

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY: THE WAY FORWARD

Mr. Emmanuel I. O'kwu

Abstract

The paper discussed the historical background of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria, its meaning, scope and its funding needs. For the nation to have sound reliable and durable educational foundation the UBE scheme must be properly financed and managed. The paper has looked into the management and diversion of funds allotted for the upliftment of "Universal Basic Education for rapid educational development. The paper has examined the problems hampering effective implementation of Universal Basic Education in contemporary Nigeria. The paper also discussed the urgent need for enlightenment and mobilization of Nigerians for successful implementation of the UBE programme and inculcation in all Nigerians, the value and spirit of civic responsibility. Finally, the paper has discussed Universal Basic Education methodology, monitoring and evaluation of the programme and drawn conclusions with suggestions for the strong, sound, successful and rapid implementation of the programme in Nigeria. .

Introduction

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme which is the brain-child of the Federal-Government was formally launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September, 1999. The UBE Programme is aimed at saving the educational sector from the rot and decay of the past. The programme was also a concrete demonstration of Federal Government's resolution to halt the gradual, but shocking drift of the country into an inglorious past of dangerous illiteracy. Universal Basic Education would develop in the citizenry a strong consciousness for education and commitment to its promotion and provide free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) would also promote the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numerical, manipulative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying the foundation of lifelong learning.

Adamaechi and Romaine (2000) stressed further that President Olusegun Obasanjo launched the former Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 when he was the Military Head of State of Nigeria. The scheme, this time will cover pupils of primary school and students of junior secondary school and would henceforth be known as the Universal Basic Education (UBE).

Scope of Universal Basic Education

Universal Basic Education is the foundation for sustainable lifelong learning. Universal Basic Education is supposed to provide reading, writing and numeric skills. Universal Basic Education comprises a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners acquire functional literacy.

In the Nigerian context, Universal Basic Education includes primary, junior secondary, nomadic education as well as adult literacy.

Similarly, the National Policy on Education Revised (1985:12) defines primary education as education given: In an institution for children aged normally 6 to 11 and above. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system.

It is also pertinent to state the general objectives of primary education as:

The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively, the laying of sound basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society, character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes, developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment, giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limit of his capacity and providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Furthermore, government prescribes the following curricular for the primary school: the inculcation of literacy and numeracy, the study of science, the study of the social norms and values of the local community and of the country as a whole through civics and social studies, the giving of health and physical education, moral and religious education, the encouragement of aesthetics, creative and musical activities, the teaching of local craft and domestic science and agriculture.

Infact, Universal Basic Education programme includes developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion. The provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school-going age among others-will complement and supplement the efforts of the government in the successful implementation of the scheme.

Thus, Universal Basic Education programme broadened the horizon of education involving formal, non-formal and informal reactions and approaches with the broad aims of laying foundation of life-long learning. Also Universal Basic Education encompasses programmes for early childhood care and socialization, acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills and also special teaching designed for nomadic people.

Funding of Universal Basic Education

Generally, education is capital intensive. All efforts must be geared towards its funding otherwise it will not be successful. Therefore, government alone may find it very difficult to finance it effectively and this will affect our country economically, socially, and politically.

Adequate funding is required for a smooth and successful implementation or operation of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. Adamaechi and Romaine (2000, P. 13) stated that:

The Universal Basic Education is bound to fail if enough funds are not provided by the various levels of Government in Nigeria. ... Although the funding of the Universal Basic Education is the bonafide right of the federal • government it is also expected that the civil servants at all levels, banks, companies, industries, trade unions and community unions etc. should make their contributions to the funding of the programme.

Despite the joint funding of Universal Basic Education by the Federal, States and Local Governments in Nigeria, other special organizations like the World Bank from time to time supplement funding of primary education by direct supply of books, vehicles, and building of structures etc.

Also, United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) also trains primary school staff, sponsors them on courses or seminars and provides such facilities as boreholes, construction of toilets etc.

The Education Tax Fund (ETF) also provides to all the States Primary Education Board (SPEB) for construction of classrooms, construction of furniture or benches and purchase of office equipment.

Infact, it is unfortunate and sad to note that in spite of the huge amount of money allocated for primary education in Nigeria today, primary education still has numerous financial problems like the payment of salaries, allowances and provision of necessary infrastructure for each primary school in the Federation. Dooga (1998,P.75) stated that:

The problem of primary education financing is the problem of sharing of the responsibility between the various levels of government. If primary education is basically the responsibility of the local government, it could be easier to elicit the local vigour and local initiative for the success of primary education. It has to be emphasized that despite the fact that a huge sum of money is earmarked to education sector yearly, the resources available to the sector has been very scarce and therefore require proper utilization.

This could be confirmed by Elekvva (1994, P.7) when he stated that a good educational system is a sound base for technological development.

