

Review

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects

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This paper looked at the role of education in the development of a nation, noting among others that education enables people to be good citizens. It therefore saw the need for a qualitative education in Nigeria as such education is what empowers its recipients to be useful members of the society and prepares them for success in life. The paper traced educational development in Nigeria from Independence to the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in September 1999. The UBE was launched in Nigeria to address the problems that brought about the failures of the previous educational policies and programmes that existed before it. The aim was to address the agitations and yearnings of the Nigerian people for an educational system that would be more relevant to the socio-economic, political and cultural background of the country. However, the UBE itself is also being bedeviled by a lot of problems. The paper examines these problems and considers the benefits of proper implementation of the UBE programme. Suggestions were made for a way forward.

Keywords: Education, UBE Programme, Problems, Prospects.

Introduction

Education, they say, is power. The role of education in the march towards development for any nation cannot be overemphasized. According to Ochoyi and Danladi (2008), education is generally concerned with the transmission of worthwhile values such as skills, knowledge and planned activities that can develop learners' potentials for national development. Adeyanju (2010) noted that no development can occur at all without education, and no peace or security without development. To him, at personal level of development, education is one of the strongest weapons for escaping from poverty because it improves the quality and chances of the individual's progress.

However, education is not only for escaping poverty. It also influences an individual's moral, spiritual, physical and intellectual self. Education trains people to be good citizens. An individual does not automatically become a good citizen. He is educated to be one. This education begins from the home and continues through school. Adeyanju(2010) rightly pointed out that it may well be that some of the corrupt practices, unprofessional and anti-social behaviors we observe at all levels of society today,

including the aggressive disruptive ones in our political, social and economic lives, result directly from the neglect of character education at home and in schools. According to him, we continue to emphasize education merely as number of credits in WAEC and NECO scores. The neglect of character education at all levels, he said, comes with a price, as no nation can aspire to join the committee of developed nations without character and respectability.

A good citizen loves his country. He pays his taxes and obeys the laws of the land. He respects constituted authorities and joins in promoting community and national development. He takes no bribe and gives none. He sees a public office not as a chance to enrich himself and acquire wealth for his generation yet unborn, but as a call to dedicate himself to the service of others. This is why a major goal of education in any nation is to prepare its citizens for responsible and productive adult life so as to be able to function honestly, efficiently and effectively in the society in which they live. According to the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2007), education is for a. The development of an individual into a morally

- sound, patriotic and effective citizen.
- b. The total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world as a global village
 - c. The inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity and
 - d. The development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities/ competencies and of empowering the individual to live in and contribute positively to society.

Adeyanju (2010) however cited a World Bank Report as noting that Nigerians have not been receiving quality and job-related education. According to Omotayo, Ihebereme and Maduwesi (2008), quality education can be viewed as specific standard of education attainable against the backdrop of the existing international standard. Such education must be functional. Educationists describe functional education as that which emphasizes technological growth, self employment, self reliance, positive nation building, job performance, competency, life skills and lifelong education (Akubuilu, 2008). Fafunwa (1986) also considers qualitative education as functional in nature. He sees qualitative education as that which can empower the recipients to be useful members of the society through the acquisition of certain basic skills, abilities and competencies. Education is therefore qualitative to the extent that it strives to achieve national objectives and prepares students for success in life. This brings out the need for a more pro-active effort in the promotion of Education for All [EFA] in Nigeria.

It must be borne in mind that the child of today is the man of tomorrow. If our children are empowered educationally, their future would be guaranteed and we would have given them the best start in life. We would have also made it less difficult for them to carry out their civic duties and responsibilities as members of the society, since education is supposed to prepare one for life in the society. And the quality and caliber of human resources in a nation is an indication of the level of development that nation can attain.

Educational development in Nigeria

Since independence, the successive administrations of the Nigerian nation have shown interest in and concern for the development of education. Realizing the role that education plays in national development, Nigerian governments have continued to venture into various educational policies and programmes with the expectation of meeting the country's need in the areas of human and infrastructural development. According to Gideons and Sorkaa (2008), some of the policies that have evolved include the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme of the Western and Eastern regions, the takeover of schools from the missionaries, the

establishment of unity schools and the introduction of UPE nationwide. The UPE was introduced across the country by the Federal Government in September 1976, still with the intention of meeting the educational needs of the Nigerian citizenry. However, a decade after its introduction, according to Fafunwa (1986), the educational outcomes showed that the national objectives were not being fully realized. The failure of the programme was blamed on lack of fund, poor planning and implementation.

