

# UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

The paper notes early attempts to make education universally accessible in Nigeria. It cites some countries where UBE has been executed. The introduction of UBE and its objectives in Nigeria are articulated. It states the foreseeable impact of UBE on nation building. The role of libraries in the onerous task of nation building is delineated. Recommendations which will enhance nation building through DBF, are given.

## **Introduction**

Efforts to combat and possibly eradicate illiteracy have become an intractable problem to nations all over the world and developing nations in particular. It gave rise to the world conference on Education for all held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990 and to the Education for all summit of nine High-population countries including Nigeria held in New Delhi in December 1993, (UNESCO, 1994). The problem has contributed to up-dating, redefining and revising of the National Policy on Education of many countries. There have been attempts at universalizing education to enable citizens of each country-acquire basic knowledge, hence the nomenclature, Universal Basic Education (UBE).

## **Countries Where UBE has been in Operation**

In Peru, the Peruvian Constitution of 1993 extended compulsory and free education from primary to secondary education. In 1997, a proposed structural change of the education system redefined basic-education by extending downward by one-year to include initial education for 5-year old children, and by shortening secondary education from five to four years. This made the overall duration of basic education 11 years. There was introduced also, two years of preparatory course work (bachillerato). This is not compulsory but free and would provide the transition to tertiary education or to the world of work. Certificate examination would be held at the end of basic education, bachillerato, and tertiary education. (World Bank 2001). In Brazil, the government took steps to provide 8 - 9 years of basic educational opportunities to all the relevant age-groups by extending (the existing coverage of the education system to remote areas of the country, (Jailade, 1977). Universal Basic Education has also been launched by Ethiopian Government in 1997/98, in Gambia in the late 1980s and by Zambia in 1998, (World Bank.2001).

## **Early attempts at Basic Education in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, early attempts at universalizing education were the launching of Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme by the Western Region in January 1955 and by the Eastern Region in 1957. (Nuagwu, 1976). Previous attempts at UBE include introduction of UPE nationally in 1976. introduction of National Policy on Education by the Federal Government in 1977 and which has revised in 1981. (UNESCO. 1998). The policy laid down expectations as to the quality of educational outcomes. However, a number of difficulties in the operating environment inhibited the full attainment of these outcomes. Among them were congestion in schools, shortage of books and materials, unqualified teachers and the use of inadequate or unreliable data in the making of major policy decisions by various governments. These constituted the greatest administrative obstacle. There was introduction of free education all levels by 1979 in some states, (UNESCO ,1998).

## **UBE in Nigeria**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of the federal Republic of Nigeria was formally launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1999. It is a nine -year programme which aims at achieving the following 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 dropout 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 (FGN, 2000:2).

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) implementation guidelines are targeted at the following six main programmes:

1. Programmes/initiatives for early 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 programme for nomadic populations.
4. Out of school, non-formal programme for up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning.
5. Non-formal skill 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 (FGN, 2000:3).

### **UBE and Nation Building**

UBE is germane to the enthronement of a just and egalitarian society. This translates to among other things, keeping the known avenues of upward social mobility and making them equally accessible to all persons without discrimination. In Nigeria, upward mobility is mostly achievable through education. In this connection, it is stated that:

Educated Nigerians fare better than non-educated. Completing primary education makes a big difference between being poor and non-poor in Nigeria. Those with secondary or higher education have half the poverty incidence of those with no education. Attending primary schools reduces the probability of being poor by almost 50 per cent, attending secondary school by another 20 per cent (FGN: 1998:10).

Therefore a system of universal education is a sine qua non towards income distribution between and within socio-economic groups. For Nigeria to produce world class scientists, technologists, artists etc.. in the foreseeable future, every Nigerian child must go to school and be stimulated academically, categorized and classified by experts in search for talents.

UBE is the most important section in the chain of efforts to socialize the growing generation into knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, norms and behaviour generally held as compatible with the developing national personality. It will enhance the stature of citizens and improve the quality of life for all Nigerians. It could be used to forge national unity and such popular education can produce human beings with understanding, enlightenment, skills and dedication to national identity which could, at least minimize, the overpowering loyalty to ethnic groups at the expense of patriotic dedication to the nation. (Nwagwu. 1976).

