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(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Barriers to human capital development in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is a pivotal component of human capital development. However, barriers to human capital development exist, particularly in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State. This necessitated the study to assess the barriers to human capital development in education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Using Becker's Human Capital Theory (1964) to guide the study, three (3) objectives and research questions were formulated. The descriptive survey design, involving the Focus Group Discussion and In-depth interviews aided the collection of primary data. The purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 285 respondents. The data obtained were analysed in themes. The results revealed that insufficient funding limits access to quality teachers, learning materials, and infrastructure, leading to overcrowded classrooms and high dropout rates. Infrastructure deficiencies, such as inadequate classrooms, poor sanitation, and lack of electricity, further weaken the learning environment. High poverty exacerbates these challenges, as many families cannot afford school expenses, forcing children into labour or early marriages. Malnutrition also affects concentration and learning outcomes. These factors collectively hinder human capital development by reducing educational attainment and limiting future economic opportunities. The study recommended that government should be committed to allocate a substantial and consistent portion of the budget to education. Also, a diversified plan is needed for the government to improve the academic outcomes of students living in poverty, and this needed to be focusing on addressing issues related to both the social and educational needs of the students for a better society.

Keywords: Barrier; Development; Human Capital; Human Capital Development; High Poverty Levels

1. Introduction

Arguably, education is the cornerstone of human capital development, but there are many barriers to effective and qualitative education in the world (Singh, Kumar and Kumar, 2022). These barriers are not limited to inadequate funding, insufficient government budget allocation, poor infrastructure, insufficient ICT equipment, gender bias, but also include teacher shortages and qualified teachers, high poverty levels, government and management policy implementation gaps, exclusion of children with disabilities, insecurity and social unrest, inefficient and poor education management, inadequate vocational and technical education, and a lack of learning materials, among others (Schultz, 2022).

According to Becker (2020), the United Nations estimates over 262 million children and young adults around the world who stay out of school which demands the world leaders to take action and concrete steps to change narratives. It is

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obvious that children's access to education has the power to end poverty, develop societies, improve health and wellbeing, grow economies, and even end malnutrition which are the processes of bringing improvements in general welfare of the people. In a nutshell, education is the answer to the biggest challenges facing the developing countries of the world, particularly the Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since Nigeria gained independence from the British rule in 1960, education sector in the country has struggled with persistent barriers ranging from poverty, gender inequality, lack of resources, and inadequate infrastructure among other deteriorating factors. Despite a substantial portion of the national budget allocated to education from the establishment of Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of 1999 President Olusegun Obasango's administration which provides free, compulsory, and universal basic education for all children up to age 15, that led to Free Universal Basic Education Act of 2004, the National Policy on Education (NPE) 2013 and the Compulsory Education (Glewwe and Muralidharan, 2022); even the establishment of system-wide policies to comprehensively overhaul the education sector to improve learning and skill development, increase enrolment, and ensure the academic security of the nation's children in Nigeria in 2024 by President Bola Tinubu, the country's education sector often fail to meet up with its objectives as a result of corruption that is effecting the institutions of the country. This has horrible consequences that lead to inadequate infrastructure, outdated educational materials, poorly equipped classrooms and shortage of qualified teachers.

The number of out-of-school children between 2015 and 2023, however, increased rather than reduced. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2022) stated that almost 20 million Nigerian children were out of school. According to the data, the secondary school out-of-school population had grown by 61 per cent, from 6.3 million in 2000 to 10.1 million in 2019. According to Mustapha (2023), the number of primary school-aged children who were not in school had also increased by 50 per cent, from 6.4 million in 2010 to 9.7 million since 2023. This brought Nigeria on the third level among countries with the highest number of children deprived of education, after India and Pakistan.

In Nigeria, huge amount of money is budgeted for education annually. For instance, in 2020, N607 billion was budgeted for education, representing 5.74 per cent of the entire budget of the country. In 2021, it increased to N771.46 billion. In 2022, N900 billion was the country's total allocation to education, while in 2023, the administration set aside 4.95 per cent of the total budget to the sector (Mustapha, 2023). The effects of poor education sector extend beyond student level and directly affect national development. This is because, a workforce that lacks the necessary skills and competencies hampers innovation, entrepreneurship and productivity (Mincer, 2020). This in turn affect economic growth and encourage dependency on foreign proficiency and suppress Nigeria's potential to compete with a global standard. Nevertheless, the deficiency of quality and effective education sector contributes to social unrest, insecurity and instability. It is in view of these that this study seeks to unravel the barriers which include: inadequate funding, insufficient government budget allocation, poor infrastructure, insufficient ICT, teacher shortage, high poverty levels, policy implementation gaps, insecurity and social unrest, insufficient education management and inadequate vocational and training education to human capital development in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

The idea of human capital development can be traced back to the 18th century during the Industrial Revolution. Adam Smith referred to the concept in his book "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations", in which he explored the wealth, knowledge, training, talents, and experiences of a nation (Becker, 1993). Adams suggested that improving human capital through training and education leads to a more profitable enterprise that, which adds to the collective wealth of the society, and makes it a win for everyone. Human capital consists of the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society. To end extreme poverty and create more inclusive societies, there is need to promote human capital. Without human capital development in education sector, countries cannot sustain economic growth, will not have a workforce that is prepared for the more highly-skilled jobs of the future, and will not compete effectively in the global economy. The cognitive explanation centres on the personalized and internal nature of human behaviour which affect the interpretation of economic situations (Ukpong and Ikoh, 2014). This is true because governments or policy actors have a lead role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) plans through the policies they make and the education system they are responsible for, to ensure that education sector is improved to develop all citizens irrespective of the tribe, gender, race or language they speak (Le Blanc, 2015).

