

Workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria: The missing links

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Abstract

Since the 1960s, successive Nigerian governments have focused on improving workforce planning and access to higher education as key drivers of national development. However, the national workforce planning policies do not align with access to higher education in Nigeria. This article examined the gaps between workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria. The study's data were drawn from a thematic review of relevant literature and a theoretical framework comprising social stratification and human capital theories. Evidence from the literature indicates that the Nigerian government has shown significant interest in promoting workforce planning for national development by establishing the National Manpower Board and higher education institutions. Unfortunately, the objectives of the National Manpower Board remain largely unachieved. At the same time, the higher education institutions primarily operate in isolation from labour market demands, leaving many graduates unemployed or underemployed in Nigeria. The Nigerian government should ensure that the National Manpower Board fulfils its mandates. In addition, all applicants to higher education institutions in Nigeria should choose courses that align with their talents and reflect an understanding of labour market demands.

Keywords: Higher Education; Labour Market; National Development; Workforce Planning

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1. INTRODUCTION

The workforce refers to the human resources that have the proper education, knowledge, skills, and energy necessary for the production of goods and services in a country. The preceding description of the workforce suggests that education is essential for workforce development in any country. The availability of an educated workforce and well-paid jobs has contributed to economic growth and development in countries such as China, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea, among others (Valli, 2017).

Studies on Nigeria's situation have revealed that graduates from higher education institutions face limited opportunities for decent jobs due to widespread unemployment and underemployment (Datti *et al.*, 2024; Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Ofor-Douglas, 2024; Okwudili, 2024; Ukazu, 2021). This situation highlights a lack of synergy between workforce planning policies and higher education institutions in Nigeria. The implications of this situation for human capital development warrant attention.

Nigeria ranked near the bottom among 174 countries in the 2020 Human Capital Index, with a score of 0.36 (World Bank, 2021). The Human Capital Index assesses the contribution of education and health to the productivity of the next generation of workers. Nigeria's position in the 2020 Human Capital Index was worse than that of other African countries, including Kenya (0.55), Algeria (0.53), Tunisia (0.52), Egypt (0.49), Ghana (0.45), and South Africa (0.43). Nigeria's poor ranking in the 2020 Human Capital Index indicates the underperformance of its education and health systems. It is noteworthy that higher education institutions can produce an educated workforce capable of meeting

labour market demands. Nigeria's higher education institutions are expected to play a key role in this regard, particularly in enhancing the employability of their graduates (Datti *et al.*, 2024).

Considering the foregoing, this article examines the gaps in workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria, addressing the following research questions: (1) How have workforce planning policies affected access to higher education in Nigeria? (2) To what extent have workforce planning policies contributed to human capital development in Nigeria? These questions were explored through a thematic review of the literature on workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria.

2. EXPLORING THE GAPS IN WORKFORCE PLANNING

Workforce planning is synonymous with human resource planning, also known as workforce planning. It can be described as the process of determining the number of employees required in various capacities for optimal organisational performance, with a focus on ensuring the correct number of employees with the right skills are in the right place at the right time to perform the right tasks (Ajao, 2018; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Doll, 2021; Ubah & Ibrahim, 2021; Ukpong, 2017; Vetter, 1967).

Workforce planning processes include scenario planning, demand forecasting, supply forecasting, and the development of action plans (Ajao, 2018; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Doll, 2021). Scenario planning involves assessing the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors that may impact the operations of an organisation and the labour market. Scenario planning may include predictions and potential responses regarding the labour market. Using

workforce planning to forecast when and how many employees, as well as the skills they need, to meet an organisation's goals can enhance organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Doll, 2021).

Demand forecasting estimates the number of employees with the right skills needed to meet an organisation's future requirements. It also includes action plans that address potential increases or decreases in employee demand. In contrast, supply forecasting measures the number of employees likely to be available for recruitment into the organisation. The development of action plans is typically aligned with scenario planning and forecasting, focusing on identifying internal resources and developing the skills needed to meet an organisation's future requirements.

