THE DILEMMA OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE ENMASSE (COSMETIC) EDUCATION OR SUPPLY OF PALTRY PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS?

Okon Akpakpan Udoh

Abstract
The study investigated the teacher-pupils ratio in Akwa Ibom State Primary Schools in the context of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme of the Federal Government of Nigeria. Using the summary sheet containing the number of teachers and pupils enrolment (obtained from AKS SUBEB, Uyo) for the 31 Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, for the second term 2011/2012, the teacher-pupils ratio was found for each of the 31 LGAs. Critical analysis of results revealed the pathetic teacher-pupils ratio 1:412 for Eastern Obolo; 1:137 for Ibeno; 1:113 for Nsit Atai; 1:101 for Udunguko. An overall percentage teacher availability of 57% implies that 43% of the population of pupils are not being catered for under the UBE scheme. It was concluded that the 6 year primary education of the UBE scheme in Akwa Ibom State is bedeviled with a serious dearth of teachers; Hence, in respect of the first set of the basic education graduates, of September 2011 the basic objectives of the scheme (viz: acquisition of appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills) are not being realized in Akwa Ibom State. A declaration of a state of emergency on the primary education segment of the UBE scheme in Eastern Obolo was recommended, by virtue of it’s virtual lack of classroom manpower to drive this segment of the scheme.

The Nigerian education system has witnessed two significant reforms at the foundational level, in about three decades of educational experimentation. First, in a bid to expand access to educational opportunities for the Nigerian children of school-going age, the Federal Government, in 1970, launched the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme. The scheme aimed at achieving universal literacy and numeracy in the country. As the nation strives towards greatness in the world of science and technology, universal free primary education would ensure that every
Nigerian citizen has an equal opportunity to develop his or her talents, skills and competences to such a level that would enable him or her to serve the nation (National Teachers Institute, 2000).

The UPE scheme was received in high spirits in several quarters; but regrettably abandoned midway. Twenty five years later, the Federal Government transformed the UPE scheme into the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme and launched the latter in Sokoto in 1999 for the nation. The UBE bill was passed by the House of Representatives on December 9, 2003; passed by the Senate on March 18, 2004; and was formally accentt to by Mr. President on May 26, 2004. The UBE scheme is being supervised by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) at the national level; by the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) at the State level; it is being monitored at the Local Government level by the Local Education Authority (LEA).

**Scope, Structure and Curriculum of UBE Scheme**

The UBE scheme is a new innovative trend in Nigerian educational framework, programmed to span 9 years. It is designed to cater for a child’s education from the onset of primary school to the end of junior secondary education. It seeks to provide universal, free and compulsory education. The 9-year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) include twenty (20) core basic subjects and the electives at the sub-levels of the 9-year education involving.

1. Lower BEC (Primary 1-3)
2. Middle BEC (Primary 4-6)
3. Upper BEC (JS 1 – 3)

The 20 basic education subjects are: English Studies, Mathematics, Computer, Basic Science and Technology, Social Studies, Cultural and Creative Arts, Christian Religious Studies (CRS), Islamic Studies, Physical and Health Education (PHE), Civic Studies, French Language, Basic Technology, Basic Science, Business Studies, Arabic Language, Home Economics, Agriculture, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

**Goals and Objectives of UBE Programme**

The UBE programme aims at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulating and accelerating national development, political consciousness and national integration (UBEC, 2004). The UBE programme is Nigeria’s strategy for achieving Education for all (EFA) and education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Specifically, the objectives of UBE accordingly to (UBEC, 2004) are:

1. Ensure unfettered access to 9 years of basic education.
2. Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-ongoing age.
3. reduce drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
4. encourage the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life long learning.

Providing a solid foundation for life-long learning requires elaborate planning. Accordingly, Aluede (2006) cautioned that “improper planning could bring about failure of any programme no matter how laudable the objectives may be”. Planning and investment in education that trivial the role of teachers would be fraught with disappointing results (Iji, 2004).