One of the barriers to human capital development in the education sector that stands as usual way of life in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria is corruption. According to Eze (2024) and UNESCO (2014), Nigeria is one of the 37 countries losing money that were meant to spent on education. Another barrier is lack of supervision, which is the process that

educational experts will move from one school to another to provide professional advice that would assist the students, teachers and the management of the school to improve the quality of the system. Lack of implementation of education policy is also a barrier to education sector in Akwa Ibom State. Poor infrastructure such as buildings, laboratories, machinery, furniture and electrical fixtures. Shortage and inadequate professional teachers. Unfortunately, education sector in Akwa Ibom State appear facing the problem of teacher shortage across schools (Obot, 2025). Other barriers include: insufficient government budget allocation; insufficient Information Communication Technology (ICT); inadequate vocational and technical education; insecurity and Social Unrest; high poverty levels; poor funding among other barriers.

Becker's theory posited that education and training are the most important investments in human capital. Becker argued that studies have shown that high schools are greatly raise a person's income, even after netting out direct and indirect costs of schooling, and even after adjusting for the fact that people with more education tend to have higher intelligence and better-educated and richer parents. It is important to understand that cultures and economic systems of the people differs from country to country especially the developing countries like Nigeria that faces many challenges of corruption both within and outside the education sector. In Nigeria, achieving effective and having access to quality education is a huge problem.

Ukpong (2010) elucidated that the challenge here in Africa, Nigeria inclusive, centres on the inability of the government to provide the enabling environment for efficient performance. Many young people of primary and secondary school age do not attend school while many enrolled but drop out because their parents are not able to afford school fees and other school necessities. Some do not have the possibility to take the school-leaving examination qualifying them to enter higher education or to graduate from school as the first step towards being qualified for work, while many graduates become job seekers for decades. According to UNESCO (2022), in sub-Saharan Africa, only two in three children complete their primary and secondary school education.

The economy of China for example, become a developed economy today because a greater junk of the populace are into technology and industrialization which propel the economy to its enviable height globally (Nwachukwu, 2024). But, in our own clime, the case is the reverse, where even young graduate at first class level decides to join politics instead of inventions to propel industrialization for economic development. This contributed immensely to the economic downturn of the country. However, the communal money that is meant to be used for the good of all is packaged by a few individuals at the top and sent into their private accounts, leaving the masses to their fate.

Studies have been conducted on the need to understand the barriers of human capital development in the education sector. For instance, Nwachukwu (2024) conducted a study on human capital development as a driver for educational improvement in Nigeria, and the results revealed that human capital development is crucial for educational progress in Nigeria because it enhances educational outcomes and improves workforce readiness. Ifejika (2017) focused on the challenges for accumulating human capital in Nigeria, with focus on education and health care services without in-depth reasons for not achieving this goal. Imran (2015), in his "barriers to human capital development: measurements, gender disparities and determinants" where he studied Towns and Districts of Punjab, concentrated more on barriers of education attainment and gender parities. However, none of these studies focused on the barriers of human capital development in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, which is the gap that this study has filled in the body of knowledge.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assess the barriers to human capital development in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- Ascertain how infrastructure deficiency hinders human capital development in education sector.
- Examine how inadequate funding affects human capital development in education sector of akwa ibom state.
- Investigate how high poverty levels affect human capital development in education sector.

1.2. Research Questions

- What are the infrastructure deficiency that hinder human capital development in education sector?
- Why does inadequate funding affect human capital development in education sector?
- How do high poverty levels affect human capital development in education sector?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance for political actors, stakeholders in ministry of education, school principals, teachers, parents, students, community leaders, labour market and development experts. It provides insights for the effective education sector that will impact on human capital development in Akwa Ibom State. The study contributes to the existing literature on human capital development through education, policy developers and students whose focus is to develop human capital. Furthermore, this study provides input to policy and lawmakers to enhance and boost their ability to make efficient policies and programmes that will address the quest to improved education sector in Akwa Ibom State. The study would bring immense value in policy recommendations and academic discourse on the dynamics of human capital development in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, where secondary schools were selected in Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Abak and Mkpat Enin Local Government Areas cutting across the three senatorial districts of the state. The major variables for investigation were: inadequate funding; infrastructure deficiency and high poverty levels as they affect human capital development in the education sector. The study was guided by the assumptions of Berger's Human Capital Theory, developed in 1964. The scope of this study spanned between 2015 and 2023.

2. Literature and Empirical Review

Human capital development has been described as an end or objective of development to any nation. It is a way to fulfil the potentials of people by increasing their capabilities, and this necessarily implies empowering the people in a way that enable them to participate actively in their own development and progress. Human capital development strengthens the skills, knowledge, productivity, creativity and inventiveness of people. Therefore, human capital development is people and not goods or production-centred strategy nor infrastructural development. Essentially, it is the empowerment of people to identify their own priorities and potentials in order to implement programmes and projects of direct benefit to them. This in turn implies the active participation of people in the development process and the consequent need to evolve institutions that permit and indeed encourage that participation (Otu, and Adenuga, 2006).

UNESCO (2022), is of the view that human capital development is a process of actively improving and enhancing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and health of individuals within a population or workforce, essentially investing in people to maximize their potential and contribute effectively to economic growth and societal development. The process involves initiatives like education, training, healthcare, and personal development programs to build a skilled and productive workforce.

