



Dynamics of Nigeria-United Kingdom Bilateral Relations and its Impact on Human Capital Development in Nigeria's Education Sector, 2015-2025

Abstract

Bilateral educational diplomacy is frequently leveraged by developing countries to bridge local instructional gaps and drive capacity building. However, the exact institutional pathways through which external bilateral interventions interact with severely underfunded domestic educational systems remain under-researched. This study critically examined the dynamics of Nigeria-United Kingdom bilateral relations and their subsequent impact on human capital development within Nigeria's education sector. Grounded in Theodore Schultz's Human Capital Theory, the study adopted a qualitative, triangulated research design. Primary data were gathered via semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (N = 17) across key diplomatic and educational institutions, including the Federal Ministry of Education, the British High Commission, and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs complemented by process-tracing and qualitative content analysis of bilateral policy texts from 2015 to 2026. The findings revealed an institutional paradox which is that, while Anglo-Nigerian bilateral frameworks (manifested through Chevening fellowships, Commonwealth scholarships, and transnational education initiatives) demonstrated a strong positive relationship with high-level knowledge transfer and academic standardization, these gains are severely neutralized by domestic systemic decay. Specifically, the study established that the structural impact of bilateral educational gains is heavily constrained by an acute domestic funding deficit (with Nigeria's education budget stagnating at 6.15% of national expenditure in 2025 and 2026) and a debilitating asymmetric "brain drain" of skilled academic and technical personnel to the UK. The study concluded that bilateral partnerships cannot act as an independent engine for national human capital formation without a resilient domestic framework. It recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria shift its strategic approach from external scholarship dependency toward institutionalizing robust, local research and development frameworks, while enacting strategic reintegration policies to retain foreign-trained talents within productive domestic sectors.

Keywords: Bilateral Relations, Educational Diplomacy, Human Capital Development, Brain Drain, Anglo-Nigerian Relations, Educational Policy.

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Introduction

In today's global educational space, the development of human capital is fundamentally anchored on the qualitative depth, structural resilience, and technical capacity of a nation's

academic institutions (Olowonefa & Lawal, 2024). As educational systems worldwide shift toward advanced digital literacy, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) frameworks, and highly specialized pedagogical

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methodologies, the cultivation of human capabilities requires continuous institutional modernization. Within this context, sovereign states actively leverage bilateral educational diplomacy to bridge local pedagogical gaps, enrich academic research, and foster cross-border institutional collaborations (Afolabi & Ekundayo, 2025). International partnerships, therefore, serve as vital institutional pipelines for the transfer of instructional technologies, curriculum enrichment, and academic capacity building.

Historically, the educational ties between Nigeria and the United Kingdom have evolved from a highly centralized colonial system of schooling into a dynamic, multi-layered post-colonial partnership (Danjuma, 2024). This relationship operates through prominent institutional bodies such as the British Council, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). These organizations drive collaborative programs aimed at upgrading instructional delivery, funding academic fellowships, and establishing joint research initiatives between British and Nigerian universities (British Council Nigeria, 2025). While Nigeria possesses the largest student population in Sub-Saharan Africa, its local institutions face severe operational strains, making academic cooperation with the UK a critical avenue for absorbing

contemporary global educational standards and best practices.

However, a profound disconnect exists between the institutional objectives of these bilateral educational frameworks and the operational realities within Nigeria's domestic schools. While specific initiatives like the UK-Nigeria Higher Education Partnerships and various transnational education (TNE) policies aim to elevate local academic standards, Nigeria's domestic educational sector suffers from severe systemic stress. Recent budgetary data indicate that the Federal Government of Nigeria allocated an inadequate N3.52 trillion to the education sector in 2025, a figure that remained stagnant in the 2026 fiscal appropriation, thereby reducing the sector's share of national expenditure to just 6.15% (National Universities Commission, 2026). This funding deficit chokes institutional capacity, resulting in obsolete laboratory equipment, poorly trained teaching personnel, and an outdated curriculum that fails to prepare students for modern global demands.

Consequently, Nigeria's educational indicators remain severely depressed on global human capital indices, characterized by an acute shortage of technical skills and a growing learning poverty rate among graduates (World Bank, 2025). This reality underscores the urgent need to critically evaluate how Anglo-Nigerian bilateral frameworks specifically teacher professional development grants, technical education aid, ICT infrastructure support, and

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institutional exchange programs can be strategically leveraged. Examining these elements is crucial to addressing the internal structural decay of Nigeria's school system and transforming it into a resilient engine for genuine educational human capital development.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines the dynamics of Nigeria–United Kingdom bilateral relations and its impact on human capital development in Nigeria's education Sector.

Statement of the Research Problem

Numerous studies, such as Amadi & Alolote (2019), Ariye (2020), Adelakun (2021), Babangida (2022), Awogbemi (2023) among many others, have their focus only on the relationship between human capital development and economic growth, while ignoring Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations and its contribution to human capital development in education in Nigeria. The role of education in elevating any nation's rapid growth and development cannot be overstated. It is the nexus that strengthens all other sectors of an economy. Those in health, politics, economic, and even agricultural sectors rely on education for the acquisition of skills and for coping with societal dynamics. Just like all other policies, educational policies require adequate financing to stir up all other activities revolving around it. Unfortunately, the educational sector in Nigeria has faced several bottlenecks, one of which, is the poor financing of the sector. The study of this nature is prompted by the slow rate

of Nigeria's economic growth despite the huge contributions of the government and other private bodies. Researches on this topic carried out over the years have not really achieved its prior objectives. According to Adam Smith, the prosperity of a country is determined by the skill, efficiency and attitude of the labour used by that country.

