

# UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION THE PANACEA TO NATION BUILDING

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## **Abstract**

Illiteracy has always been a disease that has hindered development in all fields of human endeavours in any nation. It is a known fact that a majority of Nigerians are denied access to western education by their cultures and parents for one reason or the other. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education for all Nigerians both adults and children is a welcome idea. Literacy is the only means of overcoming disease and poverty in any nation. This paper examined Universal Basic Education and nation building, problems that will hinder the realisation of the objectives of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria as a panacea for nation building, suggestions have been given on how to make the Universal Basic Education a success.

## **Introduction**

The President of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1999 launched the UBE in Sokoto. In his launching address to the nation, he emphasized that education is not just a matter of acquiring skills, rather the term is better perceived when seen and understood as a means of instilling, especially in our young ones, the importance of a number of fundamental values, such as the devotion to continuity of this nation (Nigeria) as one, respect for (the constitution and the importance of democracy, among other things are the inculcation of the sense of dignity of work and moral uprightness as well as respect of others. (Yakubu, 2001). The objectives of UBE as outlined above by the President can be achieved through functional and effective education. Such functional education should include Vocational and Technical Education which will prepare the child for Vocational skills which will make him self sufficient through self employment; moral education which will prepare him as a responsible citizen of the nation and citizenship education and political education which will prepare him to participate actively and full in political and social development of his country. These aspect of knowledge if well inculcated into the child will prepare him building a better Nigeria.

For the UBH to succeed at the grassroots level it will require the backing and the co-operation of both the Community. Local Governments, State Governments, Federal Government and as well as the teachers. Fund needs to be made available and at the same time utilized in the appropriate way. The UBE is the best way towards achieving nation building in terms of civilization and self actualization which will need the support of all members of the society if the programme were to succeed to the end and not to be a failure as well as the case of UPE programme which was launched in 1976.

## **What is UBE?**

The UBE was launched on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1999. This educational programme is intended to offer every Nigerian child of school age an equal educational opportunity. It entails free and compulsory education for every individual child, starting from primary school level to junior secondary education school level. In addition to this development any parent who fails to avail their children this golden opportunity face sanction. The Federal Government of Nigeria explained the meaning and scope of Basic Education as the foundation for sustainable life-long learning. It provides reading, writing and numeracy skills. It comprises of a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners acquire functional literacy. In the Nigerian context, basic education includes primary, junior secondary and nomadic as well as adult education. (Omotayo, 2001).

## **Objective of UBE**

The objectives of the UBE programme as stipulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria FUN (2000) areas follows:

- i. Development of the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- ii. The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- iii. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through

- improved relevance, quality and efficient education),
- iv. Catering for the learning needs of young person who for one reason or the other, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision of basic education.
- v. 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 a life long learning.

The UB1<sup>7</sup> is keeping with the requirement of the Constitution of the Federal Government on Nigeria (1999) which stated the intention of the government to provide equal and adequate educational opportunities at the levels. The Federal Republic of Nigeria spelt-out the uniqueness of this programme because it has the following features:

- i. Inclusiveness: That is person in all manners and conditions of physical, special and psychological existence will benefit from (he programme,
- ii. Special attention: That is special needs of all sectors of the population will be taken into consideration, iii. Provision of Facilities: Facilities will be made available for every childhood care with regard to their various in terms of social group and geographical zones of the country. Bearing in mind the need to lay a solid foundation of life long learning right from early childhood.

These are the attributes of the UBE. A demonstration of the nation bold attempt to cater for the needs of Nigerians and the desire to move the nation forward with other advancing nations of the world.

### **What is Nation Building?**

There is no consensus over the concept or definition of the word Nation Building, but for the purpose of this paper, the following definition(s) need to be examined:

Ebon and Ukpong (1993) define nation building as " a concerted effort by the leaders to bring peoples of a diverse society together to form an economically viable, politically strong and culturally stable nation".

Spencer (1979) in his own view defines nation building as "changing altitudes of the citizens from traditional to nationalism, patriotism and modernity".

Ikwumelu (1993) defines nation building as; "Effort made by leaders to move the nation steadily and permanently in the direction of self-reliance and development through dedication to excellence in leadership, discipline, orderliness, honesty, mutual respect and tolerance in the national affairs".

In view of the above definition of nation building, the following can be noted about effective nation building. The behaviors, actions, thoughts and feelings of all the citizens need to be redirected towards achievement, aspiration and the goals of the nation. It is in line with this view that Ezebe (1992) pointed out that nation building calls for value orientation of all the citizens. Therefore effective nation building can never be achieved without the development of the right values and acquisition of desirable skills and attitudes by the citizens which will help to promote and sustain cohesion, and progress which are essential ingredients to nation building. This is only possible through providing the citizens with sound education which the UBH aspires to provide for all Nigerians.