Workforce planning requires a systematic approach to thoroughly examine an organisation's human resource needs, including data collection and analysis, scenario planning, forecasting, and the development of action plans (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Many organizations have conducted workforce planning, particularly in the public sector and large private sector organizations. Available evidence shows that many organisations adopt a short-term approach to workforce planning, addressing employees' deficits or surpluses as they arise (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). However, workforce planning efforts often focus on specific employees such as doctors, nurses, engineers, skilled operatives in a manufacturing company, sales representatives in supermarkets, or drivers in transport companies.

This raises the issue of segregation in workforce planning, which may be based on socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, and educational qualifications, among others. Work organisation, including work design, work systems, job descriptions, and job

specifications, could also contribute to segregation in workforce planning. A study of segregation in workforce planning can enhance the understanding of workforce distribution across sectors and locations in Nigeria.

3. IDENTIFYING THE GAPS IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The need for equitable access to education at all levels is embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). As expected, participation in higher education has increased significantly in many countries due to the anticipation of better outcomes in the labour market. For instance, many Latin American governments have implemented policies to expand access to higher education, aiming to reduce discrimination and social inequalities. However, the policies reflect an underlying belief in the benefits of unlimited expansion, without considering the potential consequences, such as an oversupply of graduates in economies with limited job opportunities (Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017). Similarly, access to higher education institutions has been expanding in many Asian countries (González *et al.*, 2015).

However, the development of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa has shown contradictory trends, as the gross enrolment rates (GER) remain below 10 percent on average, significantly lower than those in Asia and Latin America (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Muller, 2014; Salihu, 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, the growth in higher education institutions and enrolment has not kept pace with population growth and the rising demand for higher education.

LeBeau and Oanda (2020), based on their observations in Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal, examined how national policies addressed inequalities and inequity in access to higher education amidst its expansion and

diversification. Since the 1960s, many African governments have implemented policies to expand access to higher education. In 1970, the GER in higher education was two percent in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 30 percent in North America (Zezeza 2016). By 2018, sub-Saharan Africa's average GER remained below 10 percent, despite the continuous increase in the number of higher education institutions in Africa (McCowan, 2016).

Unlike other parts of the world, sub-Saharan Africa still has a low GER in higher education, with many secondary school leavers unable to gain admission to higher education institutions (Carpentier *et al.* 2018; Ilie & Rose, 2016). Moreover, there are notable distinctions in higher education programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, such as between prestigious and non-prestigious programmes, STEM and social sciences and humanities, as well as between programmes perceived to have higher employability prospects and others. Studies have highlighted the impact of students' socio-economic backgrounds on competition for access to reputable institutions and academic programmes (Darvas *et al.*, 2017; Simson & Harris, 2020).

In Nigeria, competition for access to public higher education institutions is more intense due to their lower tuition fees and perceived higher standards. In this context, the dichotomy between public and private higher education institutions has resulted in disproportionate access to higher education in Nigeria. For instance, public universities in Nigeria receive about nine out of ten university admission applications. Thus, many private universities in Nigeria always look for more students to admit, while most public universities do not admit the majority of the applicants. This situation reveals some challenges concerning access to higher education in Nigeria, where many prospective students find it difficult to gain

admission to public universities. Despite the proliferation of private universities, access to higher education in Nigeria has not significantly improved, as the majority of applicants continue to prefer public universities.

4. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The theories of social stratification and human capital provide a relevant framework for analyzing the gaps between workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria. The theory of social stratification highlights the inevitability of social inequality. A key premise of the theory of social stratification is that different economic positions attract unequal rewards. The greater the functional importance of a position, the higher the reward and the level of education and training required for an individual to occupy it (Davis & Moore, 1945).

Consistent with the theory of social stratification, Tumin (1953) argued that only talented individuals should be encouraged to acquire the necessary education and training to occupy economically essential positions in society. To motivate these individuals, their future positions must offer inducements in the form of privileges and unequal rewards. This implies that the value placed on something, such as a course of study in a higher education institution, determines its ranking.

The theory of social stratification provides a framework for analysing inequality of opportunity and illustrates how individuals compete for certain economic positions to secure higher rewards. Therefore, policymakers must carefully plan and implement strategies to regulate entry into economic positions, thereby preventing both an oversupply and a shortage of candidates. This underscores the importance of workforce planning in ensuring both the availability of the required number of

professionals in each sector of the Nigerian economy and the provision of quality education to prepare them.

