

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme is an educational programme aimed at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. It is in compliance with the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) which was made in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and Bating clearly in Article 1 that every person - child, Youth on Adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs. This declaration was reaffirmed at the World Summit for Children also held in 1990, which stated that all children should have access to basic education by the year 2000.

The World Summit for Children placed a lot of emphasis on raising the levels of female literacy. In a bid to achieve education goals, the Dakar World Education Forum was held as a follow-up meeting to the WCEFA where new sets of goals were set to be attained by the year 2015. The goals include:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls, children in difficult circumstances and from ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
4. Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults; (v) Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
5. Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence for all, so that recognized and reasonable learning outcomes are achieved, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Declaration, has two of the eight goals devoted to education. They are goal 2 (to achieve universal primary education) and goal 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women).

Antecedents of UBE

Nigeria has made efforts in the past to provide broad-based education through various programmes (Patrick. 2000). These programmes include:

- a. Introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Western Region on 17th January 1955.

- b. Introduction of Universal Primary Education in the Eastern Region in February 1957.
- c. Introduction of UPE in Lagos (then Federal Territory) in January 1957.
- d. The publication of the National Policy on Education in 1977, which is unequivocal in its insistence on functional, universal and qualitative education. The Policy declares Governments intention to use a variety of strategies for the provision of Universal Basic Education for all citizens.
- e. Launching of Universal Free Primary Education on 6th September 1976 and.
- f. The launching of Universal Basic Education (UBE) on Both September 1999.

What UBE is.

Basic Education means the type of education, in quality and content, that is given in the first level of education. This construct changes from country to country. In Nigeria, basic education was equated with six years of primary schooling in the past. Currently basic education is extended to include the three years of Junior Secondary School. Universal Basic Education (UBE) is conceived to embrace formal education up to age 15, as well as adult and non-formal education including education of the marginalized groups within the Nigerian society. It is a policy reform measure of the Federal Government of Nigeria, that is in line with the state objectives of the 1999 constitution which states in section 18 that...

Government shall eradicate illiteracy; to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide a free and compulsory. Universal Primary Education, free secondary education, and free adult literacy programmes.

Objectives of the UBE

According to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) (2004), the objectives of the programme among others include:

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; reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency); and

Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) was formally launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September 1999. The UBE programme is intended to be universal free and compulsory. According to the implementation guidelines for the Universal

Basic Education programme published by the Federal Ministry of Education Abuja, in February, 2000, due attention would be given to public enlightenment and social mobilization. The document also states that teachers will always be an integral part of the process of conceptualization, planning and executing.

Differences and Similarities between UPE and UBE

Denga (2000) noted that universal access to education has been the prime target for Nigeria, since the middle of the 1970s when the Universal Primary Education (U.P.E.) scheme blasted off. This led to sharp increase in enrolment from 6.2 million in the 1975/76 session to 14.8 million in 1992. This sharp increase in enrolment without adequate planning created problems. Many educational programmes like UBE launched in the past had failed because of some factors.

Among such factors was inadequate public enlightenment and social mobilization, for full community involvement. The educationally-conscious Nigerians began to lose faith in the U.P.E. scheme, disparaging the government's effort to finance the system which many concluded was a nightmare.

The overwhelming and unanticipated results of this sudden educational expansion consequent upon the UPE scheme, evidenced a profound shortage of learning facilities including space, a severe dearth of teachers and funds to implement the system. Complaints started to be heard from parents and the general public because of the cost imposed on them from a programme that was purported to educate their children free of charge.

In addition, the teachers' morale suffered some battering. Also, various kinds of levies were reimposed on parents by some state governments in a bid to salvage the scheme. All these happened despite the excellent objectives and philosophy of the programme which were enunciated optimistically in the National Policy on Education published in 1977.

Patrick (2000) stated that, in an attempt to avoid the problems which impeded the realisation of the objectives of the past educational programmes, the government outlined implementation guidelines to facilitate successful achievement of the stated objectives. The guidelines include:

1. Public enlightenment and social mobilisation, for full community involvement;
2. Data collection and analysis;
3. Planning, monitoring, evaluation;
4. Teachers; their recruitment, education, training, retraining, and motivation;
5. Infrastructural facilities;
6. Enriched curricula;
7. Textbooks and instructional materials;
8. Improved funding; and,
9. Management of the entire process.

