

REFORMS IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL (UBE PRIMARY) EDUCATION

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Abstract

The issue of large adult illiterate population has been topical in the Nigeria educational discourses. The reason is not far fetched as the country records high school drop-out rate especially males and has been counted among the E-9 countries of the world. 50 million out of the 140m populations are illiterates made up women, out of school youths, nomadic populations and adolescents. Factors such as home and socio-cultural factors, personal and environmental circumstances combine to force pupils out of school or prevent them from initial entry. Recent reforms and innovations initiated at all the levels of education by government are expected to redress the situation with particular reference to the universal basic education (UBE) initiative which emphasized and recommends proper attention to out- of— school education for the affected classes of people. It becomes necessary to ensure that apart from posting qualified teachers to the out - of - school education centres, the innovations which have been proposed for the regular primary school education such as libraries, ICT, capacity building for teacher/ instructors be extended to this segment of education in addition to those already in practice.

Introduction

The quest for education has a long history in Nigeria, especially with its association with power, wealth, health, development and upward mobility. Studies by Okedara (1976), Agu (1986), Nwokedi (1998), and a host of others suggest that education increases the capacity for better job performance and ultimately enhances job positions. Education has been seen as key that opens doors such as economic empowerment and development, industrialization which is predicated on science and technology, political relevance both nationally and internationally and effective national development in fact, educational qualification is-the basic criterion for initial job placements. The desire, therefore, for governments to educate the entire populace has necessitated the initiation of various educational reforms such as the University Primary Education (UPE), the, 6-3-3-4 system, nomadic education, mass literacy and adult and non formal education and very recently the University Basic Education and has also informed the position of Nigeria being signatories to several international initiatives in education. It is also believed that education determines incomes earning capacity and life expectancy of the people. This is probably because education empowers, refines, and improves both technical and personal skills, enlightens and exposes latent ones. In this regard most countries of the world spend huge some of money to provide education to the citizenry and create avenues in the world of work for the Utilization of the acquired skills and knowledge.

However, the reality is that Nigeria is still counted among the countries of the world which have the highest adult illiteracy population -for example an estimated 50 million Nigerians are currently believed to be illiterates including mainly women, out-of-school youths (termed early leavers), junior government employees and people in isolated communities (FME 200; 15). With this alarming figure it becomes necessary to examine the challenges facing the on-going reforms in the education sector of Nigeria that intends to join the League of Nations which aspire to give their entire citizenry education by the year 2015. this is with the intent of charting the way forward with regard to out-of-school education.

Policy Provisions for out-of School- Education

The FME (2004:25), stated that,

Mass literacy, adult and non-formal education encourages all forms of functional education given to youths and adults outside the formal school system, such as functional literacy, remedial and vocational education.

Part of the goal of such an education being to,

Provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. This includes the nomads, migrant families, the describable and other categories or groups especially the disadvantaged

gender (p 25.) The disadvantaged gender no doubt refers to the females. To oversee the activities and

programme of these sectors of education, the Federal Government established the National

Commission for mass literacy, adult and non - formal education while the states established the corresponding agencies to co-ordinate and implement national policies, monitor and supervise programmes. The local governments of the education initiative.

The universal Basic Education (UBE), which was formally launched on 30th September, 1999 in Sokoto by Chief Olusegun Obasmiyo has one of its goals as:

Catering for young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling as well as other out-of-school children/adolescents through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.

Anuna (2004), noted that the goals of UBE are designed to attain in the citizenry the same level of literacy that exists in developed countries like USA, Britain, Canada, Brazil, South Korea and Japan.

Antecedents to Reforms in the Education System:

In 1976 Education in Nigeria was given a national attention when general Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic education (UBE), and the Mass Literacy Campaign. While the former was to be undertaken at the formal sector the latter belongs to the non-formal sector. The mass literacy campaign was to mobilize the illiterate citizenry to begin to appropriate the programmes of the adult and Non-formal education. Since then all the states of the Federation run one adult and non-formal education programme or the other. Nigeria is signatory to the following international organizations that have the aim of improving the education of its citizens.