The theory of social stratification is helpful for analysing segregation in workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria. Acquiring talents for various economic positions is a key component of workforce planning. In addition, the reward system is a vital consideration in workforce planning. Thus, workforce planning activities are in alignment with the core concepts of the theory of social stratification. For instance, specific professional courses, such as medicine, engineering, and law, are often considered more prestigious than those in the humanities and social sciences. As a result, graduates from these professional courses may receive higher rewards compared to their peers who studied non-professional courses.

In line with the theory of social stratification, access to higher education can facilitate entry into economic positions with unequal rewards in Nigeria, depending on the level of educational qualifications, such as the National Certificate in Education (NCE), Ordinary National Diploma (OND), Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), among others. Compared to graduates from polytechnics and colleges of education, university graduates typically occupy higher positions in Nigeria's public service. Many graduates from polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria have sought direct entry admission to universities in response to this situation.

Graduates from higher education institutions in Nigeria typically receive unequal rewards based on factors such as their course of study, academic performance, type of employment, sector, and privilege or influence, among others. Courses such as

Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, and Law are considered more prestigious than many other programmes at higher education institutions in Nigeria.

However, the theory of social stratification alone is insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria. While the theory of social stratification highlights the importance of talents and unequal reward, it does not explain the sources of talents or why some individuals may possess more talents than others in the same society. Thus, the theory of human capital was included in the study to complement the theory of social stratification.

The theory of human capital originated with Mincer (1958), who wrote about investment in human capital, while Becker (1964) further developed the theory in his book *Human Capital*. In his analysis of human capital theory, Becker (1994) noted that the so-called human capital revolution began in the 1960s. The pioneers of this revolution included Ted Schultz, Jacob Mincer, Milton Friedman, Sherwin Rosen, and other scholars from the University of Chicago. This demonstrates that the theory of human capital has attracted considerable scholarly attention since the 1960s.

Human capital theory focuses on the analysis of an individual's knowledge, skills, abilities, personal attributes, and other characteristics. This aligns with Harbison's (1973) description of human capital as the energies, knowledge, skills, and talents available within a country. Becker (2004) illustrated human capital theory by showing that expenditures on education, training, medical care, and other areas are investments in human capital. Consistent with the theory of human capital, Mellander and Florida (2021) noted that education and training are key sources of human capital. Studies have confirmed that human capital contributes to socioeconomic development

in a country (Glaeser & Saiz, 2003; Mellander & Florida, 2021).

Workforce planning is a crucial driver of human capital development. It reinforces the idea that human resources are valuable assets to organisations. The theory of human capital highlights the importance of investing in education and training. It is based on the idea that investment in education and training enhances human capital development. It is widely acknowledged that significant investment in human capital contributed significantly to the rapid development of Asian countries in the 1970s and 1980s (Becker, 1994).

The impressive economic performance of Japan, Taiwan, and other Asian Tigers highlights the connection between human capital development and economic growth. Baron and Armstrong (2007), in their analysis of the theory of human capital, noted that both workers and employers can invest in human capital to gain various benefits. For workers, these benefits include higher earnings, greater job satisfaction, and better career prospects. For employers, the benefits include returns on investment, improved organisational performance, increased flexibility, and enhanced capacity to innovate. The theoretical foundations of this study highlight the connections between workforce planning and access to higher education. The implications of workforce planning and access to higher education for human capital development in Nigeria deserve attention.

5. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study were derived from a thematic review of relevant literature on workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria, including books, journals, and other pertinent documents. These were obtained from the university library and online databases such as EBSCOhost, Cengage Learning, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest Central, and

Scopus. Two research questions guided the literature search. The questions explored the relationship between workforce planning policies and access to higher education and their implications for human capital development.

From approximately 800 documents retrieved from the literature, about 60 were selected and reviewed for the study, with publication years spanning 1945 to 2024. The thematic review of relevant literature was presented in different sections to illustrate the relationship between workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria, with a focus on gaps in both areas. This approach is suitable as it aligns with the research methods used in other studies on workforce planning or access to higher education (Adeyemo, 2000; Akinyoade, 2019; Ajao, 2018; Carpentier *et al.*, 2018; Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Muller, 2014; Salihu, 2020; Simson & Harris, 2020; Ukpong, 2017).