These efforts by the governments are aimed at providing education to all Nigerians

irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, occupation and location. It is to be noted that with all the efforts by the government and individuals, Babalola (2000), said that Nigeria's literacy rate was then estimated to be 52 percent. UNDP (1998) notes that only 40% of all heads of households in Nigeria had any education at all, 21 percent had only primary education, 14 percents had up to secondary education, while only 5 percent had post-secondary education. Data from the Federal Ministry of Education's, Education Statistics (1996) shows that only 14.8 million children of school age are enrolled in primary school out of the 21 million children of school going age.

Envisaged Problems of U.B.E

The following are considered as possible problems of U.B.E.

1. Funding

The aim, as declared in the policy is that Universal Basic Education should be free. It is however, true that the financial burden on government often forces parents to get involved in funding this basic level of education. Since most parents are poor, the children remain poorly equipped to learn.

2. Provision and maintenance of infrastructural facilities such as buildings, equipment and instructional materials.

3. Problem of Supervision and monitoring of what goes on in Basic Education Centres.

4. The Problem of the trekking distance from home to school. In rural areas, most children trek for more than 2 kilometres from home to school. This practice is likely to vitiate the vitality of children and result in lateness, absenteeism and truancy. Basic Education Centres should be established within 1 or at most 1.5 kilometers trekking distance from home.

5. Poor Planning

A dearth of statistics on children's enrolment, number of teachers, their qualification and demographic characteristics, statistics on buildings and other learning facilities - all are inadequate at present. This lack of data is capable of stultifying planning.

6. There is no clear-cut programme on the interface between parents and the school to facilitate child-care and basic education.

7. Competition between Private Basic Education Centres (Nursery-Primary Schools) and Public (Government-owned Centres).

In a democratic setting such-as ours, individuals have a right to operate schools just as parents have a right to seek the best education for their children. Will Government legislate against private-owned basic education centres in order to curb their excessive charges of fees?

How do standards compare? There are many problems and issues to pose, especially as the tiny details of the newly launched U.B.E. are yet to come into full circulation.

Suggested Solutions as the way forward

The following suggestions are made to minimise the current problems highlighted above:

- (1) Adequate funding is required. It is hoped that the Federal Government will provide adequate funds with the State Governments assisting sufficiently to ensure that the

poverty-stricken parents contribute minimal funds for this level of education in the new dispensation. It is well known that the teachers' morale drops with tardiness in payment of salaries. Regular grants to the States should be made by the Federal Government for payment of teachers' salaries, except where a Universal Basic Education Commission is constituted to handle all the affairs of U.B.E. directly.

- (2) Our basic education must adopt a two-fold approach. We need to educate young children on the one hand, and promote adult literacy and continuing education on the other hand to help develop their basic skills in child parenting, family management, civic participation and effective involvement in such participation.
- (3) Our new education culture must embody effective planning using appropriate data banks in all spheres of education.
- (4) Guidance services must be emphasized to deal with current behavioural problems, which have plagued the education industry at all levels in Nigeria.
- (5) The curriculum should include social and democratic values, academic skills and psychomotor competencies, which constitute our national needs. We need to raise the standards of education through a well-designed curriculum.
- (6) Our children must not sit under trees nor in open fields for instructional purposes. Secure classroom facilities need to be provided especially in rural areas where the number of school children may outstrip the institutional space for learning. Our new education culture must adequately stress a partnership between the government and other development agencies in order to tackle education funding and skill development, both for children and teachers and facilities.
- (6) Our new culture must emphasize the egalitarian philosophy in response to democratic tenets. This is to stress that equality of educational opportunity must be provided for all children regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation, physical and mental disability and socio-economic background.
- (8) We need to promote a maintenance culture, not only for the school plant but also for the teaching methods that have proved useful in the delivery system.
- (9) Our schools must socialize our children into democratic values. Our children should be socialized according to the democratic needs of the nation. This can be achieved through the teaching of civics and citizenship education.
- 10) Where regular inspection by the inspectorate is lacking, some teachers may branch off into quick money- generating activities such as farming, butchering, petty- trading and so on, even during school hours. This unprofessional behaviour creates discipline problems as children remain unsupervised.
- 11) Educational experts should sensitize the government to become more aware of their services and contributions through regular publications of research findings in their areas of specialization. Professional educators may not be members of the National Assembly. But the legislative power of their research cannot be ignored by any type of government, whether Military, Civilian or Transitional.

The implementation guideline should be religiously followed so as to facilitate successful achievement of the objectives of the programme.

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