

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION: IMPLICATION FOR THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) SCHEME

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Abstract

Education the world over has remained a catalyst and key to the rapid, socio-economic development of any society. Any society that neglects the education of its young ones does so at its peril. Unfortunately, in many parts of this country especially in the North, the provision of education to all children of school age has been the sole responsibility of Government. This has accounted for the near absent involvement or participation of the community in education. The preponderance of Government educational institutions in the North testifies to this state of affairs. A situation such as this cannot be allowed to continue forever. Instead, other stakeholders in the education enterprise be sensitized to participate actively in the provision of infrastructural and instructional facilities in our educational institutions. This is more pertinent now that the UBE is supposed to have taken off. Accordingly, this paper argues that education is an investment into the future for the ultimate improvement of the society. Therefore all hands must be on deck to ensure the success of the UBE. The paper also proffers possible areas of community participation to include among others, the provision of classroom and instructional facilities.

Introduction and Background

Section 1 SS 6 of the National Policy on Education (Revised 1999) states that the desire that Nigeria should be free, just and democratic society, a land full of opportunities for all its citizens, able to generate a great and dynamic economy, and growing into a united, strong and self-reliant nation cannot be overemphasized.

For these lofty ideals to be attained and for education to achieve its purpose, the National Policy on Education (NPE) further recommends that "in order to realize fully the potentials of the contributions of education to the achievement of the objectives, all other agencies will cooperate in concert with education to that end". This call for partnership with stakeholders in the educational sectors is timely if the objectives of the policy are to be realized. This is more so as the National Policy on Education (NPE) also states that not only is education the greater force that can be used to bring about redress (in our educational imbalance), it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of the economic, political, sociological and human resources.

The importance of education in any society and its crucial role as an agent of change and social mobility in the society has not been in doubt. That is why every society strives to evolve its own means of inducting its young ones into the norms and mores of the society for its ultimate survival and preservation

Since every society appears to have its conception and evolve its own educational system, it was not surprising that "the Spartans who were militarily conscious centred their education on training for soldierly qualities such as courage, endurance, obedience and perseverance. Similarly the Athenians, who were concerned primarily with the defence of their territory and sovereignty, dedicated their education towards producing physically fit and mentally alert citizens.

Here in Nigeria, Fafunwa, in Sani, (1998:203) has reported that the form of education offered in Northern Nigeria emphasized functional education via the acquisition of useful knowledge and skills. According to Sani, this type of education was "conceived of and used as a means of training individuals to acquire knowledge and skills for their social responsibilities, job orientation, political participation and moral perfection through learning by doing. Thus, physical-training, moral character building, manual work and intellectual exercise were emphasized in continuous process and flexible enough to accommodate individual differences.

This was the type of indigenous education advocated by Fafunwa (1974) which was tailored among others to:

- (i) Develop the child's latent physical skills.
- (ii) Develop character (a sound mind in a sound body).
- (iii) Inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority.
- (iv) Acquire specific vocational training and develop healthy attitudes and dignity of labour.
- (v) Develop intellectual skills.
- (vi) Develop manipulative skills.
- (vii) Develop a sense of belonging and participate actively in family and community affairs.
- (viii) Understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

Today, the philosophy of the Nigerian National Policy on Education is similar to the principles of indigenous education reported by Fafunwa. For instance SS4 of the Policy states that "for the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national objectives, it has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards cultural, social, economic, political, scientific and technological progress".

Furthermore, the NPE states that "Nigeria's philosophy of education therefore is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school systems".

Again, giving our children sound education is a task that must be done. We cannot fail. As Jeffery quoted by Nwagu (1987) cautions that "education is the direct means by which a people seek to share its own destiny and to transform itself from what it would hope to become". Therefore, the forms of education will certainly be the desire of a people about itself and about its future.

Need for Community Participation in Education

Though the NPE recommends the involvement of community in education when it states that "school systems and consequently their management day to day administration should flow out of the life and social ethos of the community which they serve" and hence the need for community participation in education. Unfortunately "the general orientation we have received in respect of the management and administration of education in Nigeria is that the responsibility in this regard lay solely with government of the day at all tiers".

Commenting on this state of affairs Tseja (ed) (2002) laments that "this belief has been deeply ingrained in us as parents to the extent that even minor school responsibilities expected of us to attend to as parents are usually frowned at whenever the demand is made of us to attend to our obligations to our children". Because of the orientation and the benevolence of Government with regard to its responsibility to education, it is not surprising to find some situations particularly in the Northern parts of the country when all the necessary requirements for the education of a child in the Primary and middle schools, ranging from school uniforms to pencils were provided for by government.

However, if our quest for equality in education and education for all are to be attained as soon as possible, then this orientation must change. Education should not be seen as the sole responsibility of government alone. The community in different forms must participate actively in education. All hands must be on deck.

The need for community participation in education is informed by the ever rapid explosion in the population of school age children and high demand for education in the 21 century. Infrastructure and facilities in our educational institutions are in short supply or bad state of disrepair where they are available.

