
UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) AS A MEANS OF ERADICATING LEVEL OF ILLITERACY AND ACQUIRING NEW SKILLS

By

Augustine Okereke Ogwudire

*Department of Educational Foundation,
Abia State College of Education (Technical),
Arochukwu.*

Ikechukwu Okoruga

*Department of Political Science,
Abia State College of Education (Technical),
Arochukwu.*

And

Robert Nchege Ukpai

*Department of Physical & Health Education,
Abia State College of Education (Technical),
Arochukwu.*

Abstract

The effectiveness of basic education to eradicate or reduce level of illiteracy as well as enhance development has been an issue of concern to all the stakeholders of basic education. This has been one of the reasons for the introduction Universal Basic Education (UBE) in place of the former Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria. The paper is on Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. The paper examines the fundamental concept of Universal Basic Education as well as the main objectives of the programme which include the provision of the free Universal Basic Education to every Nigerian child of school-going age. The work also examined the structure and content of UBE curriculum, the advantages of the learner-centered approach of Teaching in the UBE programme, UBE as a Lifelong Learning among others and finally concluded that UBE must equip the learners with new skills and competences for achieving those goals required for a fundamental change in the way learning takes place.

Education has remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society for decades. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched in September 1999, with the sole purpose of ensuring that illiteracy is reduced to its barest minimum among the adult population of Nigeria in the nearest future. In the pursuance of this

Academic Excellence

goal, the UBE programme aimed at making education compulsory at the primary and junior secondary school levels. This is one of the cardinal programmes of the government aimed at demonstrating its strong commitment to international policies geared towards the eradication of illiteracy in Africa.

Through the UBE programme, the Nigerian government demonstrated a strong commitment to the Jomtien Declaration (1990) on the promotion of Basic Education for all as well as the New Delhi Declaration (1991) requiring stringent efforts by the E-9 countries (nine countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterate adults) to drastically reduce illiteracy within the shortest possible time frame.

Yoloye (2004) observed that, the concept of Basic Education is not a completely new term to the Nigerian society and that within the last decade, it has assumed a global significance and its meaning has been broadened.

What Precisely is Basic Education?

According to Jomtien (1990) Declaration and Framework of Actions on Education for All (EFA), Basic Education is not detailed in terms of years of schooling that is:

- Basic Education is not a package but a process.
- Basic Education is not a question of years of formal education but a question of acquisition of skills.
- Basic Education is that foundation level that emphasizes literacy, numeracy, basic life skills and most importantly learning to learn skills.
- Basic Education lays emphasis on learning, de-emphasizing repetition and dropouts.
- Basic Education is an essential part of a broad-based policy on inclusive education.

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:13) Basic Education shall be of 9 years duration comprising 6 years primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory. It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary levels for adults and out-of-school youths.

The rationale for the introduction of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria according to Ukeje (1991:44) is the recognition that Universal Primary Education “is a pre-requisite for the equalization of educational opportunities across the country” this was according to Ukeje (1991:49) perhaps:

An attempt to implement Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, inter alia, that every one has the right to education and that this shall be free and at least in the elementary and primary stages in keeping with the provision of the 1961 Addis Ababa Conference on African education at which one of the agreements was that by the years 1980 all African States should provide free Universal compulsory education to its citizens.

International and National Antecedent of Universal Basic Education

Universal Basic Education in Nigeria has both its International and National antecedents. At the international level, Obanya (2000:3) drew attention to the following:

- The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasized the right of every one to education with special reference to Basic Education.
- The concern for a world educational crisis leading to an International Conference on the same theme in Paris in 1968 and the publication of a book on the subject by Philip Coombs, and the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO) An International Institute for Educational Planning in Paris.
- The Universal Search for a précised definition on the concept of Basic Education, which led to Jomtien (1990) World Conference on Education for All (EFA).
- Ougagdougou (1992) Declaration on the Education of women and girls.
- OAU Decade of Education (1997-2006).
- Recife (Brazil) Declaration on the pursuit of the New Delhi (1991) goals on massive reduction of illiteracy.
- The Dakar (2000) recommendation on the pursuit of Jomtien goals.
- Social Development summit Copenhagen (1996).
- The Beijing Conference (1997) on women and Development.