Bilateral diplomatic and educational partnerships between a developing state and an advanced academic superpower like the United Kingdom should serve as a functional conduit for curriculum development, teacher capacity building, and infrastructural modernization within the host nation's school system (Afolabi & Ekundayo, 2025; Danjuma, 2024). For Nigeria, its historical educational alliance with the UK is theoretically expected to upgrade local pedagogical quality, enrich scientific research output, and significantly enhance human capital outcomes across all levels of education.

However, the current situation reveals a severe institutional paradox. Despite decades of sustained bilateral educational programs, international grants, and high-profile scholarship schemes, Nigeria's educational sector remains trapped in a state of systemic decay. This crisis is manifested in poorly equipped classrooms, an acute shortage of specialized technical teachers, and a massive "brain drain" of top-tier academic talents migrating to British universities (NUC, 2026; Olowonefa & Lawal, 2024). To arrest this decline, successive Nigerian administrations have implemented

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targeted policy reforms, including the Roadmap for the Nigerian Education Sector and the National Human Capital Development (HCD) Strategy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025).

Yet, these crises persist, highlighting a major gap in the literature. While contemporary researchers extensively analyze human capital as a broad macroeconomic tool for wealth generation (Adelakun, 2021; Awogbemi, 2023), they systematically ignore the specific, practical impact of external bilateral educational interventions on actual classroom outcomes, teacher training quality, and curriculum modernization. This study is therefore necessitated by the urgent need to fill this analytical gap by providing an empirical evaluation of the exact institutional channels through which Nigeria-UK bilateral relations affect human capital development within Nigeria's education sector.

Research Questions

- i. What is the nature of Nigeria - United Kingdom bilateral relations and human capital development in education in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the possible impacts of the Nigeria - United Kingdom bilateral relations on human capital development in education in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the Nigeria-United

Kingdom bilateral relations and its impact on human capital development in Nigeria's education sector, while the specific objectives are to:

- i. Analyze the nature of Nigeria - United Kingdom bilateral relations and human capital development in education in Nigeria.
- ii. Ascertain the possible impacts of the Nigeria - United Kingdom bilateral relations on human capital development in education in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Bilateral Relations

In international relations, bilateral cooperation is a mutually cooperation that is generally known as bilateral relations. In connection with the concept of bilateral relations, Krisna (2021) in his international political dictionary said that: "Bilateral relations are conditions that describe a mutual and influential relationship or a mutual relationship occurs between two parties or two countries and the state acts as the main actor in the implementation of the bilateral relationship. This bilateral cooperation aims to create peace, accelerate the problem solving process between the two countries involved, and improve mutual prosperity. In this case, it pays more attention to social, political, cultural and economic structures so as to produce a harmonious relationship between the two countries.

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In bilateral diplomacy the main concept used is that a country will pursue its national interests in order to obtain maximum benefits and the only way is to make good and prolonged relations between countries. Basically, the bilateral relationship is a cooperative relationship between countries which is a diverse meeting of international interests from several countries which cannot be fulfilled by their own people. The definition of cooperation according to Holsti can be divided into five, among others are: The view that two or more value interests or goals meet each other and can produce something, promoted or fulfilled by all parties, approval of certain problems between two or more countries in order to utilize the conflict of interest equation, the view or expectation of a country that the policies decided by other countries help the country to achieve its interests and values, official or unofficial rules regarding future transactions made to carry out the purpose and transactions between countries to fulfil their agreement.

Bilateral relations are the founding element of international relations, or, as Thomas Gomart has suggested, “the basic form of the diplomatic game” (Gomart, 2022:65). The centrality of bilateral relations can be seen on the historical, strategic, and numerical levels. First, on a historical level, the use of diplomatic relations between states through official missions began in the seventeenth century among European monarchies, the equivalent of what may be called

“traditional diplomacy” or “old diplomacy.” The Congress of Westphalia in 1648 recognized equal status among all sovereign nations, whose mutual recognition was conducted through receiving foreign consular agents. This mainly European bilateral diplomacy, widespread until the First World War, was characterized by the central role played by embassies, a high degree of secrecy in negotiations, and bonds created through intermarriage among major ruling families that went hand in hand with political alliances. Colonial empires and decolonization subsequently led to the development of a profusion of other types of bilateral relations between Europe and the rest of the world.

Bilateral Relations (Bilateralism) therefore consists of the political, economic, or cultural relations between two (2) sovereign/independent states. When states recognize one another as sovereign states and agree to develop diplomatic relations, they exchange diplomatic agents such as ambassadors to help in dialogues and cooperation. Through bilateral relations, states can develop tailored agreements that only apply to contracting states. Therefore, in this study, bilateralism implies the conduct of political, economic or cultural relations between two sovereign states. When states recognize one another as sovereign states and agree to diplomatic relations, they have created a bilateral relationship.