### **UBE and Nation Building**

The UBE programme in its objectives has vested itself with the responsibility of providing education for the varying needs of our multidimensional socio-cultural nation through quality efficient education.

According to Suwaid (2001) the sustainability and goal achievement of the UBE can largely depend on the type of basic science and technical education it provides in its environment. Such science and technical education should centre around developing the individual for better living in his local environment.

Political factors which trigger the formation of such innovations in education should as much as possible consider the requirements of people and the relevant education to meet such requirements as people are now increasingly becoming more conscious of their needs.

In this perspective, it can be said that, the relevant basic education to be emphasized by the UBH programme should provide, among basic science education necessary to equip Nigerians to

explore and improve themselves and their environment; vocational and technical education that will give the individual the basic foundation towards self dependence and self sufficiency by equipping them with the knowledge that would eventually give them gainful employments, where they can contribute their quota towards the development of their nation economically. Also there is the need for functional moral and citizenship education that will equip the individual to play a better role in the nation's political and social developments. The Federal Government has already launched the anti bribery and corruption bill aiming at preparing Nigerians towards a better honest future life. There is no other place through which this programme can be presented better to reach the people other than the UBE. This will highlight Nigerians on the evils of this twin activity as well as widen the horizon of the individual's knowledge towards a more honest and better life and political participation in Nigeria's democracy. It is the lack of political education that has made many individuals tools in the hands of corrupt politicians to be used to achieve their selfish ends. It is equally lack of citizenship education that has made many people to become problems and menace to the Nigerian society through deviant Activities such as armed robbery, drug abuse and many other social evils that have bedeviled our great nation. Through such type of education the government can achieve its millennium aim of eradicating diseases and poverty in Nigeria.

The vocational and science education for UBE should emphasize on the development of the individual towards developing himself and his local environment for a healthy and harmonious living and it should re-emphasize the "being to school syndrome" imposed by some educational systems e.g. U.P.E. which increases the desire for white collar jobs and consequently increase the rate of unemployment.

The system of education under the UBE should be based on the dissemination and acquisition of demonstrable concepts which are of benefit to the environment and the individual and whose benefits can be easily evaluated e.g. education for improving their local trade, sanitation, health, physical fitness, political awareness and social adjustments. This type of education should be capable of providing self-reliance together with basic literacy and numeracy, beside introducing new vocational, science and technical education for the development of the individual and his immediate environment

For the UBE as an educational programme to contribute as a means of achieving nation building as outlined above, there is a need for careful consideration of the process of providing means that is resources for sustaining it in terms of methods and materials of disseminating knowledge. Horby and Covvie (1985) referred to improvisation as a way of providing, making or doing something quickly in time of need, using whatever happens to be available. The NPE (1981) stressed that the spirit of creativity should be taught to the child through the exploration of the environment and nature. The UBE should embark on the provision of education using local and available resources. This should inculcate in people the desire to explore their environment and enhance it for the solving of their problems.

### **Problems Hindering the Likely Success of UBE**

Various educational innovations have usually failed due to many unforeseen constraints which are capable of distorting the means to reach the desired end. Gefu (1988) observed that there was lack of trained teachers to handle the UPE programme. This problem is still there today where most of the teachers available are not well trained. The haphazard 9 months training embarked upon by the government all over the states of secondary school products for the pilot teachers training programme (PTTP) is completely inadequate. Just as Omotoso (1986) pointed out that primary school graduates today are unable to speak a few sentences of English correctly and find it difficult to write

down correctly simple sentences in their own languages. This will surely affect their performance in secondary schools and even higher institutions of which most of the people enlisted for the PI IP programme are victims. Many of them could hardly write one sentence correctly and yet they are expected to go out and teach in UBE schools.

Adewunmi (1986) held the following groups accountable for the low performance in the educational sector. The first being the government through politicization of education, inadequate provision of facilities, differential distribution of resources, inadequate staffing in both quality and quantity, non payment of teachers' salaries, lack of motivation of the teachers, inadequate and improper supervision, lack of guidance and counseling, inadequate funding and inconsistent educational policies.

The second group are the parents whose excessive dependence on government for provision of facilities and funds, lack of supervision of their children, over pampering the youth at formative age, nonchalant attitude towards the academic, moral and social development of children, inadequate guidance and counseling of their children, and of course over dependence on teachers for the upbringing of their children do not help matters in education.

The third group is the educators who are accused of nonchalant attitude towards students' welfare, discipline and academic progress, lack of dedication and commitment on the part of teachers. Inadequate academic and professional training by many teachers. Divided interests, poor methodology and inadequate preparation thus resulting in poor teaching.