The National Antecedents of Universal Basic Education are the part and parcel of the Nation's Educational history. According to Omoifo (2006) Western education was introduced in Nigeria in 1842; since then, Regions, States and Federal Government of Nigeria have shown keen interest in education. The first education ordinance for Lagos and Gold Coast in 1882 empowered government to participate in the running of primary education.

According to Eya (2000), evidence of government's interest in education include the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Western Region on 17th January 1955; Lagos (then Federal Territory) in January 1957, Eastern Region in February 1957. Launching of Universal Free Primary Education in 8th September 1976 and the publication of the National Policy on Education in 1977. The policy declared Government's intention to use a variety of strategies for the provision of Universal Basic Education for all citizens.

Objectives of the Universal Basic Education

The Universal Basic Educational Programme has the following objectives:

- Developing in the entire citizens a strong consciousness to education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- The provision of free, Universal Basic Education to every Nigeria child of school-going age.

Academic Excellence

- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- Catering for the learning needs of the young persons who, for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complimentary approaches to the provisions and promotion of Basic Education.
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy manipulative, communicative, and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Scope of the Universal Basic Education

In the Nigerian context, following the Jomtien (1990) recommendation that basic education should not be considered as a package but as a process to be determined by every nation according to its evolutionary needs. Basic Education objectives leave nobody in doubt as to the fact that the scheme is not limited to formal education alone. It sees education in its widest sense which according to Didan (2000) includes:

- Programmes/initiations for early childhood care and socialization.
- Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life-long skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 years and above).
- Special programmes for nomadic populations.
- Out of school non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic education needed for life long learning.
- Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youths who have not had the benefit of formal education.
- The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

The fact that the Universal Basic Education is to be universal, free and compulsory presupposes that it should offer a variety of learning experiences which not only provide for the variety of clientele that it will have, but also cater for the uniqueness of the features that it must encompass to be able to attract and retain all categories of learners in its course offerings. According to Mchivga (2000:4) this implies that appropriate types of opportunities will be provided for the basic education of every Nigerian child of school going age, that parents have an obligation to ensure that children in their care avail themselves of such opportunities, and that sanctions will be imposed on persons, societies or institutions that prevent children, adolescents and youths from benefiting from the universal basic education programme.

Implication of the Universal Aspect of the Universal Basic Education

Universal Basic Education has the following implications.

- Special attention to special groups: This implies that the special needs of all sections of the population will be taken into consideration.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) as...

- Encouragement to the provision of facilities for early childhood care and socialization. This implies that due attention will be given to the needs of specific social groups and geographical zones of the country, bearing in mind the need to lay a solid foundation of life-long learning right from early childhood.

The Structure and Contents of the UBE Curriculum

Curriculum is all the activities a learner is exposed to under the guidance of the school. According to UNESCO (2002), the curriculum comprises the core of education. It determines:

- What children learn in schools?
- Whether the content of education is relevant to the real life situation of the learners.
- Whether what children learn in school is preparing them for life in their own societies and for competition in the global economy of tomorrow.
- Whether the children acquire democratic values and conflict resolution skills.

In UBE programme in Nigeria, there are three levels in the structure, namely.

- Lower basic education curriculum for primaries 1-3.
- Middle basic education curriculum for primaries 4-6.
- Upper basic education curriculum for JSS 1-3.

Each level consists of core/compulsory as well as elective subjects.