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Human Capital Development

According to Adelakun (2021) human capital development refers to increasing skills, knowledge, productivity, and resourcefulness of citizens through the process of human capital formation. Aluko (2025) defined Human capital development as the process that enhances the skills, knowledge, efficiency, and resourcefulness of citizens through a process of human capital formation, generally conceived. Thus, human capital development is a citizen's centred stratagem, and not goods-centred or production-centred tactic of growth. Human capital development also refers to the procedure of acquiring and raising the number of people who have the skills, good health, education and experience that are critical for economic development. Therefore, human capital development talks about the improvement of skills that are being acquired or that are gifted and the enhancing of knowledge through training and practical activities that will enable one to possess problem solving skills and be able to provide solutions when needed.

Investment in human capital is a prerequisite for human capital development. Human Capital Development refers to the investment that an organization, society or country make in their citizens to increase their productive capacity and their quality of life. Human capital formation is achieved essentially through formal education, a system of practical training relating to a particular trade or enterprise, and other

activities that lead to the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge that ultimately lead to enhanced productivity. Therefore, human capital development refers to the process of acquiring the number of people who have the skills, education and experience that are essential for socio-economic development of a country (Amsalu, 2021). Harry (2020) posits that Human capital development is the quantum of efforts directed at developing and orienting human beings so as to equip them to be productive to themselves, in particular, and the society in general. To Amsalu (2021), it is called the productive base of a given nation consisting of all forms of capital – physical, human, natural and social which the present generation bequeaths to its descendants.

From the above, in human capital development, education and health are essential. Education is concerned with the cultivation of the whole person || including intellectual, character and psychomotor development. It is the human resources of any nation, rather than its physical capital and material resources, which ultimately determines the character and pace of its economic and social development. Human capital development is the process of building the inherent skills, knowledge and capabilities of people to enhance their contributions towards productive activities in their location, environment or country. Human capital development entails educating the populace so that they have the wherewithal to make better

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use of the world's existing resources. The health of the population, which in turn influences productivity, and on-the-job training designed to boost employee efficiency are both aspects of human capital development.

Education

Several scholars have advanced their views about the definition of education. According to sources, education is a word derived from the Latin word, "education" meaning breed, train, tutelage, or rear (Veschi, 2020); while Dewey (2018) refers to education as all one with growing, it has no end beyond itself (meaning that Education is everything along with growth, education itself has no final destination behind itself). Others define education as the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. There is absolutely no doubt that humanity and society have made tremendous progress since the introduction and adoption of education as a catalyst for developing and harnessing the human capital input. History is replete with the actions, struggles, and efforts made by man to improve his well-being through constant enquiry into phenomena, exploration of the environment, and the exploitation of natural resources contained therein. The transition from the Stone Age to the Iron Age, the invention of agriculture, the advent of traditional and modern technology, developments in natural and health sciences, communication, and energy have all been attributed to knowledge and to education. From age to

age, man has sought to improve his living condition by ordering and mastering his environment and has succeeded due mainly to improvements in the methods and scale of the acquisition of knowledge and its application.

In the view of Eze (2025), education, particularly schooling, serves as the basis for human capital, as it plays a fundamental role in the accumulation of foundational skills, such as literacy and numeracy. It is in this regard that the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) set the most ambitious global agenda for education ever: all children, young people, and adults achieving at least minimum levels of literacy and numeracy by 2030. Therefore, all developing countries were advised to invest in human capital formation, of which Nigeria also participated. Education is the pursuit of a wide range of activities, planned and managed for the benefit of a society and its members. To educate is to systematically influence people's knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For education to be effective in any society, it has to be embracing of the current realities of today's world. This is to avoid or prevent mediocrity and its impact in national development.

For Nyere, (2025) education is the transmission from one generation to another of the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes of the society. It is clear that education makes man moral and ethical, induces the individual into the shared values of society, develops commitment to societal

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goals in the individual, prepares the young members of society for the future; defines behavioural patterns of individuals and society; and also enhances the productive capabilities of individuals and by extension the society. Education, therefore, is the gate way to development both materially and otherwise.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

Igbini, Oluca and Oharisi (2020) studied Nigeria and the United Kingdom Diplomatic Relations: The Emerging Issues in the Post-Brexit Era. The study explored and unearthed the emerging opportunities and challenges that may result from the post-Brexit trade and other diplomatic intercourse between the UK and Nigeria on one hand, and the EU, ACP, and other Commonwealth countries, including Nigeria specifically, on the other hand. To achieve the objectives of this study, a combination of descriptive, explanatory, and desktop methods were adapted to access valid qualitative but analytical data that helps to elicit and espouse the position of the authors in the study. General System Theory (GST) was adopted to explain the potential diplomatic relationships between the post-Brexit UK, EU, and ACP, the Commonwealth, with respect to trade, commerce, and industry.

The study concluded that the emerging post-Brexit trade and other diplomatic relations will throw up challenges and opportunities which proportion may not be immediately determined. The study

recommended as follows: that Government in Nigeria and other affected nations should key into the post-Brexit diplomacy by designing economic and industrial blueprints that would provide them the foundations for mutual economic benefits, be prepared to take advantage of the new changes that are likely to accompany post-Brexit trade diplomacy critically analyzing them to avoid the mistakes of the past economic and trade regimes, ensure that currency equilibrium is permitted in its post-Brexit diplomacy. This simply means that the government should ensure that there is a balance of her local currency and pound in the post-Brexit trade intercourse with UK among others. The gap identified in the study is lack of explanation on the nature of Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations and human capital development of Nigeria.