The literature review was meticulously conducted to ensure clarity, consistency, and brevity. This aligns with Hart's (2018, p. 2) guidelines: "appropriate breadth and depth, rigour and consistency, clarity, and brevity, and effective analysis and synthesis." A meticulous review of the literature aligns with research methods in the social sciences, including looking beyond appearances, understanding root causes, and asking relevant questions (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Bryman, 2016).

6. EXISTING FOCUS ON WORKFORCE PLANNING IN NIGERIA

In recognition of the importance of workforce planning for economic growth and development, the Nigerian government established a commission in April 1959 with the following terms of reference: (1) To identify Nigerians currently employed who require further education to occupy government offices being vacated by

expatriates, (2) To review Nigeria's educational policy, and (3) To design a post-secondary education system to meet Nigeria's workforce needs from 1960 to 1980 (Ukpong, 2017). The aforementioned terms of reference demonstrate the Nigerian government's interest in promoting workforce planning and access to higher education for national development.

The commission later became known as the Ashby Commission, named after Eric Ashby of the University of Cambridge, who served as its chairman. The commission comprised nine members, including three from Nigeria, three from the United Kingdom, and three from the United States of America. The Ashby Commission report, presented in September 1960, highlighted the need for expanding higher education to support human capital development in Nigeria.

Following the Ashby Commission report, the Nigerian government established the National Manpower Board (NMB) in 1962 to improve workforce planning for national development. The NMB was mandated to carry out the following functions: (1) To determine and advise the government on workforce needs in all occupations, (2) To formulate workforce development policies, (3) To coordinate workforce development policies across federal, state and local governments, (4) To collect, collate, analyze, and publish workforce information, and (5) To provide input on policies related to workforce issues in the Ministries of Education, and Labour and Employment, among others (Ukpong, 2017).

The need for workforce planning was also addressed in Nigeria's national development plans. The first national development plan, spanning from 1962 to 1968, focused on economic growth, while the second, from 1970 to 1974, emphasized the development of agriculture, education, health, industry, telecommunications, defense, and transportation. It is noteworthy that the

Nigerian government established the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1962 to oversee the activities of universities in Nigeria. The NUC's contributions to workforce planning, especially in expanding access to university education in Nigeria, are evident in this regard. The NUC is responsible for approving the establishment of universities and accrediting programmes across universities in Nigeria.

The third national development plan, which spanned from 1976 to 1980, addressed key issues, such as a shortage of Indigenous skilled labour, poor road conditions, and low returns from the agricultural sector. Consistent with the objectives of the third national development plan, the Nigerian government established the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in 1977 to serve as an advisory body on all aspects of technical and vocational education outside the university systems (NBTE, 2020). The NBTE was also authorized to determine the skilled workforce needs in the industrial, commercial, and other relevant sectors of the Nigerian economy. The NBTE has been coordinating the activities of polytechnics, mono-technics, and other technical and vocational education institutions in Nigeria since 1977. Thus, the NBTE, NUC, and NMB are expected to ensure the development of workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria.

The fourth and fifth national development plans, covering 1980 to 1985 and 1986 to 1992, respectively, incorporated structural adjustment programmes such as deregulation, privatisation, and commercialisation. Within the framework of the fifth national development plan, the 1988 National Policy on Education introduced the 6-3-3-4 system to promote vocational education and theoretical knowledge, with the aim of making students more efficient and skilled (Daniel-Kalio, 2018). The Nigerian government established

the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in 1989 to oversee the development of teacher education through the accreditation, regulation, and standardization of teaching programmes in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, the NMB's activities were not aligned with the objectives of the national development plans. Regarding the linkage between the NMB and the national development plans, Ukpong (2017) noted that the first national development plan was implemented without reference to the NMB, despite the latter highlighting the plan's manpower implications. This suggests that the first national development plan failed to align with the NMB, leaving certain workforce planning activities in abeyance. Surprisingly, the NMB did not receive adequate attention in subsequent national development plans.