Low educational achievement in general and low literacy rates, especially the women, hinder capital development and economic growth. Gross enrolments for primary schooling fell from 93 per cent in 1982/83 to 78 per cent in 1990/1 (FGN, 1998). Recent surveys have shown that (here was an increase in enrolment between 1991 and 1994 to 86.5 per cent. Table 1: 199? and 1996 have however, shown slight declines. The multiple indicators cluster survey in 1996 showed clearly the regional disparities in this indicator between the North and South-East; Enugu and Akwa-Ibom in the East had gross enrolment rates of 129.1 per cent and 128.9 per cent, respectively. Sokoto and Yobe in the North showed rates of about 14 per cent (FGN, 1998). More than 20 per cent of primary school-age children and 80 per cent of secondary school-age children were not enrolled in schools. Of those enrolled, no more than half completed primary school and only half of them continued on to secondary education. In the North. Koranic schools attract more attendance but, for cultural reasons, girls are seldom enrolled in any school.

The federal government noted wide regional disparities in education and literacy. In the South, primary and secondary school enrolments were double those in the North. Household surveys showed that 73 per cent of the male population in the North-West have never attended secular schools compared with 18 per cent in the South-West; among females, the figures were 80 and 30 per cent respectively.

More than 40 per cent of teachers in northern schools do not have appropriate teacher training qualifications. In the South-West, many boys now drop out of school to work in the informal sector. The literacy rates by gender and region showed marked disparities between North and South (FGN,1998). I knvevcr UBE is poised to redress these inequalities.

Basic education is fundamental to laying the foundation of learning and knowledge which together, are an investment, and a means to an end. When nurtured to fruition, it yields economic return and contributes to a nation's future wealth and development by increasing the productive and consumptive capacity of the citizens. This priceless instrument for national building has its foundation in the primary school. UBE attaches great importance to primary school enrolment and drop-out rates

Table1: Gross **Primary Schoolenrolment in PercctiigL,s\_**

Year	Boys%	Girls %	Total %
1990	76.4	59.1	67.7
1991	86.6	69.1	77.1
1992	90.3	71.9	81.1
1993	93.6	74.7	84.1
1994	89.4	83.2	86.5
1995	85.5	74.9	80.6

Culled from UNESCO (1998) *The Stole of Education in Nigeria*, p. 35,

Table 2: **Drop-Out Rates by Grade (%)**

Grade Level	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Total
Primary					
1	2.93	2.46	2.24	3.54	2.74
2	3.42	5.16	4.00	4.29	4.11
3	6.35	7.62	4.16	4.00	6.88
4	5.86	6.39	6.88	4.80	6.07
5	11.56	11.30	11.84	10.86	11.49
6	35.34	36.61	36.00	35.61	35.85
Secondary					
1	8.47	8.35	8.96	7.58	8.42
2	15.80	12.29	12.32	17.68	14.40
3	0.71	8.85	8.80	0.81	9.11
4	0.49	0.25	0.32	0.51	0.39
5	0.33	0.00	0.16	0.25	0.20
6	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.25	0.29

UNESCO (1998) p.43.

The gross enrolment ratio gives only the estimate of the enrolment of children of all ages as percentage of the population of (he official age 6 - 11 years. According to UNESCO (1998). many children were leaving school unable to read and write, and unprepared for further education or productive participation in society. It added that it was obvious that many out of school children had had little more than four years schooling and that was insufficient to acquire permanent functional literacy and numeracy. This observation by UNESCO underscores the need for good and effective school libraries which services should forestall such lapses during and after the IJIM.:

### **Contributions ol'School Libraries to UBE and Nation Building**

Obi (1987) suggested that a library period should be included in primary and secondary school curricula. She explained the library period as the time given to the teacher/librarian on the time-table when students should be taught how to use the library to find out more than their class notes could give them. She observed that the library period could be used for instruction on how lo handle books, parts ol' a book, alphabetical tiling, arrangement of the library and the catalogue - be it a card catalogue or a computer. To be included in the periods would be instruction on good study habits, including reading, viewing and listening; note-taking and out-lining to name but a few. She concluded by staling lhai a display on the library walls of pictures illustrating some stories and written work by the children would interest others and would make them want to read these books.

As already shown, the school library service is a vital element in the progressive educational

system. The classroom is not enough to impact to the pupils all the facts and skills they need for their intellectual development, (Kami, 1979). The school library services strengthen the quality of the learning experiences which the school provides. It is in the library that the pupil/student is encouraged to think independently as well as develop his/her intuitive perception by use of reference tools and materials for special reports, and recreational reading materials. The library provides learning resource to pupils and students. It provides a variety of books for different levels of ability, a variety of viewpoints, a variety of audio, visual and audiovisual materials. The provision of these materials helps to motivate and increase the interest of normal children and non-readers. The library can help students develop abilities in critical, independent creative thought, through opportunities and the presentation of opposing views. This is due to learning resources in the library which enable pupils/students to explore, break new grounds, formulate values and appreciate Sitefature, (Kami, 1979).