Moreover, it has been argued that human capital development raises the income of the poor in a nation, therefore, raising the income spread between the poor and the rich which of course is a worldwide objective of education (Akpoghelie, 2016). It has also been maintained that human capital development is closely tied to the issues of education, economic growth and development. Economic growth and development are largely a function of human capital, which is an embodiment of education, good health, knowledge, skills, attitudes, expertise and technological known-how (Nwankwo, 1981; Babalola 2003; Adeyemi and Akpotu, 2004).

The Nigerian government plays a key role in promoting human capital development through policies that support access to quality education at all levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Adebayo, 2020). The first variety of the National Policy on Education was introduced in 1977, which formed the framework for the current basic education rights for Nigerian children. They include the National Policy on Education (NPE) 2013 that laid Nigeria's philosophical foundation for basic education. The said policy emphasizes the universal right to education, protected under Nigeria's Child Rights Act 2003 as well as the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. The 2003 Child Rights Act was inspired by the 1999 Convention on the Rights of the Child, formally enshrined the right of Nigerian children to basic education. Basic education policy covers children aged 0-15 years, with Early Child Care and Development Education traversing from 0-4 years and formal schooling extending for ten years.

Buhari's led government had on different occasions, promised to improve the sector, including increasing budgetary allocations to education, resolving long-standing issues with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), and improving the quality of primary and secondary education. The government had also pledged one free meal (to include fruits) daily, for public primary school pupils to encourage children to enrol to be educated and reduce the number of out-of-school children. Under the World Bank-supported Innovation Development and Effectiveness in the Acquisition of Skills (IDEAS) Project, approved in 2020, US$200m was invested in Abia, Benue, Ekiti, Gombe, Kano, and Edo States

as well as in 20 Federal Science and Technical Colleges nationwide. In 2021, Nigeria guarantees the right of all learners, teachers and other school users to receive education in safe and secure learning environments through National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-free schools in Nigeria (World Bank. (2022).

Ministry of education is considered to be a key Ministry in Akwa Ibom State, with the zonal offices in 10 Local Government Areas including Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Ikono, Etinan, Ikot Abasi, Oron, Itu, Abak, Ukanafun and Eket. The state is still battling with the problems of effective implementation of education policies that could aides the state to achieve her pre-determined objectives, as Ekanem (2003), believes that every public policy arms at solving a social problem. Education is a consuming passion of the people and the Government of Akwa Ibom State. From 2007 when free and compulsory education was introduced in Akwa Ibom State till date education moved from ruins and commodities beyond reach to citadels of equal opportunities practicing well-articulated and State Government fortified Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, with government regularly raising standards to ensure greater performance in the sector.

Education sector in Akwa Ibom has grown in leaps and bounds to become a major component of state economic empowerment and development strategy with 1,110 primary schools, 230 secondary schools and 11 tertiary institutions equipped with classrooms, libraries, workshops and laboratories, besides, 5 State libraries, together with the e-Library. All these were provided to deepen reading culture and promote education sector capable of producing self-independents Akwa Ibomites with full potentials including critical thinking, problem solving, financial security, confidentiality, lifelong learning, personality development, economic growth as well as improved mental and physical health. These visions have been bastardized with barriers including inadequate funding, insufficient government budget allocation, poor infrastructure, insufficient ICT, teacher shortage and quality, high poverty levels, policy implementation gaps, insecurity and social unrest, inefficient education management, inadequate vocational and technical education amongst other barriers.

Many schools in Akwa Ibom State lack basic infrastructure to support safe, healthy and effective learning environments Enefiok (2025), due to poor funding, corruption, project abandonment, poor planning, poor maintenance and other factors. School Infrastructure refers to the structures, facilities and systems that contribute to the function of an institution. These also include buildings, roads, bridges, power supplies, water and sanitation supplies, telecommunication systems and more. When these infrastructures are not operating properly, the chain of learning is disrupted (UNESCO, 2022). This disruption hinders effective and efficient learning, which, in turn, causes low standards of learning.

Poor infrastructure in schools have adverse impact on learning and achievement. It can lead to higher dropout rates and lower teacher retention. Factors that contribute to poor infrastructure in Schools are, but not limited to poor funding, inadequate use of resources, poor maintenance, corruption and Lack of prioritization by administrations (World Bank, 2022). Poor infrastructure can hamper students' learning and progress. Overcrowding, noise pollution as well as inadequate sanitation can bring students from concentration to distraction. For instance, some public schools in Nigeria, teachers are expected to teach over 90 students, and some students share desks and chairs while some sit on a bare floor (Iordye and Jato, 2023)

Moreover, protecting students against biological, physical, and chemical dangers that can create unhealthy and improper learning environment important. Waterborne infectious diseases and physical pitfalls associated with poor construction and maintenance practices are posing great risks to children in Nigerian schools. Therefore, a well-designed school environment that is free of these biological, physical, and chemical dangers is an integral part of efforts to setting a positive school tone for student success in the Nigeria. School environment indirectly affects student achievement from its direct impact on teachers. This is because teachers are paramount on the list of factors required for student achievement, and teachers require good physical environments to be effectual in beef up learning outcomes (Rice, 2003; Australian Government, 2016).

On a survey of primary school children in Ondo State, Nigeria, it was discovered that the pupils' satisfaction in school was remarkably related to the school infrastructure (Aina, 2015). Another study on teachers in rural public secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria found that physical environmental school factors accounted for 29.2 percent of the disparity in instructional quality (Raji, 2019).

