knowledge dissemination, and fostering sustainability-oriented mindsets enable higher education institutions to produce a skilled and responsible workforce capable of addressing global challenges. Acknowledging the challenges faced by higher education in promoting sustainable manpower development, such as funding constraints and resistance to change, the paper remains optimistic. It presents practical strategies, including faculty development, flexible curricula, and industry partnerships, as means to address these obstacles effectively. The paper underscores the importance of embracing collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, students, and stakeholders to fully realize the potential of higher education in driving sustainable development. By empowering graduates to contribute meaningfully to a sustainable future and fostering a culture that prioritizes sustainability, higher education institutions can play a transformative role in shaping an environmentally conscious and socially responsible society. In the face of a rapidly evolving world, higher education's commitment to sustainable development becomes indispensable in building a more equitable and resilient future for generations to come.

Keywords: Higher Education, Manpower Development, Sustainable Development

Word Count: 198

Introduction

Sustainable development, a pivotal concept in contemporary society, encompasses a diverse array of practises aimed at meeting present needs while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own. It entails adopting a comprehensive approach that carefully balances economic growth, social progress, and environmental protection, all with the objective of satisfying the current generation's needs without compromising the opportunities of future generations. This approach necessitates the integration of sustainable practises and strategies across various sectors, including energy, transportation, agriculture, education, and urban planning, in order to ensure enduring well-being and environmental stewardship. Consequently, it becomes imperative to equip individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, and mindset that will enable them to propel sustainable development forward and effectively address the multifaceted challenges encountered in our rapidly evolving world.

According to Khoza, (2022), higher education is commonly known as tertiary education. It encompasses post-secondary academic programmes offered by universities, colleges, and other institutions, extending beyond the level of high school education (Chi, 2022). Its principal objective is to equip students with advanced knowledge and skills, preparing them for specialised careers, research opportunities, and leadership roles in society. Furthermore, higher education promotes critical thinking, creativity, personal development, lifelong learning, and intellectual growth, thus serving as a means for manpower development (Brooks, Gupta, Jayadeva, & Abrahams, 2020). Manpower development, on the other hand, involves the process of improving and cultivating the skills, knowledge, capabilities, and productivity of individuals within a specific workforce or labour pool (Ozkan-Ozen & Kazancoglu, 2021). It entails systematic efforts aimed at enhancing the quality and effectiveness of human resources within an organisation, community, or country.

However, despite its traditional role as a pathway to personal and professional growth, higher education now faces unprecedented challenges in meeting the evolving demands of the global economy. The rapid pace of technological advancements, shifting employment patterns, and the urgent need for sustainable practises have created a pressing need to examine the role of higher education in fostering a skilled and adaptable workforce. This paper aims to explore the roles of higher education as a tool for manpower development in a rapidly evolving world for sustainable development. Thus, this research will be discussed under the following subsections:

- Sustainable Development
- Higher Education

- Manpower Development
- Theoretical Framework
- Higher Education as a Tool For Manpower Development in a Rapidly Evolving World for Sustainable Development
- Challenges Faced by Higher Education in Promoting Manpower Development for Sustainable Development
- Ways of Addressing the Challenges
- Summary
- Conclusion
- Suggestions

Sustainable Development

It emerged as a response to a multitude of challenges, including climate change, political instability, resource scarcity, and cultural conflicts, as well as positive drivers such as economic integration and technological advancements. In light of these factors, the United Nations formulated a comprehensive set of goals known as the "sustainable development goals" (SDGs), comprising 17 objectives and 169 associated targets (UN, 2015). These goals are embedded within the global agenda for sustainable development, called Agenda 2030, which serves as a holistic blueprint for advancing peace, freedom, and overall well-being with a focus on the interconnected aspects of people, the planet, and prosperity.

At its core, sustainable development strives for a harmonious equilibrium among economic growth, social progress, and environmental preservation. It acknowledges the inherent unsustainability of our prevailing development paradigms, which often prioritise short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term environmental and social concerns. Addressing these issues necessitates the adoption of an integrated approach that recognises the intricate interdependencies between economic, social, and environmental factors.

The WCED defines sustainable development as an approach that ensures present needs are met while safeguarding the ability of future generations to fulfil their own needs (WCED 1987). It underscores the crucial role of economic development in reducing poverty, elevating living standards, and fostering social advancement. However, it also underscores the imperative of pursuing economic growth in a manner that minimises environmental degradation and resource depletion while promoting fairness and inclusivity within society. This implies that economic development should extend its benefits to all members of society,

including those who are marginalised or vulnerable. According to Gehlen (2010) the overarching objectives encompass poverty reduction, social justice, and the equitable provision of opportunities, resources, and essential services such as education, healthcare, and clean water.