The fourth group are the students (pupils) themselves whose poor attitude to learning, lack of determination, physical and health factors, truancy and insubordination, too much interest in fun and luxury rather than academic work.

The fifth group is the society at large. The society pays more attention and gives better recognition to monetary "showoff" rather than intellectual ability and discoveries. It also fails to recognize teachers as the nation builders. Furthermore, indiscipline and bad examples within the society.

Aiyepoku (1989) suggested that inadequate funding, statistics and poor quality of planning are some of the factors that constrain goal achievement in UPE and the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Lack of committed and motivated teachers is another hindrance to the success of UBE. Lasser (1977) asserted that education is the door to national development and the teachers hold the key to the door. From this statement it can be said that national development cannot take place unless the teachers are committed to open the door for development through effective research, teaching and learning process. It is quite glaring that teachers are indispensable in the implementation of UBE objectives in Nigeria.

Omolayo (2001) identified that out of the total of 435,210 teachers on the ground in Nigeria, 261,116 have no NCE, while 19,868 teachers do not have Teachers Grade 1 certificates. Also he stated that for the first take off of the UBE a total of about 50,000 teachers are required. Equally enough fund and material resources are required for effective implementation of the UBE program. For instance an estimated amount of N97 billion is needed to rehabilitate the existing classrooms nationwide. It is very clear that the existing infrastructure on the ground is inadequate. Talk more of the new ones that may be needed for the take off of the programme. In many places pupils are still taught under trees and lessons are practically impossible during the rainy season.

The test of any educational system is the strength and effectiveness of its teachers. The teacher is the key man in the drive to progress. He is the most important factor in any educational system. The provision of teachers for primary education has suffered a serious neglect because the Nigerian government has failed to produce such teachers as stated in the NPE. Abukakar (1999) noticed that qualified teachers could not be found in many public schools in the country. In some local governments, qualified teachers are not up to 30% in schools. The majority of teachers in schools; either SSE failures or Grade 11 referred. NCE holders are very few. He opined further that teachers' productivity is affected because of low motivation due to delays in salary payments, lack of instructional materials and delays in promotion. He then suggested that if primary education is revived, the conditions of service of the teachers must be improved upon so that the disastrous experience of the UPE of 1976 will not reoccur especially for the successful implementation of UBE.

#### How to Make the UBE a Success

Ei-Yakub (2001) identified several factors that could make the UBE a success after borrowing a leaf from what led to the failure of the UBF programme. Some of the strategies if employed which will make the programme succeed among others are:

- i. Public enlightenment: A public enlightenment unit is very important for the smooth take off of the programme. This is very important especially in the Northern States where many people still detest Western education and see it as a way of making their young ones shun their culture and religion. State governors, local government chairmen, traditional rulers and politicians need to enlighten their subjects on the importance of the programme.
- ii. The state and the local government councils can pass edicts and laws which will make it compulsory for parents to send their children to school, making it categorically clear (hat

the programme is universal, free and compulsory, iii. States and local governments can take advantage of federal and state institutions within their domains like federal and state colleges of education and train more qualified teachers who will run the programme. iv. Functional science and vocational subjects should be included in the curriculum so that pupils and students could derive maximum benefit from them for self-employment, v. There is need to rehabilitate all existing schools in the various states of the country. Equally adequate seats for students and pupils should be made available for use. vi. Instructional materials are very important in the existence of any school system. The procurement and the distribution of these materials will enhance the effectiveness of learning/teaching activities, hence the success of The UBE for the benefit of Nigerian children, vii. There is the need for the establishment of effective inspection and monitoring units at state and local government levels to check the conduct and administration of schools for the success of the DBF, programme, viii. Functional and effective PTA and NUT officials can help in co-ordinating effective implementation of the UBB programme.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the importance of the UBE programme as an effective tool for nation building and the huge fund that will be spent for its take off and success, and looking at the problems that might hinder its successful realization, the following recommendations are hereby proffered:

- i. Education is a huge venture that can no longer be carried out single handedly by the government, therefore rich individuals and groups should extend hands to shoulder such a responsibility in kind or cash.
- ii. Arrangement should be made to recruit and qualified teachers who will teach in these schools to avert past failures of the UBE.
- iii. Enlightenment campaign programmes should be mounted by the Federal, States and Local governments in both federal and state media to bring awareness to the people on the importance of UBE and the need to support it.

### **Conclusion**

Education is the bedrock for nation building. Nigerian government, need to provide her citizens with sound education, and since primary education is the foundation of education and successful implementation of UBE scheme depends on effective management of the system. The need to provide all the necessary machineries for the success of the system is paramount in terms of adequate funds, quality and quantity control, provision of adequate resources both material and human (teachers).

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