The result of poor infrastructure in education sector starts with investments toward schools' infrastructural development in communities across the state, and both private and public agencies should procure funding to help accelerate the implementation of social and economic infrastructure projects especially in education because, education infrastructure shortages are a barrier to learning at all levels, with particular impact on schools in sub-Saharan Africa

(World Bank, 2022). Students feel more at ease and focused when their surroundings are well maintained with sufficient classroom space, proper lighting and ventilation, comfortable furniture and access to technology, can contribute to effective and efficient learning.

Inadequate funding for education is a major issue that threatens the future of the Africa's children (World Bank, 2022). Lack of funding has leads to millions of children being denied access to quality education, and this have serious consequences not only to the children and their families, but on the economy of the nation in general. According to UNESCO (2022), millions of crisis-affected girls and boys across the African continent are being denied their human right to a quality education. This is because the financial mean that can provide a quality education are not in place, and this equally stagnate them from enjoying the same rights as the rest of the children from the developed countries.

In the 1960s, after Nigeria had independent, educational funding was the only way Nigerian nationalists used to empower and develop our people. During this period, the government took over the control and administration of education sector from the missionaries, and started funding schools through budgetary and policies that enhanced effective education. Funding education is primarily the responsibility of the government at all levels. To a great extent, the level of funding determines the quality of education. Through funding, relevant instructional materials are purchased, and an adequate number of human resources are provided to realize the objectives of the school (INEYE-BRIGGS, 2023).

Akwa Ibom State need a new vision that is based on human rights for all, and education is at the core of such vision. Not just education for the few or the privileged, but education for all of Akwa Ibom children. To deliver on this, we need to embrace human rights in action, based on the promises outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UNESCO, 2022). The acquisition of effective and quality education rests on the availability of funds to provide adequate teaching and learning materials. However, most school buildings are dilapidated and many students study under such conditions. There is also a widespread shortage of teaching manpower, dilapidated classrooms, furniture, textbooks, ICT facilities and instructional materials. It is no longer news that schools in Akwa Ibom State experience the loss of facilities, the deterioration of equipment, and uncompleted school projects as a result of poor funding. Due to poor funding, the quality of education offered is affected by poor attendance and inadequate preparation by teachers; the morale of teachers is low due to poor service conditions and low salaries (INEYE-BRIGGS, 2023).

One of the reasons for poor funding in education sector in Akwa Ibom is that political class does not summon sufficient political will to invest in education (Obot, 2025). This has led to the politicisation of some educational programmes. Other reasons include that defaults in school fees paid by parents or guardians contribute to ineffective funding of education by the government, the political class sometime may not be willing to invest in education, Akwa Ibom State spend more on debt repayment than education, regressive taxation policies can reduce the amount of money available for education, other sectors of the economy, like health, security, etc. compete for resources, the rapidly growing school-aged population creates a high demand for education and over biting poverty levels. In summary, education is the most capital-intensive venture that requires every stakeholder to contribute to its funding because government alone cannot bear the financial burden (Analaba and Jack, 2023; Chuku, 2023).

One way of tackling poverty is for individuals and organization to direct attention toward investing in education. Investing in education, according to Ijaiya (1998), could take different forms, such as massive expansion of educational facilities, vocationalisation of education, adequate funding of education, etc. Many of the poorest families in Africa are not able to attend school, and the school remains too expensive and children are forced to stay at home doing chores or work themselves. Families remain locked in a cycle of poverty that goes on for generations. In many countries throughout Africa, while education is theoretically free, in practice "informal fees" see parents forced to pay for "compulsory items" like uniforms, books, pens, extra lessons, exam fees, or funds to support the school buildings. In other places, the lack of functioning public (government-supported) schools means that parents have no choice but to send their children to private schools that, even if they are "low-fee," are unaffordable for the poorest families who risk making themselves destitute in their efforts to get their children better lives through education.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 63 percent of the Nigerian population (133 million) suffered multidimensional poverty in 2022. Multidimensional poverty considers factors such as deprivation of education, health, and better living standards in its term designation (World Bank, 2022). Poverty and education in Akwa Ibom State are closely linked. People with no or little education are more likely to live in poverty, and poverty can limit access to education (Barnett and Hustedt, 2020). It is obvious that SatiSense, the data tech company had released that Akwa Ibom state has the largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty in the Niger Delta region. It was culled from the 2022 multidimensional poverty report of the National Bureau of Statistic (NBS) that the people of

Akwa Ibom State do not only lack money, but they also lack access to education which is the bed rock of development to any society. The report reveals that Akwa Ibom has 5.08 million multidimensionally poor people which represents 71% of its population (Etim, 2023).

Akwa Ibom has earned over N4 trillion in FAAC allocation, derivation income and IGR. But it is sad to say that the state poverty level is still popping up and the people are still living in poverty because their huge resources are not properly managed, and the government is not only reckless, thoughtless and wasteful, its officials were largely pilfering. NBS has consistently listed the state as being home to some of the poorest people in the country despite its famed oil wealth. The NBS statistics stimulated the former Governor, Udom Emmanuel to cast aspersions on the integrity of NBS and claimed that the NBS was partisan and envious of his achievements in the state and was therefore out to embarrass him instead of addressing the issue of poverty in a holistic manner.

In summary, the agenda of Sustainable Development Goals is a plan of action for people, countries, state and local government dwellers to move from poverty to prosperity. It also explores to heighten universal peace and a higher quality freedom. Khan, Hasan and Islam (2021), recognised that the quest to eradicate poverty in all aspects and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest universal challenge and a necessary demand for human capital development. All countries and all stakeholders including policy makers need to act in collaboration and partnership to implement the goal. One way to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our land is through effective education. This is a call that leaders (starting from the grassroots) should be determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to move the world onto a sustainable and resilient path through quality education.

