

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION TRAINING : PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES TO THE REALIZATION OF ITS OBJECTIVES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discussed the scope and objectives of Universal Basic Education (UBE). The concept of UBE, primary and pre-vocational education were highlighted. Overview of UBE and the problems militating against the implementation of the UBE programme were discussed. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made among which are that training opportunities be provided by the government for the already employed teachers in primary and junior secondary schools to enable them update and upgrade their knowledge to meet up with the requirement for teaching under UBE programme and the implementation plan should be pursued vigorously and evaluated at all levels of government for the objectives of the UBE programme to be achieved.

Introduction

The education system in Nigeria has witnessed varying degrees of problems and various challenges. The country has acknowledged education as the corner stone for any development and the bedrock of any democratic process. The philosophy goals, structure, management and delivery of education is clearly spelt out in the National Policy on Education; Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) and other documents relevant to education in the country.

Governments in the past have come with policies and programmes concerning education. Successive governments have abandoned the policies and programmes of previous government to develop and pursue new ones. Even at that, there has not been a genuine and sincere commitment of past governments to their programmes. Deeply entrenched into the Nigerian culture is corruption, that the primary pre-occupation of majority of the people in government is self-enrichment at the detriment of the overall good of the nation. The negative effect of this trend has taken its toll on Nigerian education to the extent that they have virtually crippled Nigerian education to a near total collapse.

Other problems and challenges confronting the progress of education in Nigeria since the beginning of the 21st century have been identified by the Federal Government and solutions are being sought. Three of the problems and challenges as identified by Owhotu (2006) are as follows: lack of well defined objectives and goals; deficiencies in the curriculum context of education which brought about a mismatch between national aspiration and the quality of products of the education system especially in area of skills and moral education; and the alarming rate of drop-out among school age children. These among others informed the Federal Government to formulate guidelines for dealing with these problems and challenges confronting education in Nigeria, bearing in mind the need for acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and

social abilities and competencies for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society as contained in the NPE.

One of such efforts was the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1977 by the military government to make education relevant to the needs and aspirations of the individual and the larger society. However, having observed the distortions and inconsistencies in education delivery in the 6-3-3-4 system, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched by the immediate past government to provide greater access to education and to refocus education on skill acquisition.

Concept of Universal Basic Education (UBE), Primary and Pre-vocational Education

Basic education as a concept resulted from a global search for an answer to the challenges of preparing people for meaningful living in a learning society (Obanya, 2000). Basic education is not defined in terms of years of schooling, neither is it limited to the formal schooling. It sees education in its broadest sense as articulation of the formal, the non-formal approaches and the mechanisms for awakening an all round development of human potentials (FRN, 2000, p.3). The broad aim is to lay the foundation for life-long learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning-to-learn, self-awareness, citizenship and life skills.

The UBE in the educational reform agenda of the nation is explained in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) as follows

1. Basic education shall be of 9-year duration comprising 6-years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary school. It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out-of school youths.
2. The specific goals of basic education shall be the same as the goals of the levels of education to which it applies (i.e primary education, junior secondary education and adult and non-formal education) (p.13).

The FRN (2004) defined primary education as the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 years plus. It is the foundation of which the rest education lies. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary education is the key to the success or failure of other forms of education (secondary and tertiary education).

Pre-vocational education is the form of education that prepares individuals for career choice. As the world around us is changing and changing fast, there must be an increase emphasis on vocational career education at primary school level. Subjects such as agriculture, arts and craft, basic science and technology among others are to be taught as pre-vocational subjects under the UBE programme to guide the individual for a career choice (Usuji, 2004).

Overview of Universal Basic Education Programme

The UBE programme was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria to make education "free and compulsory" at the fundamental stages of schooling (primary to junior secondary school). The UBE programme was launched by the government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto on 30th September 1999 and was established by an Act of the National Assembly in 2004. The Act is known as the Compulsory, Free UBE

Act 2004. The Act, according to Tahir (2006) provides for compulsory, free UBE for all children of primary and secondary school age in Nigeria.

In line with the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the National Policy on Education FRN (2004) and the relevant laws, UBE is aimed at:

- Ensuring an un interrupted access to 9 years formal education free.
- Compulsory UBE for every child of school going age.
- Reducing school drop-out and improving relevance, quality and efficiency; and
- Acquisition of literacy, numeracy, life skills and values for lifelong education and useful living.

In order to avoid controversies about Basic 1-9, the FRN (2004) made reference to junior primary (i.e lower basic 1-3); senior primary (middle basic 4-6) and junior secondary (upper basic 7-9). The FRN stressed that it is the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) that is divided into three parts based on psychological, pedagogical issues and considerations in curriculum development. The BEC is designed to allow curriculum planners to properly target pupils needs and interest at respective age levels and to promote appropriate core and elective subjects for well round education . The FRN (2004) section 4 sub-section 18 contained 7-goals of primary education one of which is to give the child the opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him/her function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity. For the purpose of the goals of lower basic, middle basic and upper basic, the BEC is made flexible to accommodate the learners' life-skills development.