Adshead, Thacker, Fuldauer, and Hall, (2019) argued that sustainable development places significant emphasis on long-term planning and foresight. It calls for the integration of economic, social, and environmental considerations into decision-making processes at all levels, encompassing governmental policies, business strategies, and individual choices. This necessitates a comprehensive and interconnected approach that recognises the trade-offs and interlinkages between different dimensions of development. The United Nations plans to achieve the SDGs by 2030, it draws upon foundational documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration, and the outcomes of the 2005 World Summit(UN, 2015). Its overarching objective is to make tangible progress towards fulfilling the SDGs by the target year of 2030.

Higher Education

Higher education represents a realm of advanced learning that extends beyond secondary education and is typically provided by colleges, universities, and specialized institutions (Adebisi, 2014). It plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals, societies, and economies by imparting specialised knowledge and skills and fostering personal and intellectual growth. As a critical institution for societal progress, higher education establishes a structured environment that nurtures critical thinking, research, and intellectual development (Davies, 2011). Moreover, it serves as a vibrant centre for knowledge generation, distribution, and innovation, contributing significantly to scientific and technological advancements. Additionally, higher education institutions are instrumental in shaping social values, promoting diversity, and fostering a sense of community (Adebisi, 2014).

At the undergraduate level, higher education offers comprehensive programmes that lead to bachelor's degrees upon completion. These programmes typically span three to four years and provide a balanced education, combining general requirements with specialised courses in specific fields of study. Postgraduate programmes, on the other hand, cater to individuals seeking advanced knowledge and specialised training in particular disciplines, including master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and professional degrees. These programmes

delve deeper into subjects, often involving research, thesis writing, or practical experiences, to develop expertise and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. In the sphere of research and innovation, higher education institutions function as vital hubs of knowledge creation, conducting research across various disciplines to drive scientific, technological, and societal progress. Collaborating with industry, government agencies, and other academic institutions, these institutions address societal challenges, explore novel ideas, and advance knowledge in diverse fields.

Critical thinking is another crucial aspect fostered by higher education (Davies, 2011). Through lectures, discussions, research projects, and assignments, students are encouraged to question, analyse, and evaluate information, arguments, and ideas. This approach nurtures intellectual curiosity, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity for independent and lifelong learning. Personal growth and development are also integral components of higher education. It provides opportunities for students to explore their interests, develop talents, and broaden their perspectives. Extracurricular activities, student organisations, and social interactions contribute to a well-rounded education by nurturing interpersonal and leadership skills.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) emphasised in 2004 that Nigerian higher education institutions must offer professional courses aligned with the specific needs of the nation. Scholars like Fakomogbon and Adegbija (2011) have further highlighted the need to bridge the gap between university education and the requirements not only in Nigeria but also in the global context. This underscores the continuous efforts to align higher education with the evolving needs of society and the world at large. According to NPE (2014) the goals of tertiary education shall be to:

- contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the need and interest of all Nigerians;
- Provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;
- Forge and cement national unity; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Manpower Development

In contemporary times, the term "manpower" has faced criticism due to its gender-exclusive connotation. To promote inclusivity, many organisations and institutions have adopted gender-neutral alternatives, such as "workforce" or "human resources," to describe the same concept. The term "manpower" traditionally refers to the total number of individuals available, capable, and willing to work within a specific organisation, industry, or nation (Sadiq-Bamgbopa, Hinmikaiye, Aladenika, Adewale, Olaitan, 2022). It commonly describes the human resources or workforce of a company or the labour force of a country. Manpower 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, Okafor and Essell (2022) asserts 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. This definition considers not only the number of available workers but also their active participation in the labour market, excluding those not seeking employment, such as students, retirees, or homemakers, from workforce calculations. Additionally, the concept takes into account the skills, qualifications, and expertise possessed by the labour force, enabling organisations to identify suitable candidates for various roles in different industries. The availability and distribution of manpower are influenced by dynamic labor market factors, including demographics, technology, and economic conditions.