3. Theoretical Framework

Becker's human capital theory (1964) was adopted for the study. Becker posits that investing in the knowledge, skills, and experience that individuals possess will in turn increase their productivity as well as earnings. Becker argued that human capital, like physical capital, can be invested in and increased through education, training, and experience. It is certain that people can increase their productivity and efficiency by investing in their education, training, and health. It is based on the idea that an educated population is a more productive population.

Human capital theory rests on the assumption that formal education is highly is highly instrumental and necessary to improve the productive capacity of a population. In short, human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population. Human capital theory emphasizes how education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability, which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings (Okolie, 2020). The provision of formal education is seen as an investment in human capital, which proponents of the theory have considered as equally or even more worthwhile than that of physical capital.

Becker posited human capital as "activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing resources in people" (Becker 1994, 11), and its main forms were schooling and on-the-job training, although he also considered medical care, migration, and searching for information about prices and incomes.

According to Becker, human capital is the set of skills that the workforce possesses" (Goldin, 2016). Starting from this definition, I intend to discuss in this section the main ideas and debates around the theory of human capital, given the close connection between it, the university environment and the labour market. Whether we are talking about general human capital, or one specific to certain tasks, the core of this theory is the decision the individual makes when balancing the costs and benefits of an action such as admission to college. More specifically, in this case, human capital represents the skills and competences that an individual would learn during the person' studies, as well as gains obtained at a job for which individual has prepared.

The theory has some weak points on the ground of assuming that people are rational actors whereas public servants do not make decisions based on their beliefs, goals and information available to them, they strive to bring out their best in their organizations. The theory assumes that workers as individuals without considering the collectively of public service aims and their goal oriented methods of operation.

Human capital theory also considers public servants, businessmen and entrepreneurs as people who have private property rights. It is worthy of note that even the public servant himself does not have control over his life. This is because, even a public worker has code of conduct that regulate his activities which means that the staff is treated as

government (or its agency) assets, rather than a private individual. Again, public property is secured by laws that are clearly defined and enforced by governments.

4. Methods and Materials

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design that employed a qualitative method of data collection where interview schedule was used as a tool for primary data collection. The data for the study were collected from primary sources.

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State which is one of the 36 states in Nigeria, and it situated in South-South geopolitical zone of the country. The state has 31 local government areas, with Uyo as the state capital. Akwa Ibom State is segmented into three (3) senatorial districts (Akwa Ibom North East, Akwa Ibom North West and Akwa Ibom South Senatorial Districts). According to National Population Commission (NPC), in year 2022, Akwa Ibom was estimated to have a population of 7,200,000 populations (NPC, 2023). The state shares boundaries with Abia State in the North, Rivers State in the East, Cross River State in the West and the Gulf of Guinea in the South. Akwa Ibom State has three major ethnic groups and languages are Ibibio, Annang and Oro. The prevalent religion is Christianity. There are few other faith – based organizations in the state. The major economic activities are trading, farming (mostly for upland dwellers), fishing (for riverine coastal dwellers), artisanship and white – collar jobs. Akwa Ibom State is accessible by air, land and water. Rich in culture, arts and crafts, which provide entrancing experiences for tourists. It is the largest oil-producing and revenue contributor to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's economy.

The population of this study consists of 25 parents; 10 staff from Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education; staff and students from the five (5) selected secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East, Akwa Ibom North West and Akwa Ibom South Senatorial Districts. The schools were selected using purposive sampling method. The schools are: Community High School Afaha-Obong, Abak (30 students and 20 staff), Federal College Ikot Ekpene (30 students and 23 staff), Government Technical College, Ikot Akata (30 students and 25 staff), Offot Ukwa Secondary School, Obio Offot, Uyo (30 students and 25 staff), and Adiaha Obong Secondary, Uyo (30 students and 23 staff). The total number of students participated in this study were 150, while the number of school staff participated in this study were 118 which form the total population of 303. For the purpose of this study, fifty (50) respondents were selected from each school; 25 respondents were selected from the categories of parents; while 10 respondents were selected from the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of education; and the population of this study is two hundred and Eighty - fifty (285) respondents drawn from the selected study areas.

The total number of secondary schools in Abak Local Government Area is 16, but 5 secondary schools were selected using purposive sample method. A purposive sampling, according to Guarte and Baarrios (2006), is a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest. The population from the five selected schools were 268 students and 272 staff. Using quota sampling method, 55 were allocated to staff and students at Community High School Afaha-Obong, Abak; 53 were allocated to Federal College Ikot Ekpene; 55 were allocated to Government Technical College, Ikot Akata; 50 were allocated to Offot Ukwa Secondary School, Obio Offot, Uyo; while 55 were allocated to Adiaha Obong Secondary, Uyo. From this population, a subset of individuals were chosen using proportional allocation to select the sample size of 50 respondents from each school, for this study. This gave unbiased representation of two hundred and fifty (250) respondents. The respondents represented the staff of secondary schools and ministry of education, students as well as parents/caregivers in Abak Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Method of proportional allocation was adopted by the researcher. This was done by dividing the staff and students into subgroups called strata based on gender, and randomly selected the sample size using probability sampling method of stratified sampling. In Federal College Ikot Ekpene, the whole staff were 53 while the students were 36. The staff and students were grouped into two strata – male and female. Male staff were 28 and 25 females. Using stratified sampling, only 50 respondents were selected. The staff and students from Government Technical College, Ikot Akata were 81 (48 staff and 33 students), but 50 were selected for the study. At Offot Ukwa Secondary School, Obio Offot, Uyo, from a total number of 57 staff and 38 students, 50 were selected. From a total number of 50 staff of Community High School, Afaha-Obong the entire 50 both teaching and nonteaching staff were selected. While 50 were equally selected from the total staff of 56 at Adiaha Obong Secondary, Uyo. From the strata, the sample was selected by applying stratified sampling selection on each stratum. From the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education, Abak was selected using purposive sampling technique, and 10 respondents were selected using simple random sampling. 25 parents/guardians were equally selected using same simple random sampling. This make the total sample size of two hundred and Eighty – Five (285) for this study.

