

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION: A DESIDERATUM FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND STABILIZATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Many government policies and programmes in Nigeria were known to have crumbled without meeting the desired objectives. Such collapse had led to colossal loss of funds and materials. The Operation Feed the Nation, OFN, (1976), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, DFRI, (1986), and the Universal Primary Education, UPE, (1976), among others, were some of the instances. When the Universal Primary Education (UPE) took off in Nigeria in 1976, a burning desire to universalize access to education was in the offing. Consequently the National Policy on Education for Nigeria (1981:8) provides that universal basic education, in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities, will be provided for all citizens. The collapse of the Universal Primary Education scheme was due to a number of problems including planlessness, unmanageable enrolment explosion, teacher quality constraints, among others. Now that the universal Basic Education scheme has taken off, it is strongly hoped that necessary loop-holes should be plugged to ensure the success of the scheme. Thoughtful planning, availability of funds and necessary infrastructural facilities to contend with high school enrolment, current statistical records, qualitative and quantitative supply of teachers, purposive enlightenment, transparency and accountability on the part of the school administrators, provision of commensurate instructional materials to facilitate learning, appropriate motivational strategies, diversification of curriculum offerings, among others, should be evolved so as to keep the scheme afloat and strong. Periodic evaluation of the scheme should be undertaken as diagnostic, prescriptive and prognostic tools to ensure the amelioration of the identified defects and maintenance of expected standards.

Introduction

The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme in Nigeria in 1999 heralded the attainment of another milestone in Nigeria's educational history. It was a follow-up to the provision in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (1981:8) which states that: universal basic education, in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities, will be provided for all citizens. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education scheme was not the first recent educational innovation in Nigeria. In 1976, the Universal Primary Education was launched in Nigeria. The scheme attracted a lot activities: mass recruitment of primary school teachers with their sporadic preparation, quantum leap of school enrolment, establishment of many teacher training colleges, recruitment of many unqualified "teacher trainers," provision of infrastructural facilities, unplanned expenditures, among others. However, those activities culminated in a lot of wastage and the eventual collapse of the scheme. The Nigerian government, perhaps, did not do reasonable ground work before embarking on the scheme, hence the collapse. Almost two decades later and under a democratic dispensation, the Universal Basic Education was launched in 1999 with its goals and objectives as well as the operational framework.

This paper, therefore sets out to examine the purport of UBE, its primary *raison d'être*, relevant activities-.to enrich the clientele's experiences for productive work, and suggest how best to facilitate sustainable development via the UBE.

Universal Basic Education Conceptualized

Basic education could be conceptualized variously depending on the polity being considered. Enufoha

(2002:21) citing Lenhait (1979) reports that in Jamaica, the term is identified with preschool education; in Zambia with the length of the compulsory schooling **Curricular Improvement Strategies**

The National Policy on Education for Nigeria (1981:7) states that not only is education the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources.

Before the National Policy provision, the United States Agency for International Task Force on Nigerian Education (1967: 85-87) had made the following observations:

1. The system is not geared effectively to the realities and needs of the labour market; It is not employment oriented.
2. There is insufficient application of systems, facilities and manpower toward the solution of the country's most pressing development problems.
3. The formal education institutions in the system are geared so closely to the needs of the relatively few who progress to higher education levels that they do not serve adequately the vast majority who terminate their educational career earlier in the sequence.
4. The system is directed too narrowly towards the preparation of manpower for the higher-productivity sector, whereas most labour absorption takes place in the less developed sectors of the economy.
5. The system lacks flexibility needed to respond to changing labour demand; it lacks mechanisms by which supply can be linked to demand.

Although the above report was made about four decades ago, the import of the report still appears valid today. For instance, today, in Nigeria, many school leavers roam the streets because they do not possess any requisite skills to enable them fit into the world of work. The situation calls for educational re-orientation. Hopefully, the Universal Basic Education scheme can be harnessed via, appropriate curriculum innovations and strategies.

Considering the goals and objectives of UBE, the analysis of the needs of the society as well as knowledge and taxonomy of the behavioral objectives required to meet the needs, curricula for the UBE should emphasize, among others education and activities for self-reliance involving the following as props:

- i. Technical and Vocational Education (VTE)
- ii. Science and Technology (STE)
- iii. Education Technology Application
- iv. General Education.

Technical and Vocational Education (VTE)

Technical and Vocational Education is the form of education that emphasizes acquisition of occupational skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for employment in industries, commerce and other enterprises (Olaitan, 1996; Okoro, 1993). Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) should be introduced at the primary through junior secondary school levels. This suggestion is predicated on the fact that many pupils leave school after these levels. If they do so, they will utilize the knowledge and skills they have acquired to become self-employed. Such subjects as arts and crafts, agriculture, home science, business studies, music, secretarial studies (junior secondary), management studies including accounting should form the VTE curriculum. The rationale is to ensure that the products of UBE are self-reliant.

To ensure the credibility of the UBE products, the VTE teachers should be actually qualified and well groomed in the relevant pedagogic skills because it is the quality of the teachers that will dictate the quality of the products. It is instructive that Nigeria's VTE should evolve a functional period; in Ethiopia it is a shortened period of primary schooling; in India, it is identified with education will the rural masses; and in Tanzania, it implies conveying appropriate skills to both young people and adults within the context of African socialism. In Nigeria, basic education lays emphasis on universality. According to the proposed Implementation Blueprint for Universal Basic Education in Nigeria (1999), basic education is the foundation for sustainable lifelong learning. It comprises a wide - variety of formal and non-formal education activities and programmes designed to enable learners acquire functional literacy. It includes primary, junior secondary and nomadic education as well as adult literacy. Basic education in Nigeria is aimed at equipping individuals with such knowledge, skills and

attitudes that will enable them:

- 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.