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, Mahmood, Sherazi, Sajid, Hassan, (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 (e.g., communication, teamwork), 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. Moreover, identifying high-potential individuals and nurturing their talents through mentorship, coaching, and leadership development programmes is integral to fostering a skilled and competent workforce (Bello, Kashaam&Ologbenla, 2017).

The benefits of manpower development for organisations are manifold. Firstly, it boosts productivity as skilled employees perform tasks more efficiently (Igbokwe, Osakende&Anazodo, 2017). Secondly, a well-developed workforce can readily adapt to technological advancements and changes in the market, ensuring the organisation's sustainability (Igbokwe, Osakede&Anazodo, 2017). Thirdly, investing in employee development fosters talent retention, reducing turnover costs (Mutua, 2019). Additionally, a skilled workforce enhances innovation, driving the organisation forward. On a broader scale, manpower development contributes to a country's economic growth by attracting investment and encouraging entrepreneurship by creating a highly skilled labour force. Overall, these efforts create a mutually beneficial scenario, fostering a more competent and successful workforce while contributing to overall economic prosperity.

Theoretical Framework

Dynamic Human Capital Theory

Dynamic human capital theory represents a theoretical framework that centres on the fluid and ever-changing nature of human capital (Liening, 2013). This theory underscores the significance of perpetual learning and the continuous development of skills throughout an individual's professional journey. Merwe, (2010) 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. Particularly pertinent 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. Moreover, 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, Ding, Chen & Min (2019) skilled workforce is better equipped to confront environmental challenges, embrace green technologies, and contribute to more sustainable practises.

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. By prioritising experiential learning and industry collaborations, graduates can better meet the demands of the job market. 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. Thirdly, higher education institutions can 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 development. Moreover, inclusivity and accessibility must not be overlooked. Efforts should be made to ensure that higher education opportunities are accessible to individuals from diverse backgrounds (Merwe, (2010)). Initiatives like scholarships, financial aid, and outreach programmes can provide support to underprivileged students, enhancing social equity. Additionally, 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. Lastly, 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 (Merwe, 2010)). By endorsing and implementing such policies, societies can harness the full potential of their human capital, driving progress and prosperity.

Higher Education as a Tool for Manpower Development in a Rapidly Evolving World for Sustainable Development

Higher education plays a vital and multifaceted role in achieving manpower development for sustainable development. It serves as a crucial training ground, equipping individuals with the essential skills and knowledge required in various industries. This education goes beyond mere technical expertise; it also fosters sustainability-oriented mindsets 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. Additionally, higher education actively engages in policy formulation and advocacy efforts. By providing evidence-based research and expertise to policymakers and stakeholders, these institutions influence the adoption of sustainable practises both at the governmental level and within organisations.

Moreover, 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 (Gao, Ding, Chen & Min, 2019). 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 development (Gao, Ding, Chen & Min, 2019). 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.

In conclusion, higher education plays a transformative role in shaping a skilled and sustainability-conscious workforce (Probst, Bardach, Kamusingize, Templer, Ogwali, Owamani, Mulumba, Onwonga & Adugna, 2019). By providing the necessary knowledge, fostering a sense of responsibility, driving research and innovation, advocating for sustainable policies, engaging with communities, and promoting green industries and entrepreneurship, it forms a powerful force that can drive sustainable development across sectors and address pressing global issues effectively.

Challenges Faced by Higher Education in Promoting Manpower Development for Sustainable Development

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. Additionally, the 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.

Moreover, resistance to change within the traditional educational paradigm poses a significant hurdle, impeding the swift integration of emerging sustainability trends and demands. This resistance can come from faculty, staff, and entrenched institutional structures. Coupled with this is the challenge of limited faculty expertise in sustainable development, as the field requires specialised knowledge that may not always be readily available, impacting the delivery of comprehensive and cutting-edge education.

Furthermore, the bureaucratic nature of higher education and rigid accreditation processes can slow down decision-making and discourage institutions from prioritising sustainability initiatives. The lack of recognition and rewards for sustainability efforts may diminish the motivation to actively pursue and incorporate sustainable development principles into their practises. Bridging the gap between industry needs and education outcomes is also crucial to ensuring that graduates possess relevant skills that align with the demands of sustainable development careers. Additionally, raising awareness and fostering greater engagement among students, faculty, and administrators about the significance of sustainable development are essential for effecting positive change within higher education institutions.

In developing countries, where resources and capacity are often limited, higher education institutions face even greater disparities, challenging their ability to actively contribute to sustainable development efforts on a global scale. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from policymakers, educational leaders, faculty, and students to secure adequate funding, drive curriculum reforms, promote faculty development, and foster institutional flexibility, ultimately empowering higher education to play a more transformative role in sustainable development.