Okeke & Elegbede (2024) investigated the effect of human capital development, employee coaching, and career support on organizational commitment among employees at Union Bank Plc, Lagos, Nigeria. Employing a cross-sectional design with random sampling, responses from 169 respondents were analysed using descriptive statistics, while multiple regression analysis through SPSS was used to test the formulated hypotheses. The study found that human capital development and employee coaching do not significantly affect organizational commitment, while employees' career development significantly affects organizational

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commitment. The study, therefore, recommended that the management of banks should not only invest adequately in developing their human capital to enhance their skills and competence in work operations but also ensure their conversion to full-time or permanent employee status so as to increase their productivity within the organization and thereafter improve national productivity and growth. Nevertheless, the overall gap identified under this review is the inability to sufficiently provide an explanation on the nature of Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations and human capital development of Nigeria.

Ihensekhien & Soriwei (2023) evaluated the influence of human capital on industrial sector growth in Nigeria from 1986 to 2020. The Autoregressive Distributed Lag co-integration method of estimation was applied in the empirical analyses to determine the influence of human capital variables on industrial sector growth. The empirical observations revealed that the government's recurrent investment in education had a significantly negative short-run impact on industrial sector growth, while in the long run, there was a significant positive influence. Government recurrent expenditure on health revealed a short-run significant impact on industrial sector growth, while in the long run, it was observed to be negative. The implication of this on the industrial sector is that for the desired level of industrial sector growth to be achieved, investment in education should be increased by

government policy. The study suggested that there should be a premeditated government investment in education and health to achieve the desired level of industrial sector growth in Nigeria in the nearest future. Again, this study failed to explain the possible impacts of the Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations on human capital development in education in Nigeria.

Okoli, Ezenwob & Onugha (2024) examined human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to measure the impact of the components of the human development index (life expectancy, education index and Gross National Income (GNI) index) on economic growth in Nigeria with the aid of secondary macroeconomic data sourced from World Bank Development Indicators (WDI) covering a period of 32 years (1990-2022). The method of analysis employed was the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) technique using Life Expectancy, Adult Literacy, Primary School Enrolment, Gross National Income, Population Growth, and Gross Fixed Capital Formation as independent variables with Gross Domestic Product as the dependent variable.

The estimated model shows that Life Expectancy and Adult Literacy have positive and insignificant impact on economic growth while School Enrolment Primary, Gross National Income and Gross Fixed Capital Formation have significant impact on economic growth in Nigeria. The study recommended that

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Nigeria government should ensure structural reforms on health and education through training and proper education to enable individuals to have the skills, knowledge and experience that will improve their productivity and in turn have a positive impact on economic growth in Nigeria. Nevertheless, what has not be adequately addressed under this review is the possible impacts of the Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations on human capital development of Nigeria which has constitute gap in literature.

Theoretical Framework

To place this study in its proper perspective, there is a need for a theoretical framework. The human capital development theory is considered more appropriate to achieve the goal of a comprehensive review. The human capital theory, as originated by Schultz (1993), centres more on how education, health, training, and skills increase productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing their levels of cognitive, affective and psychoactive skills. In this regard, the theory postulates that human capital is the key element in improving a firm's assets and employees to increase productivity, as well as a sustainable competitive advantage. Human capital engrosses resources that are inherent in human being, which can be developed to improve their respective living conditions. The human capital model further links expected lifetime employment to one's incentive to acquire marketable training. In turn, trainings acquired formally and

on the job, determine earning potentials. Thus expected lifetime work histories, as well as social benefits such as reduced crime, reduced unemployment, and greater economic growth, are most important motivators towards the achievement of high earnings. Ezeaku *et al* (2018) assert that human capital development is a key determinant of economic progress because it initiates technological advancement as well as invention and innovativeness through the advancement of intellectual capital (available stocks and flows of knowledge), social capital (stocks and flows of knowledge gained from networking), and organizational capital (institutionalized knowledge stored in organizations' databases and manuals).

The human capital theory as explained by Adelakun (2021) is one that shows how education leads to increase in productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of their cognitive skills. He further stated that Theodore, Schultz, Gory, Bucker and Jacob Mincer introduced the notion that people invest in education so as to increase their stock of human capabilities which can be formed by combining innate abilities with investment in human beings. Examples of such investment include expenditure on education, on-the-job training, health and nutrition-these have been recurring in the literature. The provision of education is seen as a productive investment in human capital which is considered to be equally or even more worthwhile than that of physical capital.

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The human capital theory is one of the foundational theories of socio-economic development. The founding scholars hold that any acquired qualities and abilities that help individuals and groups be economically productive is an individual or group human capital. However, the focus by classical human capital model on schooling and training as the major factors comprising human capital on all levels has made the human capital measurement tools to generally assess only educational attainment on these levels. This overly simplified approach creates difficulty in accurately assessing the strengths and weaknesses of human capital in a country but policy-makers and others use these simplified estimates of human capital because the factors suggested to have significant impact on human capital are mostly intangible and the collection of such data costly.

According to the human capital theory, educational investments are made in anticipation of greater future returns or value. Since knowledge is subject to increasing the returns because these are non-rival goods, some past studies have posited that the longer your studies or the more the training you are exposed to, the more the future benefits you are going to earn (Bowen, 2018). Also, this position of acquiring education and its implication for enhancing growth, productivity and employment has been situated in the growth literature. The human capital theory is thus, an extension of the investment theory applied to human resources.

