

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Abstract

It is a well-known fact that no nation can rise above the quality of its educated citizenry. Thus for any meaningful development to take place in any nation, appropriate attention has to be given toward the growth and development of its educational system. In Nigeria a cursory glance at what is happening to its educational system will reveal that all is not well. The system is almost collapsing; if it has not already totally collapsed. Therefore, there is need for a sound, basic and functional education for the citizens in a country like Nigeria. This paper therefore, focuses on national development which encompasses all aspects of national life is political, social, etc. The historical development of the UBE, issues and challenges that may affect the provision of a functional education, suggestions are provided for a better operational system in the years ahead.

Introduction

The urgent need for a sound, basic and functional education for Nigerian citizens cannot be waved aside in the context of national development. National in this paper includes all aspects of national life, political, social, economic, religious needs of the citizens.

In Nigeria, a cursory glance of what has been happening to its educational system will reveal that all is not well. The system is almost collapsing; Ajayi, K. (2000) summarized the dilemma facing the country's educational system. These problems have been in existence since its independence in (1960) and they are as follows:

- i. Excessive over - politicization of education,
- ii. Unplanned educational growth.
- iii. Failure of education to enhance social and economic development
- iv. Massive unemployment of the products of the system - both secondary, tertiary as well as the imbalance between educational output and the economy's manpower needs,
- v. Deliberate deviations from; and distortion of established educational goals to achieve individual or group political interests,
- vi. Indiscipline or other anti-social behaviour including cultism in an educational institution.

The above are just some of the multifarious problems bedeviling the educational system which daily cry for attention.

Looking at the National Policy on Education (1981) government has a good idea in adapting education "as an instrument per excellence for effecting national development and the Nigerian philosophy of education has been anchored on the development of the individual into a sound, effective and useful citizen.

The Concept of An Overview Of National Development

It is neither possible nor desirable to attempt a definition of comprehensive outline of a national development. The subject has been under study by sociolinguists, economists, politicians, scientists and other substantial literates moreover it must be admitted that opinion differs on what national development should be.

Black; C. (1973) observed that development actually has to do with realization of the potential of human personality and social integration.

Thompson (1981) also shared the view that development is a process that enables people to accomplish things that they could not have done.

Yet, another school of thought interpret development as a process which is mainly focused on the achievement of human potentials and capabilities with the larger frame work of social and

inter-group relations.

Chanoya (1988) defined development in terms of greater understanding of socio-economic and political processes, enhanced competence to analyze and solve problems of day to day living, expansion of manual skill and greater control of economic resources, restoration of human dignity and self respect.

We cannot enumerate all the aspects of national development, we believe however, that the following are among the vital kinds of development required by any nation state: economic development, political of man (technology), included in intellectual development and dissemination of ideas. The passing on the intellectual development achieved by a given community to her member of the community or to other communities which is referred to as education.

Strictly speaking education consist of prospering a member of the society for full participation in the development of the society.

Socio-Cultural Development

Most people accept that despite the fact that any nation - state consists of a composite number of social and cultural groups, it is desirable to evolve an identifiable heritage which will claim the common allegiance of the whole state in any case, whether ethnic, linguistically homogeneous or heterogeneous, we wish to submit that a socio-culturally developed state is one in which the elite/mass distinction is minimized or eliminated so that no section of the society suffers disadvantages.

Socio-cultural development is also a state in which cross-cultural exchange of various forms takes place both intra-nationally and internationally.

In concluding the above, a developed nation is one with a high degree of modernization, is one where there is scientific and technological process, where scholarship is encouraged, where there is equal educational opportunities, job opportunities, mass literacy, reliable communication and network systems, adequate health and housing facilities and general standard of living, educational programmes like the Universal Basic Education plays a major role in national development and national integration.

Political - Judiciary Development

There are two aspects in this area, one external and the other internal. External political activity deals with the delimitation and guaranteeing of international boundaries and the maintenance of appropriate relations with other countries. Internal politics - judiciary activity embrace the drawing up and promulgation of an acceptable constitution; search for leadership and selection, law making, the courts and law enforcement. We submit that, that state is developed in which the vast majority of the people preferably all have an opportunity to participate in and derive satisfaction from these activities.

In a nation state, the constitution, if there is one, must be a well used document which is well understood by the large majority of the people. In selection of leadership what the candidate stands for should be possible of being discussed and assessed by all the electorate not just a few. For political-judiciary development to take place in a nation, justice must be carried out in a method and language which the majority find easy to scrutinize and understand. Law enforcement counts and the citizens must be able to communicate well and apply the law in a medium which they can use with ease. It is only when this is done and when a minority of privileged people does not wield political and judiciary power and use it to enhance and perpetuate itself in position of authority can a state be said to have political judiciary development.

