

AN EXAMINATION OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) POLICY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts an examination of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy in Nigeria. It argues that Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is not new being traced from as early as 1955 from the Universal Primary Education Scheme. The paper argues further that the purpose of the programme which was launched on 30th September 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo was to provide free and compulsory education for children in the primary and junior secondary schools in the country. An examination of UBE Policy shows that a number of problems have bedeviled the policy considering its main thrust and specific objectives. It was recommended among other things, that government should increase the budgetary allocation to the education sector in regard to the recommendation of UNESCO that 26% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be allocated to the sector. Also, government at all levels should increase the funding of education especially the UBE programme.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education Policy, Objectives of UBE, Primary School, Junior Secondary School.

INTRODUCTION

Education is concerned with the transmission of worthwhile values such as skills, knowledge and planned activities that can develop learners' potentials for human and national development (Ochoyi and Danladi, 2008; cited in Anaduka and Okafor, 2013). The importance of education cannot be overemphasized. It provides opportunity for one to acquire knowledge, skills and traits for both human and national development (Ige, 2013). Education is seen as a desirable way to narrow the existing gap between members of the society who are from the affluent line and those who are suffering from poverty. Various governments and international actors are encouraging many children, including those from the poorest countries, to attend school to be assured of having a bright future ahead of them (Saliho and Jamil, 2015).

Basic education is fundamental to human and societal development. It is the foundation upon which other levels of education are built and a necessary prerequisite for human and national development (Tahir, 2006; cited in Anaduka and Okafor 2013). According to Etuk, Ering and Ajake (2012), the primary target of the UBE policy was ensuring that every Nigerian child acquires a minimum of 9 years basic education. Universal basic education comprises (9) nine year duration comprising (6) six years of primary education and (3) three years of junior secondary education. It also includes adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels to take care of those who dropped out of school (National Policy on Education 2004; Aboluwodi, 2015). Tahir (2008) cited in Aboluwodi (2015) averred that Universal Basic Education is designed to ensure free access to education,

reduce the rate of dropout to the minimum, make education relevant to the needs of learners and make education a lifelong enterprise. He maintained further that the cardinal concerns of Universal Basic Education are deeply noted in how to meet the basic learning needs of children, adolescent, youth and adults. For Obanya (2004) cited in Aboluwodi (2015), the emphasis of Universal Basic Education Policy is “education” rather than schooling. Obanya (2004) cited in Aboluwodi (2015) maintained that UBE policy has to do with the all-round development of the child. That is, a life-long learning programme aiming at improving the literacy level of the children and adults.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2007) that education is for:

- (a) The development of an individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen
- (b) The total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world as a global village
- (c) The inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity and
- (d) The development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities/competencies and of empowering the individual to live in and contribute positively to society.

OVERVIEW OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Universal basic education in Nigeria evolved from the 1955 Universal Primary Education Scheme which operated in western Nigeria. In subsequent years, the Eastern and Northern governments also had in place their respective universal education. The federal government came into the scene only in 1976 with the commencement of the universal primary education in all the regions within the country. The consequence was the provision of a unified and singular framework for educating Nigerians (Salihu and Jamil, 2015).

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched on 30th September 1999 by the then president of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo. The purpose of the programme is to provide free and compulsory education for children in the primary and junior secondary schools in the country. On launching the programme, the president assured that the many problems that bedeviled the 1976 Universal Primary Education would not be allowed to distort the 9 years basic education programme (Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013).

The UBE programme is designed to remove distortions and inconsistencies in basic education delivery and to reinforce the implementation of the National Policy on Education. It is also Nigeria’s response to the achievement of Education for all (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the present Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UBE is aimed at enabling all children in the Nigerian society to participate in the free 9 years of schooling from primary one to junior secondary school (JSS) three classes. The intention is universal and compulsory (Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013; Ejere, 2011). UBE is more comprehensive than UPE or other educational programmes of the Federal Government (Anaduava and Okafor, 2013). Based on the implementation guidelines for the UBE, the programme stresses the inclusion of girls and women and a number of underserved groups; the poor, street and roaming children, rural and remote population, nomads, migrants, workers, indigenous people, minorities, refugees, disabled and all categories of people. The formal education system is only one of the six components included in UBE. Others relate to early childhood, literacy and non formal education or apprenticeship training for youths outside the formal education system (Nigeria, 2000; cited in Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013).

OBJECTIVES OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) POLICY IN NIGERIA

Ejere (2011), emphasized that the main objective of the UBE programme is “to lay the foundation for lifelong learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning, self-awareness, citizenship and life skills”. However, he outline the specific objectives of the programme to include:-

- i. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- ii. The provision of free, compulsory, universal basic education for every Nigeria child of school age group.
- iii. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop out from the formal school system.
- 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 complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- v. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, manipulative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying the foundation for lifelong learning (Nigeria, 2000; cited in Ejere, 2011).