The human capital theory shows how education leads to increase in productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of their cognitive skills. Human capital theory offers a conceptual structure for comprehending the significance and worth of individuals in achieving organizational triumph. It underscores the notion that people are valuable resources whose competencies can be enriched through educational pursuits and training programs. As per this theory, allocating resources toward human capital development results in heightened productivity, creativity, and overall organizational efficacy. Moreover, the theory underscores the significance of education in nurturing human capital, commencing from the early stages of life and persisting through formal educational channels. By imparting individuals with pertinent knowledge and proficiencies, education serves as a pivotal element in augmenting human capital and nurturing economic progress (Petchko, 2018).

Methodology

The qualitative research design was adopted because it probed deeply, intensively, and analyses the interaction between variables involved in the study. This has the advantage of identifying the major issues in the Nigeria – United Kingdom Bilateral Relations as well as outlining the human capital development of Nigeria and the gaps in them. This study population is one hundred and sixty – seven (167) limited to staff and officials of the Federal Ministry for

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Foreign Affairs, British High Commission, Abuja, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Chartered Institute of Human Resource Management (CIHRM), Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction and Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA). The reason for choosing these institutions become necessary and fundamental because of the strategic position they have occupied and knowledge in terms of Nigeria – United Kingdom Bilateral Relations and human capital development of Nigeria.

To arrive at the sample size, the researcher used the Black and Champion (1976) technique in selecting the size. Whereas the total number of the population is one hundred and sixty – seven (167), this formula recommends ten percent (10%) of the total population as the sample size for measurement. Therefore, the work adopts 10% of the 167 population, which means the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with seventeen (17) respondents. Data for research was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through Key Informant Interviews with semi-structured interviews. The study utilized secondary data sources, which were drawn from a wide range of credible materials. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications from the Federal Ministry of Education and the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, policy briefs, reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF, and relevant publications from research institutions. In addition, reputable Nigerian newspapers and media reports were consulted to provide current insights into the implementation of programmes such as the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) and other international educational initiatives. The purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of participants.

The study adopted a mixed methods approach for data analysis, combining several qualitative research methods and approaches. The study combined iterative content analyses of Nigeria – UK bilateral agreements from relevant institutional records and written texts with primary data that was collected in the field through interaction, particularly through interviews with key informants or participants. Content analysis of secondary data analysis (Process tracing) was drawn from the research and policy literature, as well as documentation from practitioner communities was triangulated with empirical data from key informant obtained through interviews.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Objective One: To analyze the nature of Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations and Human Capital Development in Nigeria's education Sector.

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Through bilateral agreements with United Kingdom, Nigeria has consistently sought to expand access to quality education, enhance human capital development, and strengthen institutional capacity across its educational system. One major dimension of Nigeria's foreign policy in education is international collaboration and academic exchange. The country has maintained educational partnerships with advanced economies such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and China, enabling Nigerian students and academics to benefit from scholarships, research opportunities, and technical training. Programmes such as the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) scholarships have facilitated the movement of Nigerian students to countries including Russia, Morocco, and Algeria. These initiatives are designed not only to build local expertise but also to foster diplomatic relations and cultural exchange, thereby strengthening Nigeria's global presence (KII/Male/45/Abuja/April/2026).

Another critical aspect is Nigeria's engagement with international organizations in shaping its educational policies and reforms. Agencies such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF have played significant roles in supporting Nigeria's education sector through funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance. Nigeria's participation in global education initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on quality education reflects its commitment to aligning domestic educational priorities with international standards. These

partnerships have contributed to reforms in curriculum development, teacher training, and educational planning. Nigeria's foreign policy has also influenced the internationalization of its tertiary education system. Nigerian universities have increasingly engaged in global research collaborations, staff exchange programmes, and international conferences. This has improved knowledge transfer, enhanced research output, and increased the global visibility of Nigerian institutions (Jajere and Abdullahi, 2025).

The benefits of internationalization are constrained by challenges such as inadequate funding, brain drain, and limited infrastructure, which affect the ability of Nigerian institutions to fully compete on the global stage. Nigeria's foreign policy addresses issues of student mobility and Diaspora engagement. A significant number of Nigerian students pursue education abroad, contributing to the global exchange of knowledge and skills. While this outward mobility enhances individual capacity, it also raises concerns about brain drain when graduates choose not to return. In response, the government has explored policies aimed at engaging the Nigerian academic Diaspora through collaborative research, virtual teaching, and knowledge-sharing initiatives, thereby leveraging global expertise for national development. Nigeria's foreign policy plays a vital role in shaping the development of its education sector through international collaboration, policy alignment, and capacity building. While notable progress has been made in promoting global engagement and improving educational standards,

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significant challenges remain. Strengthening institutional frameworks, increasing investment in education, and adopting a more strategic approach to international partnerships are essential for maximizing the benefits of foreign policy for educational development in Nigeria (KII/Male/51/Abuja/April/2026).