Table 1 is a summary representation of the structure and content of the UBE curriculum

Table 1
Structure and Content of UBE Curriculum

Levels	Core/Compulsory Subjects	Elective Subjects
Lower Basic Primary1-3	English Studies One Nigerian Language Mathematics Basic Science and Technology Social Studies Creative and Cultural Arts The Religions Physical and Health Education Computer Studies	Agricultural Science Home Economics Arabic Languages Note: One must offer one elective but not more than two.
Middle Basic Primary4-6	English Studies One Nigerian Language Mathematics Basic Science and Technology Social Studies Creative and Cultural Arts The Religions Physical and Health Education French Language Computer Studies	Agricultural Science Home Economics Arabic Languages Business Studies Note: One must offer one elective but not more than two.

Academic Excellence

Upper Basic JSS 1-3	English Studies One Nigerian Language Mathematics Basic Science Social Studies Creative and Cultural Arts The Religions Physical and Health Education French Language Basic Technology Computer Studies	Agricultural Science Home Economics Arabic Languages Business Studies Note: One must offer one elective but not more than two.
---------------------------	---	--

Source: Omoifo, (2006)

UBE and Basic Learning Skills

Learning is an active process that involves much more than just remembering the facts the teacher explains or writes on the chalkboard. Learning in the UBE involves the development of many important skills. These include:

- The language skills of speaking, reading, writing and listening.
- The skills of getting and using information from many different sources.
- The skills of observing, recording, describing, explaining, classifying and presenting information.
- Graphical skills of passing on information through maps, graph and tables.
- Psycho-motor skills of drawing, writing, moving and modeling.
- Social skills of co-operation, willingness to share and help others.

In the UBE programme, teachers are advised to adopt learner-centered approach. In a learner-centered approach, the learners are given many opportunities to develop and practice all the skills by working alone, with a partner or in a group.

What are the Advantages of the Learner-Centered Approach of Teaching in the UBE Programme?

- All the learners get actively involved in the lesson and they don't just become passive listeners.
- All the learners contribute what they know to the lesson. The teacher can now build upon what the learners already know i.e. Entry behaviour.
- The learners can develop and practice many different skills in the classroom by working alone on a task set by the teacher or by working with a partner or in a small group.
- Learners can work more at their own pace. The quicker ones can be given additional or more challenging work while the teacher has more time to spend with those needing extra help.

UBE as a Life-Long Learning

Experts in the field of curriculum aver that life-long learning is the pivot upon which UBE revolves (Gidado, 2001; Faure, 1972; Okam & Bozimo, 2002; Tanner & Tanner, 1980).

Life-long education is that education which is concerned with helping the individual learner to develop skills, competencies and attitudes that will enable him or her to live successfully in the society as well as prepare him/her to assume roles as an adult in the future. It is a total education and aims at equipping the learners with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable him/her.

- Live a meaningful and fulfilling life.
- Contribute to the positive development of the society.
- Derive maximum, social, economic and cultural benefit from the society.
- Discharge their civic obligations competently.

This means that Basic Education intends to develop the whole person. The question now is whose responsibility is it for the development of the whole person? The answer is an *Effective Teacher*.

Who is an Effective Teacher?

An effective teacher is one who learns from teaching rather than the one who has finished learning how to teach. For teaching and learning to be effective, a great deal of creativity and innovation are required. Creative teaching involves self developing teaching and strategies which encourage independence of the learner, self exploration, self discovery of the learner both in and out of the school system.

What are the Characteristics of an Effective Teacher?

- **Mastering of the Subject** The teacher should have a good knowledge of the subject-matter and the ability to impact it on to the students.
- **Fluency** The teacher should be proficient and articulate enough to communicate with the students.
- **Flexibility** The effective teacher should use different situations or class settings
- **Originality** Is the ability to create and develop his/her own unique idea and methods of putting the knowledge across to the students effectively.
- **Resourcefulness** Is the capacity to generate ideas and improvise relevant instructional materials.
- **Vision** Should have a desire for self improvement and self-actualization through progressive continuous search for knowledge.
- **Pleasant Personality** The teacher should have good human relationship, accommodating, neatly dressed, highly tolerant, emotional stable, honorable and respectable.
- **Professional** The teacher should be professionally trained and continuously re-trained through attendance of in-service training, conferences and workshops.