Later on, the 6-3-3-4 system was also introduced nationwide by the Federal Government precisely in 1982. This system of education required a child to spend 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior secondary school, another 3 years in senior secondary school, and 4 years in a tertiary institution. It replaced the 6-5-4 system that was in operation before its introduction. Gideons and Sorkaa (2008), however, noted that most of these educational policies and programmes in Nigeria were always implemented without a reliable assessment of the country's needs, without proper funding and without monitoring and evaluation. Expectedly, despite the 6-3-3-4 system, the rate of illiteracy was still high, the conditions of the schools' infrastructures deplorable, school dropout was increasing and unprecedented poverty, unemployment, crime and other vices still were the order of the day.

Then the need for a more responsive education in the country became imminent especially following the outcome of the Jomtien World Conference held in 1990 and the declaration of Education for All (EFA) by the year 2000 at that conference. This was also followed a decade later by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which re-emphasized the EFA message, packaging it into eight main goals. The MDGs were an eight point agenda adopted by 149 World leaders on how to curb the problem of poverty and its attendant problems in the under developed countries of the world. This decision was reached at the United Nations Millennium Summit held in September 2000. The outcome of the summit was a declaration committing all member countries, including Nigeria, to strive and achieve the following goals by the year 2015.

Goal 1 -Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2 -Achieve Universal Basic Education

Goal 3-Promote Gender Equality and empower Women

Goal 4 -Reduce Child Mortality

Goal 5 -Improve Maternal Health

Goal 6 -Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

Goal 7 -Ensure Environmental Sustainability.

Goal 8 -Develop a global partnership for development (Eze, 2008).

The introduction of the UBE in Nigeria was therefore a positive move by the country's administration to strive to achieve the MDGs and to address the agitations and

yearnings of the Nigerian people for an educational system that would be more relevant to the socio-economic, political and cultural background of the country. It also showed Government's commitment to the total eradication of illiteracy in the country.

The Universal Basic Education Programme

Basic education is fundamental to human and national development. It is the foundation upon which other levels of education are built and a necessary requirement for human and national progress (Tahir, 2006). The provision of basic education for all citizens, according to Ochoyi and Danladi (2008) has been a global objective which Nigeria like some other nations sets out to achieve through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. The need for such intervention scheme in the nation's educational system is borne out of the realization of the role of education in an individual's life and in the promotion of social, political and economic development in every nation. It is said that no nation can rise above its educational level.

Before the introduction of the UBE programme, the existing policy and programme of government for education was found to give rise to distortions, high rate of dropouts, narrow curriculum content and half baked graduates that did not meet the needs of the society. The UBE scheme was therefore launched to address these problems by providing free, universal and compulsory basic education to all children regardless of sex, age, ethnic or religious inclinations, language or status. It is also to accommodate comprehensive adult literacy programme. The scheme is therefore designed to ensure adequate and qualitative education that is directed towards the achievement of the nation's objectives.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched on 30th September 1999 by the then President of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo. The programme is designed to provide free and compulsory education for children in the primary and junior secondary schools in the country. President Obasanjo on launching the scheme assured that the many problems that bedeviled the 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme would not be allowed to hamper the 9-year basic education programme. He further pointed out that the scheme is aimed at arresting the decline and decay as well as expanding and improving on the UPE scheme.

Prior to the launching of the UBE, a child starts primary school at the age of 6 years or thereabout and graduates with a first school leaving certificate. He then takes a common entrance examination that qualifies him/her for admission into a secondary school. The UBE came as a replacement of this system. The UBE involves 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school culminating in 9 years of uninterrupted schooling.

Transition from one class to another is automatic, though assessed through continuous assessment.

The UBE programme is designed to remove distortions and inconsistencies in basic education delivery and to reinforce the implementation of the National Policy on Education. It is also to provide greater access to basic education and ensure its quality throughout the country. The Universal Basic Education Act (2004) defines Universal Basic Education as early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl-child and women, almajiri, street children and disabled groups.

UBE is therefore more comprehensive than UPE or other programmes of the Federal Government on education. According to the Implementation Guidelines for the UBE, the scheme stresses the inclusion of girls and women and a number of underserved groups; the poor, street and roaming children, rural and remote population, nomads, migrants, workers, indigenous people, minorities, refugees and the disabled. The formal education system is only one of six components included in UBE. Others relate to early childhood, literacy and non formal education or apprenticeship training for youths outside the formal education system [Nigeria, 2000].

Objectives of UBE

The national objectives which UBE seeks to achieve include;

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion
2. The promotion of free universal basic education for every Nigerian of school-going age
3. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency
4. Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethics, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.[Nigeria, 2000].