The relationship between the UK and Nigeria spans decades with great potential and success stories of economic growth, cultural exchange and educational development. Some of these benefits range from capacity building for the educational sector through a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, which in turn drives innovation in research, economic growth, productivity, and efficiency across all sectors. The exchange of students and academia who undergo world class educational programs in UK institutions, enables knowledge transfer, skills, and expertise between both countries. The partnership between both countries also drives innovation and entrepreneurship through job creation, curriculum development, business development and opportunities for entrepreneurs. The cultural exchange between both countries might seem least important but this has helped in bridging cultural barriers and building respect, understanding, diplomacy, and trade between both countries (KII/Female/47/Abuja/April/2026).

From this partnership, has emanated several success stories of individual academic attainments in the UK funded by UK government-funded scholarship bodies such as Chevening,

Commonwealth scholarships, The Great scholarship, and the UK-Nigeria Research partnerships. The Chevening scholarship program has funded over 1500 Nigerians to study in the UK since 1983 while the Commonwealth scholarships program has enabled over 3,400 Nigerian scholars to study in the UK since 1959. These scholars have made great contributions upon completion of their studies to Nigeria's development in diverse fields, driving innovation and economic growth. This partnership is not devoid of a major flaw which has been a huge cause of concern both the Nigerian government and the UK government – Brain Drain. This is because many scholars upon completion of their studies fail to return to Nigeria to give back to the country, thereby depriving Nigeria of the acquired skills and expertise (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

Human capital development is of utmost importance in the improvement of education as it enhances the practices of teachers and the learning of students. Effective professional development programs enable teachers to acquire new knowledge, skills, and teaching strategies that directly influence their instructional practices. Consequently, this leads to the implementation of more engaging and effective teaching methods, resulting in improved educational outcomes. Educational institutions play a vital role in this process by providing teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities. By doing so, they ensure that educators stay updated with the latest research on how children learn, emerging technology tools for the classroom, and new curriculum resources. This continuous learning empowers teachers to adapt their teaching methods to effectively cater to

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the evolving educational landscape and the diverse needs of their students. Effective professional development programs help to develop leaders within the education system who can build a culture of high expectations. When school leaders believe in the potential of all students to learn, it positively influences the entire educational environment. These leaders can inspire and motivate both teachers and students, creating a more conducive atmosphere for learning and growth.

Nwachukwu (2023) asserts that the professional development of teachers allows them to acquire needed skills such as stress management. Furthermore, the development of human capital serves to enhance the school community through a cascading effect. As educators acquire advanced training and knowledge, they gain access to fresh insights and more efficient tools to impart to their students. This not only elevates the standard of teaching but also fosters a culture of perpetual learning within the educational institution, benefiting both instructors and learners alike. Investing in the professional growth of teachers is imperative for the progress of education, as it directly influences teaching methodologies, student academic achievements, and the overall cohesion of the school community. By providing teachers with the necessary resources and guidance, educational institutions can ensure that they are adequately prepared to address the evolving needs of their students and equip them for triumph in their academic pursuits and future endeavours.

One of the most visible outcomes of Nigeria's foreign policy in education is the institutionalisation of international scholarship schemes under bilateral arrangements. The Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) programme, implemented through diplomatic engagements has provided structured pathways for Nigerian students to access higher education abroad. Beyond the numerical value of beneficiaries, the significance of the programme lies in its targeted focus on critical fields such as engineering, medicine, and applied sciences areas where domestic training capacity has historically been constrained

(KII/Female/43/Abuja/April/2026).

Available records indicate that thousands of Nigerian students benefitted from the scheme between 2015 and 2022, reflecting sustained government commitment to human capital development. This initiative has also contributed to reducing skill shortages in specialised sectors upon the return of beneficiaries. However, scholars have noted that while the programme has been impactful, its long-term success depends on effective reintegration policies that ensure returning graduates are absorbed into productive sectors of the Nigerian economy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022; Daily Trust, 2023).

In Nigeria, impactful research activities have been at a very low level, due to declining quality of research infrastructure such as the absence of modern scientific laboratories where cutting-edge research can be conducted, declining quality of the academia, dearth of funding and the lack of incentives for relevant publications. The

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problems that have militated against the role of the universities in the triple helix are institutional in nature, whereas some arise from the long established classical approach to research and development within the university system tailored at the nation's priorities is the tool for addressing societal challenges

(KII/Male/40/Abuja/April/2026).

Another major missing link is lack of an established national institution devoted to Research and Development as a deliberate effort to enhance human capital development and fast track economic advancement of our nation through the instrumentality of science and technology. To spur the nation's drive towards making research and development the ace and game changer in our national development agenda, there is the compelling need for a robust institutional framework for a sustainable funding of Research and Development (R&D) to accelerate the nation's industrialization drive and enhance human capital development.

Objective Two: To ascertain the possible impacts of the Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations on human capital development in education in Nigeria.

The Nigeria-UK bilateral relationship significantly impacts human capital development in Nigeria through a duality of knowledge transfer and severe brain drain. While partnerships bolster academic capacity and skills development, they also drain Nigeria of critical teaching and healthcare professionals. The impacts of this bilateral dynamic manifest across three

main areas: Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer Scholarships and Exchange Programs: Initiatives like the UK's Chevening Scholarships and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission enable Nigerian professionals to acquire globally competitive skills, which they often bring back to drive innovation in Nigerian academia and industry. Institutional Partnerships: Educational delegations, such as the UK Department for Business and Trade's visits to Nigeria's Ministry of Education in Abuja, focus on expanding access to world-class schools and technical skills development within Nigeria (KII/Female/41/Abuja/April/2026).