Data were collected in this study through interview schedule that facilitated effective interviews with the respondents. The interview schedule was flexible and customized in order to obtain key information about the respondents. The interview schedule started with a crafting opening statement which helped to established a positive rapport with the respondents. Socio-demographic characteristics were gotten through lighter questions that allowed the respondents to introduce themselves through open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questions on the interview schedule were raised in line with the specific and overall objectives of the study. The secondary data collection was extensive review of the related literature drawn from secondary sources of textbooks, official gazettes journals, newspapers, magazines, websites, previous researches etc.

The principal instrument for primary data collection for the study was interview guide that was structured with an opening introduction that made the respondents feel welcomed and indicated the objectives of the interview. The study relied on a moderately scheduled interview that focused on major questions that aligned with the barriers to human capital development in the education sector with probing questions under. The closing contained the summary of the subject matter. The entire exercise was conducted with the help of two research assistants with a recorder and writing materials for proper capturing.

In the course of this study, the primary data obtained for the study were organized by transcribing the interviews and developing a coding system to categorized relevant information. Codes were assigned to the segmented data and analysed using thematic analysis.

The purpose of the study was communicated to the Principal, management of the ministry of education and staff of the study areas before the field work. They were also notified on the subject matter. This made the participation of the research completely voluntary. The principals provided oral consent to their staff before the study commenced, and there was 100 percent participant rate with full assurance of their confidentiality, and that they were free to decline or sign off participation if they were not comfortable.

Also, the researcher did not allow biases to influence the conduct of the study and finding derived therefrom.

5. Findings and Discussions

In this section, data collected from the field are presented and analysed on qualitative method using a Thematic Analysis on the basis of responses from the interview schedule. The profiles of the respondents which are: sex, age, work status, income status, place of work, religious affiliation and marital status were presented and analysed using simple percentage.

Table 1 The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=285)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	157	55.1
Female	128	44.9
Age Brackets		
15-20	150	52.6
21-25	8	2.8
26-30	14	4.9
31-35	21	7.4
36-40	40	14.0
41-45	32	11.2
46-50	20	7.0
Income Status		
40k – 50k	12	4.2

51k – 60k	11	3.9
61k – 70k	18	6.3
71k – 80k	26	9.1
80k and above	53	18.6
Nil	165	57.9
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	284	99.6
Islam	0	0
African Tradition Religion	1	0.4
Marital Status		
Married	125	43.9
Single	156	54.7
Single parenting	4	1.4

Source: Field data (2025)

Table 1 shows that out of 285 respondents, 55.1 percent were male, while the remaining 44.9 percent were female. Though equal opportunities were given to both sexes to participate in the study, male gender had more chances to be randomly elected for the study. On age levels, 52.6 percent of the respondents were between 15 to 20 years old; 2.8 percent were between the ages of 21 to 25 years; while 4.9 percent were at the range of 26 to 30 years old; 7.4 percent respondents were between 31 and 35 years old; 14.0 percent were at the age of 36 to 40; 11.2 percent were at the range of 41 and 45 years of age, and 0.7 percent fall at the category of 46 to 50 years old. On Income Status, 4.2 percent earns between ₦40,000.00 to ₦50,000.00 per month; 3.9 percent earns between ₦51,000.00 to ₦60,000.00; 6.3 percent were at the category of ₦61,000.00 and ₦70,000.00; 9.1 percent of respondents earn between ₦71,000.00 and ₦80,000.00; 18.6 percent earn ₦81,000.00 and above while 57.9 percent were not income earners. This is because majority of the respondents were below 20 years old, who depend wholly on their parents as secondary school students.

On religion, 99.6 percent of the respondents were Christians, there was no respondents from the Islamic Religion; 0.4 percent of the respondents were African Traditional Religion (ATR). This made it clear that the study was conducted at the area where Christianity is the dominant religion. In the area of marriage, 43.9 percent of the respondents were married, 54.7 percent were singles while 1.4 percent respondents were single parents.

5.1. Infrastructural deficit and Education Sector

To answer research question three which focused on poor infrastructure as a barrier to human capital development in education sector in Akwa Ibom State, the interview focused on how inadequate classroom space affect student engagement and participation in class, and measured the relationship between access to functional laboratories and students' ability to perform practical experiments. To further reveal the effects of poor infrastructure in education sector, the interview schedule also focused on how poor lighting and ventilation in classrooms affect student concentration and health. The participants said:

Despite the agitations for improved infrastructure in our schools, schools around this area face significant challenges to include poor infrastructure. The state of educational infrastructure in Akwa Ibom State has been a longstanding concern, impacting the quality of education and the state's overall development. Many schools across the state lack proper maintenance, leading to crumbling structures that endanger the safety of students and staff. From inadequate classrooms to collapsing roofs, these physical conditions hinder the learning environment. Inadequate classroom space has significantly decrease student engagement and participation by creating physical limitations that hinder active learning, group work, movement, and overall comfort. These, in turn, lead to distractions, reduced focus, and a less positive learning environment, ultimately impacting students' ability to actively participate in class discussions and activities.