Similarly, Shamsuddeen (1998, p.2) asserted that;

Since the early 1980's with the effective end of oil boom, we have gone through various strands of economic policy including deregulation, privatization, trade liberalization, devaluation, drastic changes in fiscal and monetary policies, interest

hikes etc.

Also Ngbede (1991JMO) confirmed that:

The oil boom which lacked indigenous technological base and support with time changed to oil doom where it gave birth to current economic depression which demanded of us an education which the nation neglected initially.

Laudable educational policies such as the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) have failed completely in their operations in Nigeria because of poor management and misappropriation of funds allocated for the upliftment of the programme for rapid educational development.

The Universal Basic Education as the foundation of our educational process, if not laid properly, will make the whole system collapse. The programme needs competent, hard working and well-experienced educators who can manage it properly.

Funding must be intensified at the primary school level of education for the nation to have a sound, reliable and durable educational foundation.

Management of Funds for Effective Implementation of Universal Basic Education: Primary school education management and financing have undergone series of revolutionary changes in Nigeria. Hence, funds allocated for Universal Basic Education implementation are important factors to be considered if the programme is to succeed. Funding and management of personnel, facilities, infrastructure and other resources are some of the problems that are affecting the effective implementation of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Thompson (1981, p.6) was of the view that:

Quite enormous sum of money is allocated to education, the bulk of this sum goes to paying teachers' salaries and relatively little is available to finance innovations. Teachers could not give their best when they were not paid salaries and their allowances. The quality of education depends or is related to the amount of money one is ready to spend on it.

Since independence it has been observed that education in general has been toyed with here and there swinging left and right, thereby destabilizing primary education which as the foundation of education has to be properly laid otherwise, the entire system of education will fail. Adesina (1988, P. 9) asserted that:

Education has been so unduly politicized that decisions on education, particularly at the primary school level, are no longer, technically or professionally derived. The politicization of education has made it un-meaningful and it has often been neglected and underfunded.

Today, we need a well-organized Universal Basic Education in Nigeria which will give opportunity to all children and youth to develop their potentials and talent to the maximum, both for their own personal satisfaction, needs and for the service of their nation.

According to Ukuma (1994), the management of funds for effective implementation of educational programmes has brought back or retarded the effective implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. This embraces primary education which was introduced by the former Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida, that started off with the purchase of instructional facilities and other teaching and learning facilities. The lowering of educational standard could be traced to the mismanagement and misappropriation of funds allocated for advancement of education.

Since the inception of this administration on 29th May 1999, deliberate efforts were made to reverse the decline in the educational sector. These include the review of the status of institutions in the education sector for restructuring where necessary. Launching of the Universal Basic Education scheme in September, 1999, enlightenment campaign on Universal Basic Education to elicit public support on it, inauguration of visitation panels to tertiary institutions whose reports led to some crucial decisions of government and restructuring of examination bodies among others.

Problems hampering Effective Implementation of Universal Basic Education in Contemporary Nigeria:
The problems hampering the effective implementation of Universal Basic Education

in contemporary Nigeria are many. One of the major problems is' lack of infrastructural facilities and teaching materials as well as low morale of teachers. Pupils in some primary schools located especially in the rural areas study in a completely bare environment, no building, no furniture, no facilities both teaching and learning. This makes one wonder why past primary administrations have never been able to make any recognizable impact at the primary school level of education.

With over-crowded primary schools having an average of 80 to 90 pupils in a class, teachers find it very difficult to cope with such great number of pupils. Another problem hampering the effective implementation of Universal Basic Education is lack of focus as to how to go about the entire National Policy on Education especially the primary school aspect.

Also non-payment of teachers' salaries, delay in their promotion exercise by State Primary School Education Boards (SPEB), inadequate qualified teachers who can teach in the primary schools, (the minimum educational qualification to teach in primary school is the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) are serious problems facing the U.B.E. programme. Many teachers teaching in primary schools that are located both in urban and rural areas are still Grade II teachers. The products or pupils of such primary schools come out ill-equipped thereby lowering the standard of education at primary school level, which is the base, or foundation of educational system in Nigeria.

Enlightenment and Mobilization of Universal Basic Education Programme

Mobilization is the process of bringing together, harnessing, actualizing and utilizing potential human resources for the purpose of development. It could also be regarded as a process whereby human beings are made aware of the resources at their disposal and are also motivated and energized to collectively utilize such resources for the improvement of their spiritual and material conditions of living.

Enlightenment is a process by which instructions or knowledge is disseminated to people to enable them do the correct things or free them from ignorance, misunderstanding or false beliefs. Enlightenment helps people to understand things better and free them from prejudice and superstition. To educate and bring people together to achieve a common goal is difficult. It is very difficult to change values, attitudes and orientations that they may have acquired over the years.

