

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Universal Basic Education programme like its predecessors - the 6-3-3-4 and the Universal Primary Education is a beautiful packaged programme that could change the vision of Nigerians if properly implemented. It is doubtful if the UBE will not become a mere cosmetic or ornamental in the hands of the government like its predecessors due to faulty implementation strategies. This paper attempts a review of the UBE programme as a most recent educational policy operative in Nigeria. Like the preceding programmes it is already staggering nation-wide. This is due to a number challenges that have availed themselves along the process of implementation. The paper examined briefly these challenges and the way they should be tackled in order that the UBE becomes a reality in Nigeria.

Introduction

The moral and philosophical justification for free and compulsory education dates back to UNO Charter of 1948. This was when the United Nations (UNO) drew attention of the entire world to the issue of "education for all" all subsumed under the basis of the individual right to education. In the same vein Awolowo (1971) opined that education is a natural right of individual if civilization must continue. And that such a right is fundamental and absolute without further interpretation. Despite this, the Nigerian child has not been availed the full opportunities of absolute right to free education as propounded by the above authors. This has been due to inconveniences witnessed in the Nigerian educational industry. For instance, in 1955 the government of the then Western Region of Nigeria passed on a bill making primary education free for all six years old children in the region. This was the beginning of making education free to all Nigerian children. The Eastern Region of Nigeria followed suit in 1956 and theirs actually took off in 1957 (Taiwo, 1980). It was unfortunate that the programme collapsed in the Eastern Region just after one year, while that of the West survived its tumultuous times until the Federal Government came into Universal Primary School programme.

The Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education in September 30, 1976 for the entire nation. Despite its good intention, poor planning and subsequent military incursions into the government of Nigeria mutilated this gem of growth and advancement. Tabotndip (2000) opined that corruption in the high places in government, nepotism, and squandermania dramatically laid the Universal Basic Education Scheme to rest leading to Nigeria having neither free nor Universal Education.

With the emergence of the Third Republic Democracy in Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo revisited the package of universal access to education when he launched the Universal Basic Education in Sokoto on September, 30, 1999. It was an inclusive programme that stretched from the Primary School to the Junior Secondary Class III (JSIII). The Nigerian National Policy on Education specified the levels of the Universal Basic Education (FGN, 1997 revised 1981 and 1998).

The theoretical frame of the UBE is well planned to meet the socio-economic and political needs of Nigeria if properly executed. These necessities, when fulfilled will place Nigeria on better horizon in the future. Ibezim (1998); Oyewole (1998); Erundu (1999); Nwodo (2000); Uwaoma et al (2001) all agreed that when the citizenry is educated, the future is brighter for the economy.

Objectives

The Universal Basic Scheme has the following as its objectives.

- 1.. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
2. The provision of free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child 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 have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative
 - » communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Scope

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme covers the following areas:

1. Programmes/initiatives for the childhood care and socialization.
2. Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy. Numeracy and life-skills; especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above).
3. Special programmes for nomadic populations.
4. Out-of-school, non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning.
5. Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education.
6. The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

From the above, it is clear that the UBE is a very ambitious programme which spans from the formal, non-formal non-formal, life skill to learning - to - learning skills. Okebukoia (2000) praised the UBE programme for having given full considerations to non-formal education and education for special groups like the nomads.

Concept Challenge

Challenge could be regarded as the ability to withstand the upsurging problems while in the process of trying to achieve an aim. In other words a challenge is an incidental that appears along the way to impede progress. Challenges call for efforts towards evolving coping strategies that will evade these pit-falls of progress. Havighurst (1953) posited that challenges are necessary checks and balances to redirect the objectives of the planner towards attaining excellent results.

Challenges And Future Of UBE

A number of challenges exist for the Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria and they are:

School Enrolment

The Universal Basic Education means all Nigerian children from six years and above should be enrolled in primary and secondary schools. It is unfortunate that no reliable data exist in Nigeria *where the accurate number of children and adult illiterates' can be obtained for proper planning and execution of the programme. This is because there has been no effective census exercise in the country. Consequently, most plan projects as they concern population have been a matter of projections better called guess work. Lamenting over the exact population figures in Nigeria, Tabotndip (2001), Nwagwu (1999); Yisa(1988) said that it was difficult to know the exact number of Nigerians in and out of the country because of the defective census results ever produced for the nation.*

The primary, post - primary and the non-formal levels of education are all cost intensive programmes because they are a programme of most full time learners who need a complete school plant to study. For this reason, it will be a fruitless effort to dabble into such a lofty programme without having the accurate data for better projections in order to prepare for future capacities. The consequence of such a rough non - database programme is that it may fail colossally in the future to the detriment of the nation's educational growth and development.