The subjects in junior secondary (upper basic) are listed under core subjects, pre-vocational electives and non-pre vocational electives: these subjects according to Usuji (2004) will empower learners to study different subjects which will ultimately lead to a variety of career choices at the tertiary level. The grouping undoubtedly provides room for flexibility in learning which could enhance adaptability and responsiveness to global situation of the 21st century. Based on the dictates of the present challenges, the BEC curricular have been expanded to include primary education which forms one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

UBE is an inclusive education, since it embraces non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary school levels for the adults and out of school youths. However, the specific objectives of UBE, according to FRN (2000) in order to eradicate illiteracy in Nigerian populace are :

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- The provision of a free UBE for every Nigerian child of school going age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or the other have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of their basic education; and
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic

values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Findings of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) in 2006 showed that there are 42.1 million(m) Nigerians eligible for primary school education, with only 22.3m having the opportunity to attend school. This figure implies that about 19.8m Nigerians who should be in primary schools, were not. Similarly, the report contained that there are 33.9m Nigerians eligible for secondary school education but only 6.4m in secondary schools. This report indicated clearly the crisis that education in Nigeria is faced with. It is not out of place to state therefore, that the UBE Act represents the most significant reform in educational sub-sector in Nigeria. The Act addresses access, inclusiveness, affordability and quality education to all Nigerian children irrespective of tribe, creed, religion and place of abode. It is the foundation for sustaining life-long learning and providing reading, writing, and numeracy and life skills (Ossoma, 2006).

It should be noted that in terms of scope, the UBE programme in the Nigerian context, is not simply education from primary 1 to Junior Secondary School (JSS) III. It is more all- embracing in keeping with Universal Concept of Basic Education. As contained in the implementation guideline, the Basic Education Programme encompasses the following:

- Programmes/Initiatives for early childhood care and socialization;
- Education programmes for acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy, and life skills especially for adults (persons 15 years and above)
- Special programmes for nomadic education;
- Out-of school, non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basis needed for lifelong learning;
- Non-formal skills and apprentice-ship training for adolescents and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education; and
- The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school (FRN, 2000, p.3)

The non-formal and formal programmes of the UBE consist of functional literacy, remedial, continuing, vocational, aesthetics, cultural, political and environmental education for youths and adults outside the formal sector. The non- formal sector is an integral part of UBE (Tahir, 2006). The two major target groups Tahir stressed are the nomadic population of pastoralists and the migrant fishing communities.

Problems Confronting the Implementation of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

It could be observed that the UBE programme like most educational programmes and policies, is faced with a number of problems . The success of the UBE programme depends on adequate supply of manpower to implement process. Today, public schools particularly in the rural areas suffer a serious neglect, which manifest in dearth of trained teachers to teach in the schools. There are local government areas where qualified primary school teachers account for less than 30%. According to Ndu (2002) the vast majorities of the teachers are Senior Secondary Certificate Education (SSCE) failures or grade II (referred).

Primary schools in rural areas are in total decay. The sorry state of the primary schools is not the best for the UBE programme. Lamenting on the deplorable state of the primary schools, Agbo (1997), Ohakwe (1999) and Onyeukwu (2000) observed that the

model of beauty and elegance associated with primary schools in the past have gone down the drain. Roofless buildings, falling blocks of classrooms, classrooms without seats and chalkboards, no toilet facilities and instructional materials characterized what is in place now. In some cases teachers carry chairs from their houses to classroom to teach. Commenting on the physical facilities and the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme, Tahir (2006) observed that the UPE programme was faced with inadequacy of needed equipment, workshops and laboratories, offices, seats, toilet facilities, play ground, to mention but a few. According to him the same mistake is about to repeat itself in the present UBE programme.

The success of any programme largely depends upon the availability of resources needed for such programme. Funds must be adequate, without fund other related activities cannot be provided. Salami (1992) in Adeleye (2000) identified inadequate funding as one of the constraints in financing education in Nigeria. Adding weight to the above lamentation Isyaka (1997) observed that financing education suffers some serious problems that have limited its effective contribution to the development of the nation. The problem of in-adequate funding, has lead to inadequate teaching facilities, shortage of laboratories and workshop equipment, shortage of qualified teachers at all levels, poor remuneration, lack of infrastructures and facilities. The success or failure of the UBE programme will ultimately be determined by the availability of funds for adequate supply of infrastructural facilities, equipment and their maintenance, employment of qualified personnel and prompt release of funds.

United Nation Education Scientific Cultural organization(UNESCO) (2003) identified several other problems and challenges that are confronting education in Nigeria since the beginning of the 21st century to which solutions are being proffered. Some of these problems and challenges are:

- Deficiencies in the curriculum context of education, which brought about a mismatch between national aspiration and the quality of products of the education system especially in the area of life skills and moral education.
- Gross inadequacies in infrastructural facilities at all levels of education.
- Lack of maintenance of school buildings and equipment.
- Poor curriculum delivery resulting in the low of performance levels in schools.
- Inadequate funding of education sector.
- Overcrowded class rooms especially in urban areas.
- Deficiency in educational monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Recommendations

The followings are recommended for UBE to meet the needs of the society, the nation and the global challenges of 21st century.

- Training opportunities should be provided by the government for the already employed teachers in primary and junior secondary schools, to enable them update and upgrade their knowledge to meet up with the requirements for teaching under UBE programme.

- The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should be brought into the programme and mandated to use her structure on ground for massive production of teachers for the UBE programme to reduce teacher-students ratio

to 1:21 so as to enhance close monitoring and supervision of students to facilitate effective teaching and learning.

- There is the need for optimal allocation and efficient utilization of resources and effective coordination and monitoring of the programme at Federal, State and Local government levels.
- The implementation plan should be pursued vigorously and evaluated at all levels of government for the objectives of the UBE programme to be achieved.

Conclusion

The UBE programme like most educational programmes and policies is faced with a number of problems such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructural facilities, inadequate attention to policy framework among others. In order to meet up with the global challenges of the 21st century, the Universal Basic Education which is the foundation for all levels of education must be given topmost priority in our educational system.

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