- Non-formal skill needed for lifelong learning.
- The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school (FMG, 2002-2003),

Below are the objectives of the scheme as contained in the same implementation guidelines.

- i. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. The provision of a free 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 efficiency.
- iv. 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 of basic education; and
- 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 lifelong learning.

The programme is intended to be universal, free and compulsory. Talking about universalization of education, this is in keeping with the present 1999 Constitution under the educational objectives which in Section 18 states as follows:

... Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels... Government shall eradicate illiteracy; and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable, provide

- free primary education
- free secondary education
- free university education and
- free adult literacy programmes.

Issues And Challenges Ahead

A number of issues arises from the foregoing: There is no doubt that the President meant well by launching the UBE programme, borne out of concern about the deplorable state of the nation's development yet some issues are very vital to be talked through the new educational programme.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the scheme was hurriedly launched; just as the UBE scheme of 1976 was hurriedly launched too. It was launched before the implementation blue print was published, it was launched before the Bill on it was forwarded to the National Assembly. It was launched when no financial provision for it was made in the budget. The scheme was even launched before an education submit to discuss it was called.

Most government educational policies in the past had faced the problem of haphazard implementation strategies. Up till now, many Nigerian schools lack qualified teachers, poor quality and quantity input which include; inadequate teacher supply in some states.

In line with the above, going through the pages of Nigerian Tribune of Friday 21st July 2000, a headline story captioned, "NTI to train more teachers for UBE in Kaduna; already approval has been given and this training is a crash training programme for 40,000 teachers within a few months at an average of 1,000 per state and those to be given training are those with three(3) passes at G.C.E. or S.S.C.E. level. These are people that will go into the class room to teach in the 21st century Nigeria when even as far back as 1977; the National Policy on Education (NPE) document talked about NCE being the minimum qualification for teaching.

Another issue is the lack of government supervision or monitoring of the primary sectors and of course the new educational programme due to the ineffectiveness of the inspectorate system at both the federal and state levels.

Another issue is indiscipline and other anti-social behaviour including cultism in our educational institutions. This issue has led to incessant disruption of academic calendar which have resulted to constant falls in the standard of education.

There is gross wastage in education with several drop-out and drop-ins, and misfit between education and the world of work. The above has led to massive unemployment of the product of the system both secondary and tertiary as well as the imbalance between educational output and the economy's manpower needs.

With the introduction of the new educational programme UBE, the enrolment figure into the schools specially the primary has tripled the number so, there are inadequate facilities and infrastructure needed for effective teaching and learning.

Nation-building, patriotism and citizen education are vital elements of national development in a country. Working at this factor, Nigeria is yet to attain any of the factors and Nigeria need to have a better perspective of loyalty, honesty and other democratic values needed for nation building.

Poor salaries and conditions of service for teachers at all levels and the low status accorded them. These factors have led to teachers not putting their best.

The Way Forward And Conclusion

It is a well established fact that education is a basic human right. It is also a necessary condition for the upward social mobility or disadvantaged members of the society. It is a tool for national development. Therefore the following suggestions are brought forward as a significant step to guide the implementation process of the programmes.

There must be adequate planning and involvement of experts in these scheme rather than jobs for political patronage. The planning must be one that will heavily rely on both hindsight and foresight learning from the mistakes of the past and making amendments.

There must be adequate funding of the programme with all the stake holders adequately involved, other sources of funding must be sought. Above all, there must be judicious utilization of whatever fund is allocated to the scheme while frivolous spending must be avoided.

As for teacher factor, we should bear in mind that "no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers".

In this wise, there must be full teacher involvement in the programme development; there must be adequate motivation and development of teachers while adequate remuneration package and incentives must be worked out for them.

Also there must be adequate supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the scheme from time to time and this implies that the Inspectorate Division at both the federal and state levels must be well equipped for this task.

In terms of infrastructure and facilities a visit round most of our schools will reveal a gory picture-dilapidated and derelict structures with rickety and jerry - built tables and chairs.

In some parts of the country, pupils still carry their own desks and chairs to school; classes are conducted in some under-shades of tree or in building with roofs almost caving or in part of the buildings already collapsed. Something must be done to ameliorate this type of situation if the scheme is to succeed.

The scheme cannot afford to go the way of its predecessors like the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the UPE programme. Thus, all hands must be on deck to ensure the success of this scheme to posterity and generation yet unborn.

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