Pupil - Teacher Ratio

The National Policy on Education (1981 revised 1998) prescribed a pupil-teacher ratio of 35 pupils per teacher for the purpose of effectiveness. How can this be achieved when no accurate number of school-age children and perhaps that of the teachers are known? An added disadvantage is that even when the teachers are adequate for the programme, policies like statism, nepotism and general corruption make them absolutely insufficient. It is very common to have a high number of teachers concentrated in one state than the other and one teacher teaching more than the ratio stipulated by the national policy while some where another one is teaching less than that.

For the UBE to stand the test of time, this canker-worm of statism, nepotism etc that is galloping into the educational system of Nigeria should be checked immediately. It is necessary to allow the free-flow of teachers and other personnel across the nation for posterity especially that all the states of the federation cannot produce enough teachers now for this programme at the same time. Ehrenberg (1978) posited that a manageable size of learners for a teacher will not only make for effectiveness but for high level efficiency in the job.

Despite the inadequacies of data available for the UBE programme some rough projections as seen below offer a food for thought for all Nigerians as it concerns UBE.

Primary Education Projected Needs For UBE Between 1999 - 2004

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Teachers at 1.35 pupils	713,000	806,740	912,760	1,032,706	1,168,410	1,321,960
Classrooms At 1:35 Pupils	713,000	806,740	912,760	1,032,706	1,168,410	1,321,960
Recurrent Cost at N100 per Pupil.	N1 9,960m	N22,580m	N25,560m	N28,920m	N32,720m	t N3 7,020m
Capital cost At N200 per Pupil	N2,496m	N2,823m	N3,195m	N3,613m	N4.089m	N4,627m

Source: Adapted from Opoola (1993) Free Universal and Compulsory Education in Nigeria: Problem and Prospects.

The implications from the above table is that increase in school enrolment is directly proportional to the needs of teachers, classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries, halls, recurrent costs, capital costs among others. It is therefore necessary for the States and Federal Government to conclude effective plans for the UBE before it is too late.

Junior Secondary School Enrolment Projected Needs For UBE (1995 - 2005)

Class	1995	2000	2005
J.S. I	3,201,000	3,622,000	4,092,000
J.S. II	3,135,000	3,547,000	3,965,000
J.S. III	3,071,000	3,474,000	3,630,000
Total	9,407,000	10,643,000	11,687,000

Source: Adapted from Opoola (1993) Free Universal and Compulsory Education in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects.

From the above table, by the year 2005, the nation will be having about 12 million students at the Junior Secondary School level. The question therefore is "is Nigeria prepared to provide free education up to the Junior School level?" If yes, then adequate preparation should be made to accommodate the population explosion in both the primary and secondary schools otherwise it will be a fruitless effort in the future.

School Plant

The school plant includes the land, the playgrounds, classroom buildings, libraries, laboratories, staff quarters, generating plant, school/gardens and equipment. Many schools in the country look like their founding dates, highly dilapidated and inhabitable yet children still learn in these death-trap structures. No doubt, much is being done by the Federal Government and associates in this direction to alleviate the conditions of the school plants though this is yet to be elaborate to meet the demands of many of these yearning schools. Fraenkel (1973) contended that the pivot of any educational system apart from the personnel is the school plant which should be properly organized and managed before learning and teaching begins. Aliero (2002); Gidado (2001) and Obanya (2000) had Ibis in mind when they warned against faulty implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria. For the UBE programme to accommodate all its learners today and tomorrow the Federal and State Government should pay prior attention to the school plants that cannot be toyed with. .

Drop - Out Syndrome

The Universal Basic Education had the drop-out of school as one of its challenges hence it is one of its objectives. It was on this basis that the scope had to extend to out -of- school and non formal school programmes (FME 1981 revised 1998). There has been the tendency for children to drop out of school these days and take to apprenticeship just to get rich quick. This is highly abated by parents with claims of no finances for school and that the school doesn't pay off faster like trading etc.