Another initiative in workforce planning in Nigeria is the National Employment Policy (NEP), which the Nigerian government renewed in 2017 to address the challenges of rising unemployment and underemployment (Akinyoade, 2019). Nigeria's first NEP was formulated in 2002 and revised in 2013. The NEP outlines national employment strategies that emphasize human capital development, workforce employability, and skills acquisition. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) redefined the method for calculating unemployment by changing the criteria from a person of working age who worked less than 20 hours per week to one who worked less than one hour per week. This adjustment reduced Nigeria's unemployment rate from 33.3% in 2020 to 4.1% in the first quarter of 2023 (Ejechi, 2023).

Despite the NEP, the rates of unemployment and underemployment remain high in Nigeria. The NEP document reveals that Nigeria's education and training system produces graduates who lack the necessary

knowledge, skills, and qualifications for available employment in the labour market. This aligns with Okwudili's (2024, p. 1534) observation that:

Employers find it difficult to find the right candidate with the required skills and capabilities to fill available posts. Skills required by employers, such as data analytics, marketing, and human relations skills, are not in good supply in the labour market. There have been concerns about the quality and applicability of the current curricula.

This suggests that Nigeria's higher education institutions must intensify efforts to produce graduates with employability skills. The implications of higher education for workforce planning and human capital development can be examined in this context. Consistent with this line of thought, Ofor-Douglas (2024, p. 66) noted that:

Enhancing the education system is crucial for producing high-skilled workers capable of meeting evolving labour market demands. University education plays a pivotal role in improving skills, yet recent reports indicate Nigerian university graduates are ill-prepared for the workforce. This situation affects the relevance of university education.

The following section focuses on access to higher education institutions in Nigeria within the context of workforce planning and human capital development. This is based on the idea that access to higher education and vocational training programs plays a crucial role in workforce planning and human capital development. Workforce planning policies often reference education, while the goals of educational programs

frequently emphasize workforce development.

7. EXAMINING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The primary goal of higher education institutions in Nigeria is to cultivate an educated workforce that drives economic growth and development. The National Universities Commission (2021) referenced Section 8 (59) of the 2014 National Policy on Education, which outlines the aims of higher education as follows:

1. Contributing to national development through high-level workforce training
2. Developing the intellectual capabilities of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and global environments
3. Equipping individuals with physical and intellectual skills to become self-reliant and valuable members of society
4. Promoting and encouraging scholarship and community services
5. Fostering national unity and promoting cohesion, understanding, and integration.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria are categorised into colleges of education, innovation enterprise institutions, monotronics, polytechnics, technical colleges, universities, and vocational enterprise institutions. The development of higher education in Nigeria began with the establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932, though it officially commenced operations in January 1934. This was followed by the establishment of Yaba College of Technology in 1947 and the University College Ibadan, an affiliate of the University of London, in 1948.

Following the recommendations of the Ashby Commission and the prevailing conditions in Nigeria, the number of universities and other higher education

institutions has steadily increased since the 1960s. As of July 2024, Nigeria had 274 universities, including 149 private universities, 62 federal universities, and 63 state universities (Statista, 2024).

The Federal Ministry of Education records show that there are 89 accredited and approved Colleges of Education in Nigeria, including 22 federal, 47 state, and 20 private colleges (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). According to the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Nigeria has 607 technical and vocational education institutions, including 29 federal polytechnics, 48 state polytechnics, 57 private polytechnics, 33 colleges of agriculture, 50 colleges of health, and 123 technical colleges, among others (NBTE, 2020). The mission of the NBTE is to promote the development of a skilled technical and professional workforce to support the growth of the Nigerian economy.

In September 1969, the Nigerian government organised a National Curriculum Conference in Lagos to discuss ways to improve Nigeria's educational system (Akanbi & Abiolu, 2018; Fafunwa, 2018). Based on the report from the 1969 National Curriculum Conference, the Nigerian government established the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977. In furtherance of its commitment to developing Nigeria's educational system, the Nigerian government reviewed the NPE in 1981, 1988, 2004, 2008, and 2014. The NPE outlines the philosophy, goals, and systems of education in Nigeria.