Obong (2006) outlined the specific goals of the programme as;

1. Ensuring an un-interrupted access to 9-years formal education by providing free and compulsory Universal Basic Education for every

2. Reducing school drop-out rate and improving relevance, quality and efficiency.
3. Enabling individuals acquire literacy, numeracy, life skills and useful living
4. Providing mid-day meals to enhance children's access, retention and completion of the school cycle.
5. Emphasizing on curriculum diversification and relevance to effectively and adequately cover individual and community needs and aspirations.
6. Disarticulating junior secondary schools from senior secondary schools.
7. Realigning/Integrating junior secondary education with primary education.
8. Individualizing teaching methods.
9. Introducing rudiment of computer literacy
10. Ensuring appropriate teacher professional development.
11. Encouraging community ownership of schools including participating in decision making process in schools.

The UBE programme took off in September 2006 in the country.

Problems/ challenges of the UBE programme

Some of the problems/challenges of the UBE scheme include

Inadequate funding

The UBE planning and Implementation Document (Nigeria, 2000) stated that the sum of 5 million dollars was estimated for renovating the existing school structures and building new ones. Such an amount of money from all indications has not been disbursed for renovation of schools as most schools still have dilapidated structures with no libraries, laboratories, and other support facilities, and where they exist, they may not be well equipped.

Inaccurate data for planning

When data provided for planning is inaccurate, then decisions based on such data would be faulty. Dare, Onekata and Auwal (2000) pointed out that the National Population Census, for instance, which is expected to provide the most reliable data for educational planning and implementation has always been politicized. It is of course common knowledge that after each head count, figures are rolled out and in some cases, these figures may not quite represent the actual number of people in

the locality. When planning is done based on such inaccurate statistical data, surely there would be problem.

Lack of enough competent teachers

The teacher-student ratio in the UBE scheme is put at 1: 40. Obviously this is not what obtains in most UBE schools where some classes have up to 70 pupils/students. This has therefore continued to be a big challenge to the government considering the cost implication of employing such a large number of teachers as the scheme demands.

Poor implementation of the new UBE curriculum

The teacher is an important and indispensable tool in the achievement of educational goals in all educational institutions. He is at the centre of knowledge and learning. Curriculum process in Nigeria can be considered as consisting of 3 levels- what is intended, what is implemented and what is learnt or attained. Curriculum reform can therefore only be effective if teachers are trained and equipped with the skills to implement the intended curriculum, and such training often does not hold for all teachers.

Poor public enlightenment

There are parts expected to be played by all stakeholders in the education business in the UBE scheme. However, most stakeholders seem unaware of these responsibilities and some are laws that must be obeyed. For instance, the enabling law of UBE has prescribed punishment for parents and guardians who keep their children and wards from school. Such offence is punishable by imprisonment or payment of fine. Yet even till date, young Nigerian children are still seen hawking and begging for alms on the roads during school hours and nobody does anything about it.

Poor monitoring/evaluation

Only through monitoring/evaluation can one be able to estimate the effectiveness of an educational enterprise and such monitoring/evaluation is often not done.

Poor motivation of teachers

There is no doubt that the morale of Nigerian teachers is generally low. The teaching profession and teachers themselves are generally relegated to the background in

terms of what they are paid as salaries by government and other owners of schools, and this goes a long way to affect their productivity.

Benefits of the proper Implementation of the UBE programme

The Universal Basic Education programme if properly implemented would help the country achieve the following;

Quality education

Education, it has been said, is qualitative to the extent that it is functional. Since the new curriculum for basic education derives from the immediate needs of the Nigerian State, education would therefore be more functional as the recipients of it would then be more useful in the society.

Achievement of the MDGs

The MDGs according to Eze (2008) are ends in themselves but they are also the means to a productive life, to economic growth and to peace and stability. The central need for member countries to work towards the attainment of the MDGs is for the eradication of poverty and its attendant horrors which the UBE strives to achieve. When individuals are empowered, poverty paves way for a more fulfilled life.

More jobs for Nigerian citizens.

Enrollment of children in schools is expected to increase at an alarming rate with UBE, and with such increase in the number of schools and students, more teachers will be needed to be employed. This would create enormous job opportunities and so more individuals would be engaged in the labour market, thereby bringing about a reduction in the level of unemployment in the country.

Curbing of indiscipline and crime

The idle mind is said to be the devil's workshop. When someone is idle and of course religion is not a powerful dynamic force in the individual, crime can take over. UBE is designed to provide individuals with basic education enough to enable them live a more productive life in the society.