1. The Jomtien (1990) Declaration and Framework for action on education
2. The New - Delhi (1991), Declaration of E-9 countries requiring them to reduce the incidence of illiteracy drastically within the shortest possible time.
3. The Ouagadougou (1992), Pan - o African declaration on the education of girls and women
5. 4. The Ouagadougou (1992), Pan -African declaration on the education of girls and women
- The Durban 1998), Statement of commitment by which African states reaffirmed the commitment to making (he generalization of basic education a reality.
6. The OAU Decades of Education in African (1997-2006), on inter African co-operation on education with a strong emphasis on education with a strong emphasis on Vigorous pursuit of basic education.
7. Dakar World Education Forum (2000), which sets an agenda for education in the 21st Century.

In Dakar 2000, about 164 countries of the world met and reiterated the fact that the world's over 100 million children need quality education just as much as they need food, shelter and water as a right. They therefore, agreed that by 2015 children would not only get education but a relevant free and quality one with the principal aim of eradicating illiteracy from the face of the earth (Alaneme 2004: 23).

The national Planning Commission NEEDS, (2004), document admits that while the universities have produced an educated labour force, adult literacy remains at 49% and that although 76% of the children of primary school age attend school, participation drops to 20% for children of secondary school age, that is, this percentage of school children drop out of school. With these figure

before us, it then becomes critical that every available effort and resource must be mobilized to put this group of citizens back on the education runway. This is even more urgent since the necessary manpower that drives the economy is produced through educating the people whether it is formal or non-formal. Something tangible needs to be done in a country (World Bank Reports 1996), simply because the target group does not possess the necessary skills and competences that are required to appropriate the abundant resources available to it. These skills are lacking in most of the working age group who are illiterates. For example, a recent UNESCO survey revealed that of the 44.25m out-of-school children about 45% of them are in the Sub Saharan Africa. Nigeria has the largest percentage of illiterate adult when compared with the other countries of the world (Osuji 2004). Nigeria also belongs to the E-9 countries (i.e. 9 countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterate adults.). This is the group that actually drags the economy down because they contribute very minimally to the economy. The out-of-school education becomes very expedient for the country.

Target group of the Out-of-school Education

The target group for out-of-school education includes:-

1. Drop - outs (early leavers)
2. Adult illiterates
3. Nomadic populations
4. Adolescents and youth (who have not had the benefit of formal education).

Several reasons can be proffered for the inability of these groups to obtain formal education. These reasons will in turn determine the dimension of assistance they require in order to have access to education. These include:

1. Home / Socio-economic factors

- i. Poverty
- ii. Death of sponsor
- iii. Lack of parental supervision

Socio-Cultural Factors

- i. Occupation e.g. nomads and fishermen
- ii. Child-labour
- iii. Early Marriage
- iv. Large family size and structure

3. personal factors

- i. Teenage pregnancy
- ii. Sickness/health problems
- iii. Peer group influence
- iv. Lack of intellectual capacity
- v. Emotional problems

4. School Environment

- i. Lack of proper direction from teachers
- ii. Unstimulating school environment
- iii. Teacher ineffectiveness in the classroom
- iv. Hostile school environment through intimidation from older pupils, insults and undeserved punishments from teachers.
- v. Harsh institutional rules and regulations especially for pupils whose family conditions do not encourage education,
- vi. Lack of qualified teachers
- vii. Curricular content that does not connect with realize experiences the pupil
- viii. Too many subjects

The Challenge

The NEEDS documents (2004: 16-17), recognize the fact that poor people are more likely to live in rural areas, be less educated and have larger families than the rest of the population (p.20). they

are also very susceptible to diseases inhibitions and food taboos which can be addressed by relevant information and supervision. In view of this pathetic situation and the reasons for them, as already outlined, it becomes necessary to be more serious and pragmatic about the implementation of the policy provisions. For example the NPE (2004: 26) stipulates that:

There shall be a motion - wide mass literacy Campaign based on various strategies including that of "each - one - teach - one" participatory Rural Appraisal Regenerated Freircan Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques' PRA ? REFECT and other innovative approaches

The issue becomes to establish to what extent these strategies have been employed in the pursuit of out of school education - apart from the noise that was raised when it was initially suggested; nothing is heard of it any more. In fact, a visit to the mass literacy / out -of- school education centres shows a picture of uninterested and unmotivated teachers and pupils who prefer using the period for getting to know each other better.