Human capital development is crucial for educational progress in Nigeria as it enhances educational outcomes and improves workforce readiness. By focusing on investing in the growth and development of individuals, stakeholders can build a stronger education system that supports sustainable advancement. Developing the necessary human capital, which includes individuals with the appropriate skills, knowledge, competencies, mindset, attitude, and motivation, is essential for achieving sustainable development. This approach equips people with the capacity to mitigate the negative impact of society on the environment and safeguard the planet for future generations (Odekunle, 2019).

The UK-Nigeria Strategic Partnership framework prioritizes job creation and development, leveraging investment to improve economic resilience. Driven by recent foreign exchange shifts, the Nigerian government is partnering with the UK to establish high-quality

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international schools locally, reducing the financial burden on Nigerian families while elevating domestic educational standards. The UK's recruitment of skilled Nigerian educators and healthcare professionals has contributed to severe talent gaps in Nigerian institutions (KII/Female/41/Abuja/April/2026).

Education has functioned as a soft power instrument within Nigeria's foreign policy architecture. Through sustained academic exchanges and institutional partnerships, Nigeria has deepened bilateral relations with several countries. For example, educational cooperation between Nigeria and Russia, which dates back to the early post-independence period, has remained a stable component of diplomatic engagement. These partnerships extend beyond scholarship provision to include cultural exchange programmes, joint academic initiatives, and technical training. The enduring nature of such collaborations demonstrates that education serves not only developmental goals but also diplomatic interests by fostering mutual trust and long-term engagement. Empirical observations suggest that countries with strong educational ties to Nigeria tend to maintain broader cooperation in trade, technology transfer, and cultural diplomacy (Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2016; Premium Times, 2024).

Access to Global Knowledge and Skill Acquisition Nigeria's foreign policy has facilitated access to global knowledge systems by enabling students and

academics to study and conduct research in technologically advanced environments. Exposure to modern laboratories, innovative teaching methods, and interdisciplinary research has significantly enhanced the intellectual capacity of Nigerian beneficiaries. This exposure is particularly important in science and technology-driven disciplines, where infrastructure deficits at home can limit effective training. Graduates of foreign programmes often return with advanced competencies that contribute to improved service delivery in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, and information technology. Studies have shown that international academic exposure enhances critical thinking, research productivity, and professional adaptability among graduates (British Council, 2020). Nevertheless, the extent of impact is sometimes moderated by systemic challenges such as inadequate research funding and limited opportunities for knowledge application within Nigeria. This underscores the need to align foreign training with domestic development priorities. Attraction of International Funding and Institutional Support Nigeria's engagement in global diplomacy has also translated into increased access to international funding and technical assistance for education. Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank have played a central role in supporting educational reforms in Nigeria. Funding interventions have focused on improving access, enhancing quality, and strengthening institutional

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capacity across various levels of education.

For instance, major financing initiatives under programmes such as the Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) and Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) have provided substantial resources for infrastructure development, teacher training, and system reforms. Reports indicate that these interventions have contributed to increased school enrolment and improved learning outcomes in several states (World Bank, 2023; Reuters, 2025). This achievement illustrates how foreign policy engagements can yield concrete developmental benefits, particularly when aligned with national education priorities and supported by effective implementation frameworks. Promotion of Educational Standardization and Policy Reforms Nigeria's participation in international education frameworks has influenced the adoption of global best practices in policy formulation and system management. Through collaboration with international organisations and adherence to global benchmarks, Nigeria has undertaken reforms in curriculum development, accreditation processes, and quality assurance mechanisms. Institutions such as the National Universities Commission have incorporated international standards into accreditation and programme evaluation processes, thereby improving the credibility of Nigerian qualifications. Additionally, engagement

with global bodies has encouraged policy innovations in areas such as outcome-based education, digital learning, and institutional governance. These reforms have enhanced the comparability of Nigeria's education system with global standards, thereby increasing the mobility of Nigerian graduates and strengthening the country's academic reputation internationally (UNESCO, 2022; Okebukola, 2021).

Expansion of Access to Education through Policy Reforms Linked to Foreign Engagements A more recent development in Nigeria's foreign policy trajectory is the strategic redirection of resources from external scholarship dependency toward strengthening domestic education systems. Lessons drawn from years of international engagement have informed policies aimed at expanding access within Nigeria. Government initiatives such as the introduction of student loan schemes, expansion of local scholarship programmes, and increased investment in tertiary institutions reflect this shift. Reports from The Guardian Nigeria indicate that these reforms are designed to accommodate a larger population of students while reducing the financial burden associated with studying abroad. This transition represents a more sustainable approach to educational development. Rather than abandoning international cooperation, Nigeria is leveraging its foreign policy experiences to build a more resilient and inclusive domestic system. The emerging model

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combines selective international exposure with strengthened local capacity, thereby ensuring broader access and long-term national benefits. Furthermore, human capital development plays a critical role in improving workforce readiness by providing individuals with the necessary skills and competencies to excel in their careers. Skills training programs, professional development opportunities, and ongoing learning initiatives contribute significantly to preparing individuals for the workforce in Nigeria. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training facilities, and lack of support systems can hinder the effective implementation of human capital development programs for improving workforce readiness (Kyllonen, 2023).