Despite the increasing number of higher education institutions in Nigeria since the 1960s, access to higher education remains a major challenge due to the significant gap between the number of applicants and the number of admissions. For instance, Nigeria's universities can admit only 411,032 students out of 1,428,579 applicants

per year, leaving over one million applicants without admission (Yakubu, 2019).

Apart from the issue of limited admissions space, there are also concerns about the quality and outcomes of access to higher education in Nigeria. Despite the aims of higher education, particularly those related to workforce planning, many graduates, including medical doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and other professionals, remain unemployed or underemployed in Nigeria (Adeboro, 2022; Ojinmah, 2023; Stutern, 2022; Uwaegbulam, 2023).

Many graduates have left Nigeria for job opportunities abroad due to unemployment and underemployment at home. About 20% of dentists trained in Nigeria are practicing abroad, resulting in a shortage of the dental workforce in the country (Ajao, 2018; Idoko, 2023; Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria, 2017). This suggests that a career in dentistry may offer job opportunities in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas facing an acute shortage of dentists and other oral healthcare professionals.

As reported by Muanya (2018), many doctors and nurses have migrated from Nigeria to the UK in search of better working conditions, contributing to a worsening doctor-patient ratio in Nigeria from 1:4,000 to 1:5,000 – further deviating from the WHO's recommended ratio of 1:600. Nigerian-trained doctors are also practicing in large numbers in the United States, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and other countries.

As observed by Ojinmah (2023), 13,609 Nigerian doctors migrated to the United Kingdom between 2015 and 2023, making Nigeria the third largest source of migrant doctors in the United Kingdom after Pakistan and India. Similar to the dental and medical workforce, many engineers, including tech experts and software engineers, have migrated from Nigeria to

countries offering better working conditions (Uwaegbulam, 2023).

The large number of higher education graduates without adequate opportunities for gainful employment has hindered the goal of workforce planning for national development in Nigeria. In addressing this situation, Ofor-Douglas (2024, p. 67) noted that:

The universities in Nigeria have to consider the needs of society while designing their curriculum. Nigerian universities only dwell on the theoretical aspect more than the practical aspect, thereby failing to meet society's demands. The society is demanding graduates who are ready-made for the labour market.

Similarly, Akanbi and Abiolu (2018) noted that if the recommendations from the 1969 National Curriculum Conference had been adequately implemented, Nigeria would have joined the ranks of developed countries with a sound and functional education system.

8. CONCLUSION

This article examined the gaps in workforce planning and access to higher education in Nigeria. The Nigerian government established higher education institutions to address the challenges of workforce planning. This process led to the establishment of the National Manpower Board and other agencies that have contributed to promoting workforce planning for economic growth and development. This article has demonstrated how interest in workforce planning has significantly improved access to higher education in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, workforce planning policies and student admissions outcomes in Nigerian higher education institutions are not aligned. This has led to high

unemployment and underemployment in the Nigerian labor market, leaving many graduates vulnerable to unintended consequences of their education, such as involuntary non-standard employment and precarious working conditions.

Given the adverse consequences of the disconnect between workforce planning policies and the outcomes of student admissions in Nigerian higher education institutions, an urgent review of the workforce situation is needed. This review should clearly identify areas of labor supply deficits and surpluses, in comparison to areas of demand. In this regard, student admissions to various programmes in higher education institutions should align with labor market demands and human capital development in Nigeria.

It is important to note that failing to acquire the right skills at the right time during higher education can prevent graduates from aligning with the principles of workforce planning in Nigeria. Therefore, students seeking admission to higher education institutions in Nigeria should conduct due diligence, set realistic goals, and be intentional in their course selection, focusing on acquiring the right skills at the right time to prepare for future employment in Nigeria. Candidates seeking admission to higher education institutions should be fully aware of the job prospects for the courses they intend to pursue before applying.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria should equip students with employability skills to enhance their job prospects upon graduation. The curricula and training programs in higher education institutions should be tailored to meet industry needs. This requires collaboration and partnerships between higher education administrators and industry leaders.

The Nigerian government should ensure that the National Manpower Board fulfills its mandate, particularly by urgently reviewing

and publicizing the gaps between labor demand and supply across occupations in various sectors of the economy. Finally, the Nigerian government should review, harmonize, and strengthen all existing workforce planning policies to support human capital development.

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