To further explain on how infrastructural deficits hinder education sector in Akwa Ibom State, respondents further said:

Poor lighting and lack of ventilation in classrooms can significantly affect student's concentration which make them feel sluggish and less focused. It can also affect health by causing discomfort, headaches, impaired cognitive function, as well as respiratory issues. These health challenge can decrease academic performance and negatively impact overall well-being. Also, when classrooms lack modern technology, teachers are significantly restricted in their ability to implement innovative teaching methods that is obtainable in the developed countries, as they are unable to utilize tools like online learning platforms, digital simulations, and data analysis software, which are crucial for engaging students with different learning styles that provide personalized feedback, and create a more dynamic and conducive learning environment for the students.

Finding showed that with limited classroom space, students experience difficulty in focusing and concentrating, limited social interaction, and higher stress levels that stand as barriers to human capital development. Apart from that, learning becomes less interactive and students find it difficult to move freely. the absence of modern technology in classrooms significantly hinders teachers' ability to adopt contemporary teaching methods, which can lead to a less engaging and potentially less effective learning experience for students. Inadequate infrastructure, particularly in schools located in lower socioeconomic areas, can significantly contribute to disparities in educational attainment by limiting access to quality learning environments, hindering student engagement, and creating barriers to accessing educational resources, ultimately disadvantaging students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds compared to their peers in better-equipped schools.

5.2. Inadequate Funding and Education Sector

To answer the research question one which focused on how inadequate funding barriers human capital development in education sector in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, the interview focused on the negative impacts of insufficient funding on students, teachers, infrastructure, and overall educational quality, while further proposing concrete solutions like increased government allocation, improved resource management, community involvement, and potential funding sources like corporate donations or philanthropic initiatives. The respondents were saying thus:

The overcrowded classrooms, shortage of qualified teachers, dilapidated infrastructure, limited learning materials and other social factors are as a result of inadequate funding in the education sector. Most times, we wonder why financial strategies are not implemented well, knowing the fact that education is the key to development in any state. This funding situation has led to a number of issues in our schools, including poor teaching and learning, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of academic staff. We witness how large class sizes hinder personalized attention and effective learning. Equally, low salaries (sometimes delay in payment) have led to teacher shortages, and lack of experienced educators is a problem. Deteriorating buildings all over, outdated technology, and inadequate lab facilities hinder learning so much. Lack of textbooks, supplies, and learning resources restricts many students access to quality education. It is unfortunate to say that state education funding is hard to come by and there's no organized plan for rebuilding or renewing schools. This shows that the funding mechanism in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, needs to be developed to achieve its educational objectives compared to other developed countries (Otioro, 2024).

Another respondent said:

Implementing transparent systems to ensure funds are used effectively within the education sector will not only encourage the students to effective learning, but will go a long way to building a society of creative thing and developed mindset. Community involvement in school support, fundraising, and volunteer initiatives, collaborating with business men and women to provide financial support and resources for educational programs ae well as encouraging charitable giving to support educational causes are very good, but our people are not encouraging to do that. Urgent and sustained interventions are needed to reverse this trend and revitalize the education system. Adequate funding, coupled with strategic reforms and collaborative efforts, is crucial to providing every Nigerian child with access to quality education, thus unlocking the nation's potential for sustainable development and prosperity.

Findings showed that inadequate funding in education sector in Akwa Ibom State has downgraded human capital development as this barrier results in inadequate provision and maintenance of educational infrastructure, such as inadequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries and other facilities. Despite the pivotal roles played by education, it is disheartening that many developing nations, are captured by corruption to the extent that funding education sector often seen inconsequential in most aspects, while some of the funding is diverted. This manifests in the deplorable condition of classrooms and offices, poor quality of teachers and insufficient teachers, lack of teaching materials, no or poorly equipped laboratories and libraries, and poorly motivated and remunerated staff amongst others. As Ukpong

and Ikoh (2014), noted that in the face of decline in expected revenue, it became difficult to fund budgetary allocation, execute projects that had been initiated and fund programmes that target social and infrastructural development. These invariably have far-reaching consequences to include among others poor quality of student output, high rate of school dropouts, high crime rate, high level of unemployment and dependence ratio, increase in the proliferation of private schools with its attendant challenges and so on. Findings proved that this funding compromises both human capital development and national development.

5.3. High Poverty Levels and Education Sector in Akwa Ibom State

In research question two, focus was on how high poverty levels barriers human capital development in education sector in Akwa Ibom State. Data revealed that poverty impact access to education, and many students from low-income families faced challenges in terms of school attendance and academic performance. Providing more insights about how high poverty levels barriers effective education in Akwa Ibom State, the respondents said:

Children's brains develop best when they have low exposure to stress in their houses. Poverty has created series of emergencies that trigger stress hormones on students. These hormones have a dampening effect on brain development, which can result in an inability to pay attention in classes, regulate emotions, or develop proper memory function. Many impoverished children have grown up with what is sometimes called "learned helplessness." They believe that the odds are stacked against them and there is nothing they can do to get out of the cycle of poverty. Poverty has negatively impact students' education in many ways, including limiting access to education, increasing drop-out rates, and hindering academic performance. Poverty can also perpetuate cycles of deprivation and hopelessness.