It is in realization of the need to foster basic education in primary school that the National Policy on Education (1981) stated:

To make it easier to carry out curricular activities. Government will provide junior libraries for primary school children (FGN. 1981:12).

In addition, the school library services fall within the first of the six main programmes of the UBE implementation guidelines. In spite of this pronouncement, many public primary schools do not have library facilities. In a sample study of 10 primary schools (three private and seven public) in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Okore (2001) observed that only the private primary schools were deriving the benefit of school libraries.

### **Contributions of Public Libraries to UBE and Nation Building**

Nigeria has embarked on a democratic government. Democracy is about the ability of the electorate to seek and use information to engage in informed debates, to make critical choices and to influence policy. The purpose of libraries is to facilitate access to information and public libraries in particular cater for the information needs of the general public. It therefore follows that public libraries have a critical role to play in fostering a democratic culture. They achieve this by providing answers to inquiries, reference questions, provision of daily newspapers, magazines and their indexes, political debates in various formats, Bills passed in States and National Houses of Assembly, texts on constitution, constitutional conferences and debates as well as literature on governance, leadership and democracy. They also provide services geared towards achieving the goals of UBE as shown below.

#### **i) Mobile Libraries/Bookmobiles**

Mobile libraries have been established by public libraries in order to reach out to distant and/or disadvantaged communities like in the education of the children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen. In preparation for the UBE, the National Council on Education (NCE) approved the education of the children of migrant fishermen in 1990, (UNESCO, 1998). Eight states are participating in the programme. They are Rivers, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Ogun. The states, Local Governments, Communities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are expected to set up schools, while the Council provides the technical and financial support. It could be recalled that by 1978, there were three mobile libraries in former Anambra, seven in Cross River, two in Imo and four in Rivers State, (Jackson, 1981). It is expected that the number of mobile libraries in these states will increase in order to take care of the vagaries of the new dispensation in the UBE.

The National Commission for Nomadic Education also approved the education of the children of pastoralist nomads, sharing the responsibility as in the case of the education of the migrant fishermen. UNESCO (1998) reported that mobile schools were in operation in the River Benue area of Taraba, Benue, Adamawa, Nassarawa, Borno and Yobe states. To foster basic education in these communities requires provision of mobile libraries.

#### **b) Book Depots**

Book depots were established by public libraries to provide reading and writing materials of high quality at moderate prices to communities. The popular but defunct Bendel State Book Depot provided meritorious services to her community. In Enugu State, book depots still exist at Enugu and Nsukka state libraries. About the quality levels of teaching and learning materials UNESCO stated that "77% of the children observed had no textbooks; 33% lacked writing materials....." (UNESCO, 1998:37).

Parents

who cannot afford to provide reading materials to Their children/wards because of the exorbitant prices in the markets can avail themselves of the services of the book depot.

- e) Other public libraries services include among others, provision of skills acquisition, including that of speech, story-telling sessions and film shows. All these activities are geared towards inculcating the habit of reading and learning among the children and youths. This function fulfills one of the six main programmes of the UBE implementation guidelines.

### **Contributions of Research Libraries to Nation Building and UBE**

Research Libraries are concerned with the delivery and exchange of scientific and technological information. For instance, one of the research libraries, the National Science and Technology Reference Library does store and provide, among other things, information on rare publications obtained locally and internationally, it links up with similar reference centres in other parts of the world. It houses rare and out-of-date scientific texts, science and technical journals, trade and industrial bulletins, research findings of Nigerian institutions and available information on technically feasible and economically viable projects to which Nigerian entrepreneurs can profitably direct their investments. It operates a national network, linking up with the specialist research libraries of the Research Institutes of the Ministry. In this way, science and information development and delivery are co-ordinated and utilized in nation building. It is in recognition of this role of libraries that Ugoh (1979), the then Minister of Science and Technology stated:

We will not rest until the Nigerian public comes to accept library services as a source of their life-long education and begin to use libraries as a matter of national culture and development (Ugoh, 1979: fit).

Entrepreneurs could pick viable projects from the research library and create large industrial labour force. The labour force could engender economic growth which could snowball into longer life-span for individual, better quality of life, better health care system, more stable government and better quality education including provision of the much needed infrastructure for UBE.

### **Recommendations**

- I. More Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) teachers should be trained for the UBE.

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