Discussion of Findings

The results amongst others showed that there is a positive and strong relationship between the nature of Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations and human capital development in education in Nigeria. Through bilateral agreements with United Kingdom, Nigeria has consistently sought to expand access to quality education, enhance human capital development, and strengthen institutional capacity across its educational system. One major dimension of Nigeria's foreign policy in education is international collaboration and academic exchange. The country has maintained educational partnerships with the United Kingdom, enabling Nigerian students and academics to benefit from

scholarships, research opportunities, and technical training. Programmes such as the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) scholarships have facilitated the movement of Nigerian students to the UK. These initiatives are designed not only to build local expertise but also to foster diplomatic relations and cultural exchange, thereby strengthening Nigeria's global presence. The finding is in agreement with Mohammed et al. (2026) study that revealed the relationship between tertiary education and human capital development. This finding is in tandem with Okeke and Elegbede (2024) submission that education is crucially important for the development of human capital. At an individual level, your education affects your skill sets, your earnings, your employability, and your adaptational capacities. It also affects your health, which is also critical for human functioning and human capital development. Education helps individuals fulfil and apply their abilities and talents and increases productivity in an economy.

As predicted, the study also revealed that the relationship between the UK and Nigeria spans decades with great potential and success stories of economic growth, cultural exchange and educational development. Some of these benefits range from capacity building for the educational sector through a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, which in turn drives innovation in research, economic growth, productivity, and

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efficiency across all sectors. The exchange of students and academia who undergo world class educational programs in UK institutions, enables knowledge transfer, skills, and expertise between both countries. The partnership between both countries also drives innovation and entrepreneurship through job creation, curriculum development, business development and opportunities for entrepreneurs.

The study established that Nigeria-UK bilateral relationship significantly impacts human capital development in Nigeria through a duality of knowledge transfer and severe brain drain. While partnerships bolster academic capacity and skills development, they also drain Nigeria of critical teaching and healthcare professionals. The finding is in agreement with Aluko's (2025) views that education plays a very important and crucial role in improving the production capacity of a population. Available records indicate that thousands of Nigerian students benefitted from the scheme between 2015 and 2022, reflecting sustained government commitment to human capital development. This initiative has also contributed to reducing skill shortages in specialised sectors upon the return of beneficiaries. However, scholars have noted that while the programme has been impactful, its long-term success depends on effective reintegration policies that ensure returning graduates are absorbed into productive sectors of the Nigerian economy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022; Daily Trust, 2023).

Conclusion

This study has attempted to highlight the impacts of the Nigeria – United Kingdom bilateral relations on human capital development in Nigeria's education Sector. It showed how and why education developed across the world and the benefit that it has brought to mankind by creating the needed human capital for the progress achieved so far. It has particularly shown how the Nigerian education system evolved and expanded overtime and explored Nigeria's potential to develop an enduring research culture to underpin its future greatness. Human capital development plays a crucial role in educational advancement by focusing on enhancing the knowledge, skills, and attributes of individuals. The theoretical underpinnings of human capital theory emphasize the value of investing in people to drive organizational success and economic growth. In practice, educational institutions can leverage human capital development to improve teaching practices, student learning outcomes, and overall organizational performance.

By prioritizing human capital development in education, organizations can foster a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and growth that benefits individuals and society as a whole. In the context of educational advancement, human capital development serves as a catalyst for transforming the learning environment and improving teaching practices. By investing in teachers' professional

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development and implementing student-centered approaches, educational institutions can enhance the human capital of their workforce and educational outcomes.

Concrete steps will have to be taken to address these problems if the nation is to achieve and build the needed human capital to develop the country. One of the most important steps is creating the needed atmosphere or environment for research activities in the country by government. The provision of basic infrastructure and facilities, which goes hand in hand with increased budgetary allocation to the education sector and to research specifically, has become imperative. Understanding the specific context and diversity of individual research systems and how it relates to partnerships and international cooperation remains key to effective research and capacity building among the nation's academics. Developing national systems for research to identify needs is also necessary. It is through such systems that research results and local impact are known and measured. Building research capacity becomes paramount and can be carried out through fostering collaborations, partnerships and networking among local and international researchers, sharing and managing research and funding research.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical and theoretical findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Nigeria should leverage its diplomatic ties with the UK Department for Business and Trade to prioritize the establishment of high-quality Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships and international schools locally. Future bilateral educational agreements must mandate a joint counterpart-funding mechanism where international grants are structurally tied to upgrading domestic research laboratories and institutional infrastructure. This will ensure that the "nature" of the bilateral relationship directly repairs the structural and instructional decay of domestic classrooms rather than serving merely as an exit route for local talents.
- ii. To mitigate the severe impact of asymmetric brain drain and the talent gaps caused by UK recruitment of skilled Nigerian professionals, the government must institutionalize formal policy frameworks for academic Diaspora engagement. Rather than treating outward student and faculty mobility as a total loss, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should negotiate structural "brain circulation" clauses within the UK-Nigeria Strategic Partnership framework. This includes formalizing virtual teaching tracks, collaborative co-supervision of doctoral research, joint scientific publications, and mandatory short-term physical return incentives for Chevening and Commonwealth beneficiaries. Furthermore, a dedicated National Institution for Research and Development must be established to provide

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competitive incentives and robust career integration tracks that absorb returning foreign-trained graduates into productive sectors of the Nigerian economy.

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