For more explanations on how high levels of poverty affect education sector, respondents in the interview schedule further said:

Factors like poor nutrition, inadequate healthcare access, and a stressful home environment associated with poverty can significantly hinder a child's ability to learn by impacting their cognitive development, concentration, emotional well-being, and overall physical health, making it difficult to focus in school and absorb information effectively; essentially, a child struggling with basic needs like food and a stable home may not have the capacity to fully engage in learning activities. It is certain that limited educational opportunities children due to poverty can have many long-term consequences including e**conomic hardship** because people without education are more likely to be unemployed or earn lower salaries; and this can make it difficult for them to escape poverty even as they grow up. This can also lead them struggle to fit in socially and may be marginalized and more vulnerable to exploitation.

Findings showed that poverty negatively impacts students in a variety of ways through different factors like health issues stemming from a no nutritional diet, homelessness, lack of food, or the inability to receive medical treatment for illnesses, and lot more that are symptoms of poverty. Children from poor families may not have access to high-quality education, as Phipps and Lethbridge (2006), captured that children from low-income families have worse outcomes than children from high-income families. According to Udoh (2025), one of the major challenges confronting Nigeria as a nation, as well as Akwa Ibom as a State is poverty. Poverty can lead to high drop-out rates, especially for children from disadvantaged communities. Lack of support and poverty can lead to poor academic performance. Children living in poverty may experience neglect and social deprivation. Children living in poverty may have lower self-esteem and more mental health problems, Children living in poverty may be exposed to environmental toxins, crime, and violence. Nearly one-fifth of students nationwide are either living in poverty, attending a high-poverty school, or both. Parents of these families often work longer hours or multiple jobs, meaning they may not be available to assist their children with their schoolwork.

6. Conclusion

This study assessed barriers to human capital development in the education sector of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The result revealed that many government secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State are poorly funded. The inadequate funding therefore, lead to lack of modern technology in classrooms which limit teachers' ability to incorporate innovative teaching methods, as well as inadequate infrastructure which equally contribute to disparities in educational attainment between different socioeconomic groups in Akwa Ibom State. The study also revealed that poverty is one of the major reasons why many Nigerians could not access quality education. It is discovered that students from poor background do not only receive the worst education, but they also fall victim to lifestyle and health issues that hinder their ability to learn. Students living in poverty often have fewer resources at home to complete homework, study, or engage in activities that helps equip them for success during the school day. It will be better to educate our children about careers and what it takes to succeed on the job, helping these poor students to aim higher.

Finally, investing in school infrastructure, designing schools that are efficient, inclusive, and conducive to learning, ensuring schools have adequate facilities, textbooks, and instructional materials. Building schools with accessibility features such as basic classroom infrastructure to include lighting can ensure quality learning condition. support safe and healthy learning environments. The implication of this study is that barriers to education can lead to a number of negative consequences, including poverty, social inequality etc. which therefore negate the processes that enhance human capital development.

6.1. Contribution to knowledge/ Suggestions for further study

Nigeria government should return to a serfdom system where education will be only for a certain few. It is disheartening and unfortunate situations in Nigeria when the society place much value on education, receiving so much from even the poorest parents who do not want to send their children to higher institutions, but they take the risk of borrowing money some sell their clothes in the course of training their children following the 6, 6, 4 educational systems in Nigeria with utmost expectations, only for those parents to realise that job opportunity was limited to less than one fifth of the literates.

It is obvious that human capital has implications not only for human development and employment but also for the long-term sustainability of a diversified, knowledge-based and future economic development to the nation. Knowledge has it that job creation is the overarching goal of the broader drive for diversification and sustainable employment which require a vibrant and robust man power that can compete with the rapid technological changes, education sector diminished the value of standard 6 system of graduation to senior secondary three, and now university and polytechnic degrees with hundreds of thousands of graduates every year with little or no labour market that allows for flexibility, skill-building, and reasonable compensation.

The vital aim and objective of many developing countries including Nigeria would have been to attain stability, material prosperity, and social progress. The reverse of this is always the case as parents and individuals make infinitely much investment in a gigantic pile of money to pay for anything that can reasonably shape their future only to end up as Okada men, Keke drivers or private sectors with no economic growth for lack of capital to boast it up.

6.2. Recommendations

Government's commitment to allocate a substantial and consistent portion of the national budget to education is crucial. Prioritizing education spending ensures adequate resources for infrastructure development, teacher training, and the procurement of modern teaching aids and materials. Efforts to enhance the efficiency of fund utilization and ensure transparency and accountability in budget allocation and spending are paramount. This includes measures to curb corruption and mismanagement of funds within the education sector. Also, collaboration between the government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations can bridge the funding gap. Encouraging private investment in education and fostering partnerships can supplement government efforts in improving access to quality education. States like Lagos and Edo have embraced this collaboration.

A diversified plan is needed to improve the academic outcomes of students living in poverty, and this needed to be focusing on addressing issues related to both the social and educational needs of these students, including providing adequate access to basic necessities, early childhood education, culturally relevant curriculum, strong teacher support, social-emotional learning programs as well as community partnerships to offer additional support outside of school hours.

To have effective strategies for funding and prioritizing education infrastructure improvements this study is recommended that there is need for government to Conducting needs assessments to identify areas of improvement and prioritize spending as well as improving school facilities to create a more conducive learning environment. There is also need to improve planning and budgeting to increase budgets for improved planning and budgeting mechanisms.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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