Despite the provision of the UBE to accommodate these class of children, it is seeming difficult to reduce the rate of drop-out in both primary and secondary schools. Ekennia (1994) opined "that drop-out syndrome of children at the primary and secondary school is a behaviour to be eradicated through behaviour modification.

It is eminent therefore to make the UBE programme of studies quite motivating to help fight out the feeling of dropping out of school for other alternatives which are mere flowers and short-lived in actual development.

Management Strategy

The UBE is astride between the State Primary Education Board and the Secondary Education Management Board in the country. This implies that two sets of policies affect the UBE i.e. the state and the federal policies. This position doesn't augur well for a precious and lofty programme like UBE for the nation. For the UBE to be meaningful to Nigeria from now on, the Federal Government should establish a board solely for the UBE programme. Its present divided position of authority under the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) and the Secondary Education Management Boards does not provide a platform for overseeing the scheme's activities at a glance.

The federal government of Nigeria had detected this problem early enough and went on to separate the primary education from the secondary education for the purpose of effective management and proper funding of education in the country (FGN Decree No. 31 of 1988)

Enabling Law

It is unfortunate that the UBE took off without an enabling law as it concerns its implementation. After three years of the commencement of the UBE, it is still a mirage in some states of the nation where it has poorly taken off or it is about to take off in practical terms. It has been very difficult to separate the planning stage from the implementation stage. This confusion has challenged the authorities to the drawing table for immediate corrections else the programme becomes a mere cosmetic. Gidado (2001) lamented this saying that the absence of an enabling law after two years of launching the UBE programme has stalked its implementation.

The House of Assembly reserves the authority to enact an enabling law to guide the success of this programme else it has no future like other educational programmes that have been laid to rest forever.

^Funding

The biggest challenge the UBE has is how funds meant for the programme should be properly

and effectively used towards achieving its aims and objectives. Allocations for this scheme from the Federal Government seem to get missing on transit to the disgust of the general public as it concerns the programme. The federal government should come up with a law guiding the management of the UBE funds with full accountability. Ekefere (2000); ANCP (2000); FME (2000) warned that transparency was needed to make this Universal Basic Education programme a reality in Nigeria.

International Involvement

UBE is a covenant baby between Nigeria and other international communities where Nigeria is not only a member but a signatory to many of the international educational conferences. Based on this Nigeria and her UBE programme are challenged to keep to this covenant strictly as an unshakable commitment or lose international recognition at this level. Among the international education covenants to which Nigeria is a signatory are:

- The World Conference of Education for All (WCEFA) Jomtien - Thailand: (1990)
- The Delhi Declaration on E-9 Countries: (1991).
- The Sixth Conference of African Ministries of Education Dakar: (1991).
- The Ouagadougou Conference on Education of Girls and Women (1992).
- The Seventh Conference of African Ministers of Education Durban: (1998).
- The O.A.U. Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006).
- The Dakar World Forum of Education for All (April 2000) (Gidado: 2001).

Politicization of The UBE

The Universal Basic Education programme has the challenge to prove beyond all reasonable doubt to the Nigerian public that it is not a mere political party (PDF) concern and will not be phased out of the stage when the party gets out of power, This stigma by the masses creates hatred for UBE especially among those who don't appreciate government gimmicks in its projects, policies and programmes. For the UBE to be acceptable by the entire masses it should be depoliticized in all ramification and handed over to educational experts to do their best for an excellent result.

Conclusion

The Universal Basic Education programme is a properly packaged educational programme meant to change the vision of Nigerians. Nigeria is very good at designing virile policies in education with the intent of achieving the much desired scientific and technological advancement to enhance national growth and development.

But it has been unfortunate that most of the time these policies fail to meet the challenges of time along their implementation process. These achievable policies soon become mere cosmetic and ornamentals in the hands of the government. Consequently, it is necessary to plan for any challenges that would destroy the future hopes of the Universal Basic Education as a lofty educational programme for Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government should enact the necessary laws to guide the UBE at all stages of development including its entire management.
2. The programme should be depoliticized and allow experts the management and control for realizable objectives.
3. The school plant and the personnel should be effectively handled and put in place for the operations of the programmes to flow.
4. The programme should be adequately financed to avoid all financial problems that have been responsible for the failure of some other programmes.
5. A school population census should be conducted to obtain the working statistic of school-age children annually.
6. For effectiveness, the pupil-teacher-ratio should be maintained in all the schools in the nation.

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