Vices like bribery, misappropriation of public funds and political thuggery have all continued to reign since 1960s. Laudable educational programmes like the 6-3-3-4 educational system which include the Universal Basic Education aspect have been pronounced but all efforts to implement such a good educational programme are yet to make a serious impact.

The enlightenment, mobilization and implementation of Universal Basic Education programme have been on the pages of newspapers, magazines, and on electronic media instead of the implementation in the minds of all Nigerians.

This could be confirmed by Adzonge (2002, P. 2) who states that:

Awareness of the need for and the importance of education in Nigeria is characterized by wide geographical disparity which refers to differences in participation, retention and successful completion rates in different geographical regions of the Federation. Sociological disparity is seen in two major situations, the non-affordability of financial costs of school and the loss of faith in educational system. Gender disparity is a well-known feature of Nigeria's educational systems with girls and women as the disadvantaged. This differs from some other parts of the country where boy-child retention is the problem.

Enlightenment and mobilization of Nigerians' for urgent implementation of Universal Basic Education have to be appropriately targeted by using the masses as the agents.

This will restore the people's confidence in the educational system and especially in the pronouncements and promises of Government on Universal Basic Education. Enlightenment of members of the society on the urgent need for primary education to have a sound, strong durable foundation and mobilization efforts will as much as possible be undertaken by every citizen of Nigerian educated and uneducated.

Enlightenment and mobilization of Nigerians for the implementation of Universal Basic education will have long term benefits to the individual and the society in general.

Inculcation in all Nigerians the Value and Spirit of Civic Responsibility

The inculcation in all Nigerians the value and spirit of civic responsibility is a necessity. This is because people constitute the active agents in any development process. It may also awaken the consciousness of all categories of Nigerians to their right and obligation as citizens of Nigeria.

The value and spirit of civic responsibility ensures that materials which appear in the mass media both electronic and the print are aimed at enlightening people on the urgent need for Universal Basic Education and mobilization of people to donate generously and participate in one way or the other in the rapid implementation of the programme in Nigeria.

Since the National Policy on Education (NPE) is a blue print for achieving its national objectives using education as a tool, no policy on education in Nigeria can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and objectives of the nation's affairs apart from the advancement of Universal Basic Education.

The War Against Indiscipline Brigade handbook (2000, p. 21) stated that:

Educating Nigerians on educational matters can be described as a process of mental liberation which breaks down apathy and the culture of silence of the vast majority of Nigerians and empowers (them to participate effectively and meaningfully in the process of nation building.

The value and spirit of civic responsibility may create consciousness about Universal Basic Education, its usefulness or benefits, the role each citizen is expected to play and the proper role of Government in serving the collective interests of Nigerians.

Also, knowing the value and spirit of civic responsibility will commit Nigerians to social justice and economic self-reliance through mobilization and harnessing of energies and natural resources into productive use.

Thus, the inculcation in all Nigerians the value and spirit of civic responsibility will sensitize, induct and equip all Nigerians to fight against corruption, dishonesty and misappropriation of bur resources that are meant for advancement of Universal Basic Education programme by a few individuals and groups who do not want progress or educational advancement of Nigeria.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Universal Basic Education Programme

Monitoring and evaluation of Universal Basic Education programme is also of the significant aspects or areas which must be taken seriously if the programme is to be successfully implemented. Monitoring and evaluation of the programme will help the programme to be strengthened, efficient, effective and functional in all the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory.

Monitoring and evaluation of Universal Basic Education covers both supervision, inspection and observation. This is to achieve efficient, effective and high quality standard of the programme. Similarly, Adzong (2002, P. 7) stated that:

Monitoring refers to what activities are carried out by monitoring officers in areas of coverage. Monitoring officers carry out the following activities on the field: go through school books, lesson notes and teacher's work load, check school time table, go through continuous assessment records, check register, admission and attendance, log books, movement books cash books, games books and observe teaching and learning for accuracy and facility.

Evaluation of Universal Basic Education involves collecting accurate and necessary information about the programme and analyzing it for rapid advancement and smooth implementation of the programme.

Information may be collected through administering questionnaires, observation of pupils, teachers, parents, government, individuals etc.

Evaluation of the programme and its diagnosis, will reveal various areas of weaknesses in the programme and provide information about what is to be done for the effective and rapid implementation of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Also evaluation of the programme may help to reveal the role educational stake holders have to play in the educational sector in general and Universal Basic Education in particular.

Conclusion

The paper has appreciated the laudable ideals of the Universal Basic Education Scheme in Nigeria. However, the implementation strategies are clad with many problems. These go to hamper the performance of civic responsibilities of the citizens.

Thus, the way forward is for the stakeholders to enlighten and mobilize the citizens well enough to avail themselves of this opportunity to be educated. They should also monitor and evaluate the implementation strategies to ensure that the objectives of the scheme are achieved. All these hinge on the release and appropriate use of finance.

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