This state of affairs has been occasioned by the fact that we have tended to rely too much on government not only in the area of education but in the provision of other social services. Despite our dependence on government, it has not been "forthcoming in all respects, many uncompleted projects litter campuses, libraries and laboratories are ill-equipped or non-existent and students study under very uncondusive environment".

Furthermore Tseja has lamented that our public education system is facing imminent collapse

for a number of reasons. The demand for education has escalated many folds and the various governments of the federation are finding it near impossible to provide adequately for the demand, lack of trained manpower i.e. teachers, trained administrators and other specialists in professional fields are hampering the proper instruction and management of the school system, facilities are in very short supply, the burden of financing education is on the verge of strangulating the school system to a standstill".

Accordingly, because of the down turn in our economy, and since government is finding it increasingly difficult if not impossible to provide even minimally for the proper education of our children, he has advocated that the community should support Government by establishing and running schools under existing rules and regulations.

Levels of Community Participation in Education

Community participation in education can be seen from two levels namely:

- (1) Provision of infrastructural facilities and instructional materials. These include the construction of classroom and office accommodation, laboratories, libraries, games facilities, vehicles and other essential items, which add up to make a good school. The community can directly or under umbrella of Parent Teacher Association (FTA) employ and pay teachers to supplement the shortfall in teachers demand in most of our educational institutions.
- (2) Community should become an integral part of the school to the extent of participating in taking decisions about the curriculum and every aspect of education. The community can also put their professional expertise and facilities at the disposal of the students for co-curricular and out-of-school educational activities. Again professionals in the community could serve as resource persons in the acquisition of pre-vocational skills of masonry, blacksmithing, farming, carpentry which are some of the common trades in the rural areas and as recommended by the National Policy on Education.

Apart from the immediate community in which the school is situated. Other community based and public-spirited organizations or individuals should also participate actively in education. These other groups include:

- (i) Old Boys/Girls and/or Alumni Associations.
- (ii) Parent Teacher Associations.
- (iii) Corporate organizations (Shell, Elf, Chevron, NNPC.) scholarship awards,
- (iv) Donor agencies (UNICEF, UNESCO, Commonwealth, Ford Foundation, etc.)
- (v) Religious organizations (Catholic Church, JNI, etc.)
- (vi) Prominent politicians and public spirited individuals, e.g. the Roehas Foundation, Laic Abiola's contribution to the provision of sporting facilities in schools.

It is also to be noted that if our education should be relevant to the needs of the society, then, the community should participate not only in the provision of facilities, but also in policy formulation and implementation in education. Also calling for collaborative effort Baikie (2002) emphasized that the strategies to improve education in the North should go beyond government to include the participation of the private sector in the funding of education.

Implication for UBE

According to the proposed implementation blueprint for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme (2002) basic education is aimed at equipping individuals with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to;

- (i) Live meaningful and fulfilling lives.
- (ii) Contribute to the development of the society.
- (iii) Derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society and
- (iv) Discharge their civic obligations competently.

Realizing that Government alone cannot run the scheme successfully, the Blueprint has

recommended among others things, greater participation of the community via:-

- (i) Encouragement and stimulation of the active participation of the private sector, non-government organizations and voluntary organizations as well as local communities in the scheme.
- (ii) Establishment of working partnerships and collaboration with the international communities and donor agencies.
- (iii) Assigning specified roles to local communities, voluntary Agencies, NGOs, donor agencies and public spirited individuals.

For the scheme to succeed, members of the public should be properly educated that the era of education being the sole responsibility of Government has gone and members of the community must rise to the challenge.

Parents and other stakeholders should come out vigorously to support and complement government's efforts in this regard. The implication of this is that if the scheme is not supported by the community, it will go the way of the UPE that preceded it. Such support can come in the area of:

- (i) Capacity building,
- (ii) Provide logistic support and enabling environment for the execution of the scheme in their localities.
- (iii) Initiate and execute specific project within the framework of the scheme in their localities,
- (iv) Provide relevant human and material resources for the successful implementation of the scheme.
- (v) Ensure safety and maintenance of the scheme's infrastructure and UBE implementation resources and materials in (their localities.

- (vi) Organize and ensure the support and active participation of the entire community in the scheme.
- (vii) Establishment of education communities at the village, ward, local and state levels.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, what has become evident is that Government alone cannot provide for the education of our young ones. This is in view of the rapid expansion that has taken place within the past twenty years following the introduction of the UPE. The implications of this rapid expansion in enrolment without a corresponding expansion in infrastructure has tended to greatly compromise the quality of our products. To salvage the situation, all stakeholders (Government, parents, old boys, donor agencies) in the education enterprise must cooperate and collaborate to provide some of the much-needed facilities in the schools at all levels. Such collaborative efforts should come in the form of the provision of classroom and office accommodation, laboratories, technical workshops, library books, payment of (P.T.A) teachers' salaries to mention just a few. Furthermore Old Boys/Girls Associations, Public spirited individuals and organizations could be sensitized to construct classrooms, desks and have such edifices named after them. By so doing, members of the community would be contributing significantly in this critical area i.e. the provision of infrastructure in the primary schools. This is one area where the need for expansion has been in great need. However such contributions do not mean that Government will relent in its efforts. It will continue to retain the authority to ensure that maximum standards are maintained in all its ramifications.

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