Goals and Objectives of the UBE Scheme

The goals of the scheme are to universalize access to basic education, engender a conducive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. Specifically the objectives of the scheme, according to the Blueprint on UBE (1999) include:

- i. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. Provide free, compulsory universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- iii. Reduce drastically drop-out rate from the formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency;
- iv. Cater for drop outs and out-of-school children / adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education, and
- v. Ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative and life skills (as well as the ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying the foundation for life-long learning.

Given the gamut of UBE goals and objectives, the burning question is: How could the UBE scheme be utilized to attain and improve the economic potentialities of the citizenry and at the same time make for sustainable development of the society? Curricula improvement programmes, are the desiderata. Such programmes will not only equip the clientele with the capacity to survive in the world of work but will also make them self-reliant and contributing members of the society. system and liaise with industries to ensure relevance. Educational technology application should be adequately employed as an instructional strategy to obviate the problem of abstraction in the students. Furthermore, students should be properly guided so that their experiences are enriched the more. Under guidance services, students should be exposed to the various occupational areas and what it takes to fit into those areas. Such exposure facilitates occupational choice.

Science and Technology Education (STE)

According to the McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology (1.797:151)

Science deals with humans' understanding of the real world about them, their inherent properties of space, matter, energy and their interaction. Engineering is the application of objective knowledge (made available by science), to the creation of plans, designs, and means of achieving desired objectives. Technology deals with the tools and techniques for carrying out the plans.

Science is regarded as the generation of knowledge about life, while technology is the duplication or use of (scientific) knowledge. Science and technology, remains the cornerstone of progress and advancement, (National Policy for Science and Technology, 1986). Teaching of science through all levels of the educational pyramid has been stressed (National Policy on Education, 1981:8). "thus, at the primary level, the objective is to lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking. At the secondary level, the objective is to equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology. Given the above provisions, the UBE Implementation Blueprint states, as one of the objectives of UBE, "to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative and life skills needed for laying the foundation for lifelong learning."

In order to effectively teach science and technology, well-qualified science educators should be handy; laboratories should be well equipped with laboratory attendants or staff readily available. Readable science textbooks should be used by the pupils and students to enable them do independent reading. Experiences to be provided to the learners should be as suggested by Butts (1973:58-59) and

McDonald, B, Nelson, Leslie, Reilly, MX, Brown, R.L (1972:315). The suggested techniques include:

- i. Stimulating activities to arouse pupils' curiosity should be embarked on. Freedom and cooperation in discussion among the pupils should be encouraged.
- ii. Experimentation and demonstration should be simple and relevant instructional materials should be utilized, the pupils should be required to do the experiments under the teacher's guidance. They should feel free to ask questions when necessary. " The importance of maintaining safety should be emphasized.
- iii. The pupils should be allowed to explore, initiate actions, and manipulate their environment,
- iv. The pupils should be led through structured experiences to enable them evaluate, explain and describe their experiences to others while expanding their own abilities and intelligence,
- v. The teacher should be able to analyze and direct the learner in many unique ways involving the learner with his environment, his past experiences, his powers of reasoning, and his skills or processes.
- vi. The teacher guides the pupils to learn by manipulating their own thoughts and experiences for themselves.

It is believed that grooming pupils as stated above will enable them develop the culture of independent activity and invariably to life-long learning which will, hopefully, foster self-reliance.

Other Areas of UBE

Nomadic education and adult literacy programmes are other areas covered by the UBE scheme. Curricular experiences to be provided under nomadic education should follow the earlier suggested programmes of VTE and STE. But for the school drop-outs, adult education programmes delivery should be evolved. Adult education has many ramifications, including functional literacy, community development, political education and civics, cultural and aesthetics education, home management and consumer education, trade unionism, driving and safety education, cooperative activities, remedial education, extra mural studies, distance education and recurrent education (UNESCO, 1995).

Correspondingly, these areas require competent staff (educators) to impart the requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills. Appropriate methodologies have to be applied. This underscores the need to have professionally trained adult education, tutors, craftsmen, artisans, technicians and those qualified to teach the required skills. Team teaching approach should be utilized to ensure the success of the programme because some aspects of general education in communication, social and adult psychology have to be included. Instructional materials have to be qualitatively and quantitatively provided to concretize the teaching — learning process. Acquisition of manipulative skills in addition to theoretical knowledge should be highly encouraged by engaging the clientele in practical and industrial experiences. The rationale here is to ensure that the products of the programme can undertake relevant productive activities (Okeke, 2003:148-149). In this way, self-reliance is fostered.

Self-reliance and UBE

The major thrust of UBE is to equip the clientele with life-long learning. The type of learning that can make him survive in the world of work. Such learning will equip him with the capacity to fend for himself economically—he has acquired the skills that can make him employable, where he is employable either by himself or the labour market, he becomes independent economically and correspondingly self-reliant. Self-reliance connotes economic independence, self-satisfaction, self-providing. It does not imply isolationism. A self-reliant individual is hardly in want because he possesses the requisite skills and expertise to enable him cope satisfactorily with life's perplexities. A self-reliant nation, for instance, has high per capita income, has standard of living for the citizens, is well developed (Rodney, 1974). According to Nyerere

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