Furthermore, where many Nigerian children are not taught the values and norms of their society in schools and then perhaps no one mentions them at home either, the children can easily yield to crime. The removal of moral and civic education from the curriculum was indeed a mistake. It made a bad situation worse. But with the UBE curriculum, such values as would help a child grow up as a good citizen have been built back into the curriculum.

Reduction in child labour

The International Labour Organization ILO (2001) defines child labour as some type of work done by children under the age of 18. According to them, child labour include full time work done by children under 15 years of age that prevents them from going to school or that exposes them to health risks. Compulsory basic education is the key to ending this exploitation and abuse of a child's right to education. Children who attend school are less likely to be engaged in such hazardous and exploitive jobs. Moreover, since the major reason for child labour is poverty and UBE is supposed to be free, parents would also not have any reason not to send their children/wards to school.

Reduction of gender imbalance in educational attainment

The UBE program will help to produce educated women that can contribute meaningfully and effectively to national development. The development of any nation no doubt depends largely on inputs made by all her citizens, and considering the fact that women constitute about half of the Nigerian population, Nigeria may well be undermining the contribution of about half of its citizens if women are not given opportunity to go to school. Interestingly, the UBE programme focuses on gender imbalance with a view to reducing it to the barest minimum for the benefit of the country.

Reduction of the level of poverty.

Poverty is a disease. In the face of poverty, people strive frantically and labour so much, engaging in any kind of activity that will fetch them their daily bread. This paves way for a lot of anti-social behaviors such as arm robbery, prostitution, human trafficking, etc. But one factor that can eradicate poverty is employment which itself is gained after an individual have had some sort of training in a school or have learnt some kind of trade or skill, which are all what UBE provides for.

Better health for the Nigerian child.

Realizing the importance of food for the intellectual as well as the physical well being of an individual, the Federal Government of Nigeria in September 2005, launched its home-grown school feeding and health programme aimed at providing highly nutritious meals to primary and junior secondary school students under the UBE scheme. This for some children could be the only good meal they would be able to have in a day and it will help to enhance their health status. Poverty and consequently poor eating habits increase the risk of child malnutrition which has adverse effect on growth and intellectual development.

Help to parents

All parents want to see their children grow up normally. The primary school age is a time when a child goes through remarkable physical changes of all kinds and so their food intake becomes a critical aspect of this growth and development. The UBE programme makes provision for feeding of the students in schools and such would reduce the burden of impoverished parents. Moreover, UBE is free and so parents are also helped to have their children in school and yet spend less.

Motivating students to enroll in schools

The rich curriculum of the UBE and also the home-grown school feeding and health programme can encourage students to enroll and be regular at school especially children in rural communities where poverty level is high, school enrollment low and drop-out rate high. A child who would not be sure of getting food at home would rather prefer to go to school where it is certain that he would have a good meal. With this positive attitude developed, the child's interest in school and in learning may from there be ignited

Suggestions/Steps towards proper Implementation of UBE

Adequate funding

UBE scheme, judging from its provisions is obviously capital intensive and so requires adequate funding for the programme to succeed. Government should therefore strive to make funds available for the proper implementation of the programme.

Provision of Infrastructure and other facilities in schools

Educational facilities are imperative to qualitative UBE programme in Nigeria. Facilities such as textbooks, libraries, classrooms, seats and tables, laboratories, computers, technical/vocational equipments, electricity, etc are all very important for the effective implementation of the UBE scheme. There is therefore the need for adequate supply of these facilities and such facilities when provided should not be diverted.

Recruitment of enough competent teachers

There is also need for recruitment of enough trained teachers for the effective implementation of the UBE programme. There should also be re-training of teachers already on the job to ensure that they update their knowledge base.

Better motivation for teachers

Teachers should be properly motivated to render quality service by regular payment of their salaries and improvement in what they are paid. With adequate motivation and remuneration, the teachers can then work with renewed spirit and commitment to the UBE scheme.

Effective monitoring/evaluation

The program should be monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure that the system does not deviate from the set goals.

Conclusion

Nigeria like the rest of the countries of the world has strong desire for development. Today, more than ever before, it has become an indisputable fact that any nation that wants to achieve progress and development must of necessity pay serious attention to the development of its human resources. And the key is education.

The UBE programme has been launched and kicked off in Nigeria to provide quality basic education free to all Nigerian citizens that do not have it. All hands should therefore be on deck to ensure the effective implementation and consequently the success of the programme.

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