CRITIQUE OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) POLICY IN NIGERIA

An examination of the UBE policy shows that a number of problems have bedeviled the policy considering its main thrust and specific objectives.

A major constraint or challenge of the UBE programme is inadequate funding. The federal government takes the lead in setting policy and financing basic education through transfers to states, financial responsibility for basic education is shared between the states and local governments. Local governments are charged with paying salaries and allowances of primary school teachers. In spite of the shared responsibility for UBE financing by the three tiers of government, funding has remained an issue. Similarly, funds estimated for renovating the existing school structures and building new ones are hardly disbursed. Most schools have dilapidated structures with no libraries, laboratories and other support facilities (Ejere, 2011; Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013).

The problem of qualified teachers has continued to be a big challenge to the UBE programme. The scheme lacks qualified teachers which can adequately accommodate pupils of the junior secondary category who under the 9-3-4 system of the UBE policy would become integral part of the primary schools. The lack of unskilled teachers affects pupils to the extent that they graduate without being equipped with the required educational skills that match with that level of education. The implication is that the objective of the Universal Basic Education enhancing literary and basic life skill acquisition have not been achieved (Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013; Etuk, Ering and Ajake, 2012).

Inadequate data for planning is a major setback facing the UBE programme. Inadequate and poor data pose planning difficulties and implementation challenges. Unreliable data prevent adequate projections in terms of expected enrolment, required teachers, infrastructural needs and equipment. When data provided for planning are inaccurate, the decisions based on such data would be faulty (Ejere, 2011; Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013).

According to Salihu and Jamil (2015) one of the ways to assess the effectiveness of the UBE Scheme is to look at the availability of infrastructures needed for its implementation. They noted that infrastructure such as classroom, books, and other learning materials are insufficient to meet the goals of the programme, and to ensure access by everyone. The UBE programme is confronted with the issue of inadequate learning facilities which affect the

learning conditions of the pupils negatively thus defeating the goals and objectives of the programmes. Shortage of equipment, infrastructures, text-books and instructional materials are undermining the successful implementation of the UBE programme. Without the provisions of adequate textbooks and instructional materials, it is difficult to implement the school curriculum (Etuk, Ering and Ajake, 2012).

Poor management of available resources and corruption also contribute to the problems confronting the UBE programme. Mismanagement is observed in the UBE sector especially in the area of funds allocated to the programme. Funds that are meant for execution of projects are diverted into personal pocket. The corrupt attitude of stake holders discourage teachers and create unnecessary bottle necks and even outright hindrances to the furtherance of issues that will make for the success of the UBE programme (Ejere, 2011; Etuk, Ering and Ajake, 2012).

The teacher is an important and indispensable tool in the achievement of educational goals in all educational institutions. Curriculum reform should involved teachers inputs. Curriculum reform can therefore be effective if teachers are trained and equipped with skills to implement the intended curriculum, and such training should be for all teachers (Anaduaka, and Okafor, 2013).

In spite of the inefficiencies or inadequacies of the programme, many still agree that the universal basic education in the country has been highly significant in changing the political, social and economic context of the country. If one agrees to the fact that education is a veritable tool for advancing any nation, especially a developing country like Nigeria, then the UBE programme is worth executing since its aim is to empower leaders educationally for the of advancing human and national development (Salihu and Jamil, 2015; Etuk, Ering, and Ajake, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy in Nigeria has failed to deliver significant success rate. It has been anticipated that the policy will be able to deliver more positive outcomes compare to the ones previously implemented. Under this scheme or policy, all the tiers of government have been obliged by a mandate to provide free access to education for all the citizens of Nigeria. Students are required to attend compulsory 9 years in primary education and junior secondary education, in which the former should be completed for a period of 6 years while the latter should be completed in a period of 3years.

The introduction of UBE in Nigeria is a positive policy to achieve the MDGs and to address the agitations and yearning of the Nigerian people for educational system that would be more relevant to the country socio-economic, political and cultural background. Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should increase the budgetary allocation to the education sector in regard to the recommendation of UNESCO that 26% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be allocated to the sector. Also, government at all levels should increase the funding of education especially the UBE programme.
2. The scheme should employ more teachers to meet the current demand. There is need for training and re-training of teachers already employed to meet modern teaching pedagogy.

3. The issue or problem of infrastructure and other facilities should be addressed to enhanced conditions of learning. Just like there is Tertiary Education Trust Fund for Tertiary institutions in the country, there be a scheme introduced to help in terms of providing infrastructure and other facilities for UBE programme.
4. Corruption should be tackled vigorously.
5. Teachers should be properly motivated to render quality service and in designing or upgrading UBE curriculum, teachers should be part of the team.

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