Ways of Addressing the Challenges

To effectively address the challenges faced by higher education in achieving manpower development for sustainable development, a multi-faceted approach involving various stakeholders is essential. Governments and private organisations must increase funding for higher education institutions, specifically targeting sustainability-focused initiatives, while curriculum reforms are necessary to integrate sustainability across disciplines, providing graduates with essential knowledge and skills for a sustainable future. Faculty development programmes should be encouraged to foster expertise in sustainability-related fields, and institutions must embrace flexibility and innovation to integrate sustainability initiatives seamlessly.

Raising awareness through advocacy efforts among students, faculty, administrators, and the community is crucial to garnering support for sustainability initiatives. Collaborating with industry, government agencies, and NGOs can bridge the gap between education outcomes and industry needs, leading to enhanced real-world research projects and funding opportunities. Recognition from accreditation bodies for sustainability efforts can serve as a powerful incentive for institutions to prioritise sustainability, empowering students in decision-making processes and fostering student-led initiatives.

Additionally, fostering international cooperation and knowledge exchange among higher education institutions globally can provide valuable insights and opportunities to address sustainability challenges on a global scale. Furthermore, supporting capacity-building efforts in developing countries will enable them to actively contribute to sustainable development despite limited resources. By collectively implementing these strategies, higher education institutions can better fulfil their roles in cultivating a skilled and sustainability-conscious workforce, paving the way for a more sustainable future.

Summary

This paper highlights the vital role of higher education in equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to address sustainability challenges. Emphasizing the interdependency of sustainable development, higher education, and manpower development, the paper showcases how institutions, through sustainable-oriented curricula, research, and innovation, foster a sense of responsibility towards the environment and society, enabling graduates to contribute meaningfully to sustainable practices across various sectors. Despite these benefits, challenges such as funding constraints, limited faculty expertise, bureaucratic resistance to change, and a lack of industry-aligned curricula hinder the seamless integration of sustainable development principles. However, the paper concludes with actionable strategies that advocate increased funding, faculty development, flexible curricula, advocacy and awareness campaigns, industry partnerships, and international cooperation to address these obstacles and unlock the full potential of higher education as a transformative tool for sustainable development in a rapidly evolving world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has underscored the pivotal role of higher education as a powerful tool for achieving manpower development in a rapidly evolving world for sustainable development. By providing specialised training and knowledge and fostering sustainability-oriented mindsets, higher education institutions can produce a skilled and responsible workforce capable of addressing global challenges. However, the paper also acknowledges the challenges faced by higher education in this pursuit, including funding constraints and resistance to change. Nevertheless, the paper remains optimistic, offering practical strategies to address these challenges, such as faculty development, flexible curricula, and industry partnerships. Embracing the proposed solutions and collaborative efforts from policymakers, educators, students, and stakeholders is crucial to fully realising the potential of higher education in driving sustainable development. By empowering graduates with the tools to contribute meaningfully to a sustainable future and creating a culture that prioritises sustainability, higher education can play a transformative role in shaping a more environmentally conscious and socially responsible society. As the world continues to evolve, higher education's commitment to sustainable development will prove indispensable in building a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future for generations to come.

Suggestions

Leveraging higher education as a tool for manpower development is crucial in preparing individuals to tackle the challenges of a rapidly evolving world and contribute to sustainable development. Here are some suggestions for stakeholders to help build a sustainable future through higher education:

1. Collaborate with academia, industry experts, and policymakers to review and update higher education curricula. Integrate sustainability-related subjects across disciplines to raise awareness and develop critical thinking skills among students.
2. Encourage interdisciplinary research and learning to address complex global issues. This approach fosters a comprehensive understanding of sustainability challenges and promotes innovative solutions that consider environmental, social, and economic aspects.
3. Integrate technology and digital tools into the educational process. This facilitates access to knowledge and empowers students and educators to engage in online courses, virtual collaborations, and open educational resources related to sustainability.
4. Create opportunities for hands-on experiences and community engagement. This could include internships, fieldwork, service-learning projects, and partnerships with NGOs and local communities to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations.
5. Foster a diverse and inclusive learning environment that encourages participation from individuals of all backgrounds, including those from underrepresented communities. Different perspectives enhance problem-solving capabilities and ensure equitable and sustainable development.

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