Conclusion

Education is becoming an internationally traded commodity. No longer is it seen primarily as a set of skills, attitudes and values required for citizenship and effective participation in a modern society; rather, it is increasingly seen as a commodity to be purchased by a consumer in order to build a “skill set” to be used in the market place, for this reason the traditional educational system in which the teacher is the sole source of knowledge, are ill suited to equip people to work in this knowledge-driven economy.

The challenge facing UBE and training system are immense, UBE must equip the learners with new skills and competencies, achieving those goals required for a fundamental change in the way learning takes place. Cognitive research on learning suggests that how people learn is more important than what people learn in the achievement of successful learning (OECD, 2001).

Effective Learning Depends on the Establishment of an Effective Learning Environment.

Effective learning environment is characterized by the following:

- **Learner-Centered** In a learner-centered environment, learners acquire new knowledge and skills based on what they already know.
- **Knowledge-Rich** Learners should have ability to transfer what they have learnt to new context, this requires a grasp of themes and concepts in addition to factual knowledge.
- **Assessment Driven** In assessment driven environment learning is based on definite clear standards, identifying the point from which learners start, determine the process they are making towards meeting standards, and recognizing whether they have reached them.
- **Community Connected** The circumstance in which learning takes place in the UBE have an important effect on the way which people learn and the likelihood of a successful outcome. The teacher must create the atmosphere of trust, the school setting, the classroom, the school, and the virtual place must be conducive to learning and to increasing learners’ motivation.

Recommendations

Effective teaching results to effective learning. For effective learning to take place, the teachers are required to emphasize the following:

- **Active Learning** Teachers must see that learners are involved in doing, thinking, using, processing, inquiring and designing class activities.
- **Gender Sensitivity** Materials to be used in the UBE classroom must be free from overt gender bias.
- **Meaningfulness** Teachers should endeavour to make learning meaningful through the use of materials within the locality and by involving the learners to construct and create meanings.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) as...

- **Productivity** The teachers should involve the students in the application of the knowledge and what is learnt must be connected to the daily life of the learners.
- Teachers should cease every opportunity in the classroom to make the content of education functional and relevant to the needs of the students.
- Teachers should use appropriate motivational strategies to arouse the student to become interested in learning willingly.

References

- Didan, C. (2000). *Implementation Guidelines of the Universal Basic Education*. Text of a Paper Presented at Kaduna State UBE Local Level Policy Dialogue. Kaduna Gymnasium Hall Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University.
- Eya, P. (2000). The Extent of Primary School Teachers Awareness and Involvement in Universal Basic Education in Enugu Urban Areas. *International Journal of Research in Basic and Life-long Education* 1(2).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC.
- Godado, T. (2001). *The Universal Basic Education in Nigeria*. A Paper Presented at UNESCO/IBE/FGN Sub-regional Seminar on Strategies for Teachers Coping with the New Curricula held at ASCON Badagry.
- Jomtien Declaration (1990). *World Conference of Education for All*. Jomtien Thailand: UNESCO.
- Obanya, Pai (2000). *Sustainability, Suitability and Continuity*. The UBE Response. Workshop on Universal Basic Education. Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Okam, M. C. & Bozimo, G. O. (2002). Forging on Effective School Community Relationship in Implementing the Curriculum. Issues in Nigerian Universal Basic Education at the Primary Levels Nigerian. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*.
- Omoifo, O. N. (2006). *Science Curriculum Pedagogical Issues and Challenges. Implications for Success of the Nigerian Universal Basic Education*. Lead Paper Presented at the College of Education, Warri Second National Conference.
- Tanner, D. & Tanner, L. M. (1980). *Curriculum Development, Theory and Practice*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Ukeje, B. O. (1991). Financing Education in Nigeria. Moving Education Towards the year 2000. *The Nigerian Academic of Education Journal*. Enugu: Optimal Computer Solution.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002). Curriculum Development Programme. <http://www.UNESCO-ICCba.Ng/programme/curriculum.html>.