Planning in the Context of UBE Scheme

Planning is the act of studying the future and arranging the plan for action. It is the process by which educational purposes are initiated, translated into programmes and implemented. For change to occur, a major factor is planning. Adequate planning must precede implementation of all educational innovations and changes. In most cases, it is at the planning stage that educational change fails. The teacher in any form is strategic to the development of education (Iji, 2007). The Nigerian teacher saddled with enormous responsibilities plays significant roles in the development of a functional and relevant educational system (Ibe-Bassey, 2005).

UBE scheme therefore requires strategic planning with respect to the number of pupils to be catered for, the number of teachers and classrooms that would be required, etcetera. Strategic planning is tantamount to coming into confrontation with a fundamental question: To what extent is my level of planning capable of ruling out possibilities of dissipated efforts and wasted resources, as well as attendant failure?

The Problem

In an attempt to expand access to educational opportunities, especially at the foundation level, the Federal Government launched the UPE Scheme in 1976. The programme never achieved the anticipated level of success due to poor planning (Ajayi 2011, Aluede 2006, Onwioduokit, 2006). Twenty years later, the Federal Government came up with the UBE scheme. Like its predecessor, the UBE is facing the problem of improper planning, hence it is implemented haphazardly and the objectives are not being realized (Ajayi, 2011).

Given that the UPE scheme in 1976 brought about explosion in students/pupils enrolment and sudden increase in the number of teachers required, which of course, resulted in the use of shabby school buildings and untrained
teachers, would it not be reasonable to suspect gross inadequacy in the supply of the right quantity and quality of teachers as being the prime failure-inducing factor? Eshiet (1996) triggered this suspicion. Hear him:

_The teacher factor in a learning process is dominant. The teacher identifies, acquires and deploys appropriate teaching materials and facilities for effective teaching. He handles the students in the learning process and is the central figure in curriculum implementation, including assessment and evaluation of performance._

The National Policy on Education (2004) has provided the necessary illumination on the issue: “For effective teaching and learning, the teacher-pupils ratio should be 1:35 for primary education”. Now, with the escalation in pupils population, occasioned by the free and compulsory UBE scheme, a fundamental question would agitate the curious mind: To what extent has Akwa Ibom State Government (under investigation) taken cognisance of the provision in the NPE as regards the teacher-pupils ratio of 1:35? This research study is aimed at addressing this crucial question, with a view to evading wasted resources, dissipated effort and the concomitant poor results, which characterized previous attempts at providing universal access to formal education at the basic level.

**Research Methodology**

The Survey research design was adopted for the study. A summary sheet of the number of teachers, and pupils’ enrolment, for the second term 2011/2012 (in the 31 LGAs of Akwa Ibom State) was obtained from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Uyo. A critical analysis of teacher-pupils ratio was then carried out for the 31 LGAs of the State. Resulted obtained are shown in the table below:

**Table 1: Summary of No. of Teachers, Pupils Enrolment and Teacher-pupils Ratio in AKS Primary School for Second Term – 2011/2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>LGAs</th>
<th>No. of Schs.</th>
<th>No of Teachers</th>
<th>Pupils’ Enrolment</th>
<th>Teacher-Pupils Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M  F  T</td>
<td>M  F  T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Abak</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>240 636 876</td>
<td>17797 18649 36446</td>
<td>1:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eastern Obolo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26 18 44</td>
<td>8722 9392 18114</td>
<td>1:412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eket</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35 455 490</td>
<td>16386 16370 32756</td>
<td>1:67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Esit Eket</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>87 130 217</td>
<td>6839 7598 14437</td>
<td>1:67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Essien Udim</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>243 498 714</td>
<td>27158 26888 54046</td>
<td>1:73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 1 three layers of revelations can be delineated

**Layer 1**
The first revelation summarized thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of LGAs</th>
<th>Teacher – Pupils Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>1:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>1:36-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>1:41-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>1:61:70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>1:71-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>1:81-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>1:91-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>1:101 and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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It is observed that only one LGA (Ibesikpo) has met the mandatory teacher-pupils ratio of 1:35; otherwise, the 6-year primary education of the UBE scheme in Akwa Ibom State is bedeviled with a serious dearth of teachers.