Usually, when reforms are initiated, a new zeal and enthusiasm is generated to get things on the right track. Very often such zeal is spent ever before they are utilized. The reasons are not farfetched. The state of the nation's economy which depends almost 100% on oil and affected by the manipulations at the international oil market determines to what extent social / public institutions receive adequate funding Igwc (1987) and Alanaemc (2004), had noted that the effects of financial insufficiency on the inputs to be made in education cannot be over emphasized especially in the rural area where there is large concentration of the illiterate populace, where the rural-dweller school child is forced to drop out three times more than his urban counterpart due to poverty and unstimulating school environment. The paltry budgetary allocation made to education must be drastically reviewed upward. UNESCO had recommended 26% of the annual budget allocation and if the federal Government is serious about reforming the educational sector, it must accept that percentage.

One of the challenges that have faced educational reforms in the country is effective implementation or non-implementation. The 6-3-3-4 system that was phased out but later reintroduced was never effectively implemented. Most of the equipments for the JS science and technology-based subjects were never installed. They either rusted in their crates or were carted away by village thieves. The teachers who were trained abroad to teach the JS classes ran to oil companies or remained abroad and it was almost at that time that electricity supply deteriorated. The challenge of implementation of the suggested reforms cannot be ignored.

The report for ensuring the universal right to literacy and basic education. It therefore, outlined a 7 - point strategy for effectively implementation of adult literacy programmes, namely,

- Public enlightenment programmes directed at community leaders and men on the consequences of illiteracy.
- Review of existing adult literacy programmes to include relevant vocational skills and entrepreneurial education.
- Training of women instructors
- Production of-pedagogical materials for rural dwellers / farmers by the Ministry of Agriculture, Education and State Agencies with the co operation of experts, United nations Agencies and interested NGOs.
- Adaptation of time - table and learning programme to suit the occupational and cultural biased of the target groups.
- Constant monitoring and evaluation aimed at improving strategies and reviewing the programme.
- Need for the provision of adequate funding for providing learning facilities, training and re training instructions and for ensuring permanency of literacy through follow -up education.

It also believes that strengthening the non- formal sector and provision of meals to schoolchildren by communities will help check drop-out rates. No such provision is made for those who had already dropped out. Likewise teacher preparation for these programmes is still lacking in intensity and comprehensiveness. The operators / overseers of the ANFE programmes rely on the recently

recruited UBE teachers to also teach in the literacy classes.

The issue of ideological framework for the on-going reforms should be taken seriously. Irondi (1996), believes that whatever might have been the short-comings of the 1977 National Policy on Education, it was the most progressive policy in Nigeria Education System.

It is unfortunate that the intensity of the research and consultation made before the 1977 policy document was produced was lacking to form the basis for the suggested reforms. The UBE programme was launched in 1999 but the supporting policy was produced in 2004. The policy challenge is significant. The challenge of financial and personal discipline cannot be ignored. The level of corruption in the country is very embarrassing and more disheartening is the caliber of people involved. The mindless sacking of the national treasury discourages commitment must be comprehensively to (the attainment of national goals. The issue of official corruption must be comprehensively dealt with and all loopholes through which public funds are diverted effectively plugged. The issue of quality of product of the adult and non-formal sector cannot be overlooked as part of the educational system. The national Commission for mass literacy. Adult and non-formal Education needs to rise up to the challenges of quality control. It is not enough to go round adult and non-formal education centres without actually observing teaching to ensure subjects matter mastery and effective use of instructional materials and the correct evaluation strategies.

The provision in National Policy on Education (2004:28), of mobile and rural libraries, television viewing and audio listening centres and studio visual teaching and learning aids constitute real challenges, for apart from the financial implication of purchasing the equipment of trained personnel to man the equipments, the communities must be sensitized and educated to the usefulness of them and the need to protect them.

The Way Forward / Recommendations

Though the out-of-school educational programmes constitutionally belong to the LGA and the authority to control and administer it belong to them, yet the state Ministry of Education must be involved in the supervision for greater result.

The poverty of the rural populace in the nation has already been acknowledged. It is therefore, futile to insist that such communities provide meals for the pupils. Rather, both the state and federal Government should pool resources together in order to sustain this aspect of the reforms. In fact the meal component is very necessary and attractive as it will cause the pupils to remain at the centres instead of wandering about in search of food. Nutritionists, psychologists and most educationists agree that quality feeding accounts for dramatic changes, in the growth and intellectual capacity of people (Cobb, 2001 Nwachukwu, 1996, Anuna and Obi 2006). Qualified and adequate number of teachers should be deployed to the UBE out-of-school education centres while instructional materials and text books are made available to them in sufficient quantities.

Teacher motivation through prompt payment of allowances and promotion should never be compromised.

In - service training for teachers should be institutionalized and sustained in order to retain the teachers.

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