Layer 2

This layer of revelation is given by the overall teacher-pupil s ratio of 1:61. This translates to only 57% (35:61) of the mandatory number of teachers intended to implement the loaded primary school segment of UBE curriculum in Akwa Ibom State. Put another way, only 57% of the pupils population are actually exposed to teaching; 43% of the population of pupils are not being catered for, under the UBE scheme.

Layer 3

This layer of revelation is given by the following teacher- pupil’s ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Obolo</td>
<td>1:412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibeno</td>
<td>1:139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nsit Atai</td>
<td>1:113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udung Uko</td>
<td>1:101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider Eastern Obolo with one teacher for four hundred and twelve pupils. This LGA should be considered disadvantaged area, with virtually no teaching manpower to drive the UBE scheme. Ibeno, Nsit Atai, and Udung Uko fall under the same category, though their situations are about three times, respectively, less pathetic.

Discussion of Findings

Given that teachers are the most fundamental agents of change in the classroom arena, the revelation of an overall, paltry 57% classroom manpower supply in Akwa Ibom State primary schools, sends a strong signal to the effect that realizing the aims and objectives of the UBE scheme in Akwa Ibom State is far – fetched. This research finding seems to be typical, or characteristic; of the entire education situation in Nigeria – poor planning being at the root of previous failed attempts, as revealed by literature review.

Onwioduokit (2006) reported that the UPE launched in 1976 failed woefully in the Country, basically and realistically, because of poor planning. For instance,

(i) 3.0 million Children were in primary one as against 2.3 million estimated, implying that the enrolment of 30% of the children was not planned for.

(ii) The total primary school pupils’ enrolment in the Country stood at 8.2 million against 7.4 million estimated. Besides

(iii) A high student- teacher ratio existed.
He (Onwioduokit, 2006) concluded his review of government’s previous effort by posing a crucial question: “Now that the name has been changed from UPE to UBE, has there been a change also in the adverse situation that led to the UPE? Aluede (2006) provided a fascinating answer:

*The forces that brought about the failure of UPE scheme are still very much around. The forces are: lack of proper planning, inability to project the estimated population that will be in school during the period, lack of the knowledge of the number of teachers that will be required. These factors could well bring about the failure of the UBE scheme (p.100).*

Concurring, Ajayi (2011), regretted that the UBE scheme is facing the same problem inherent in the UPE scheme, resulting in the former being implemented haphazardly like the latter. Hence, until the issue of teacher-pupils ratio is addressed, as recommended in the National Policy on Education (2004), the hope of realizing the aims and objectives of the UBE scheme, will like its predecessor, be an optimal illusion.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In Akwa Ibom State, the overall teacher-pupils ratio is 1:61, as against the recommended ratio 1:35. This translates to only 57% the mandatory number of teachers required to effectively drive the primary school segment of the UBE scheme. Thus, the 6-year primary education of the UBE scheme in Akwa Ibom State is bedeviled with a serious dearth of teachers. The State seems to be in dilemma of providing enmasse (cosmetic) education or supplying a paltry percentage of teachers. Hence, in respect of the first set of the basic education graduates of September 2011, the basic objectives of the scheme (viz: acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills) are not being realized in Akwa Ibom State.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the research study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The new education culture, in all strata of education, should embody effective planning using appropriate data bank.
2. Preferential posting of teachers, especially wives of high-ranking personnels, to urban areas to the detriment of rural areas should be discouraged.
3. There should be added incentives for teachers who are teaching in the rural areas.
4. There should be immediate re-employment, and re-distribution of the right quality of teachers, in the recommended teacher-pupils ratio of 1:35.
5. A state of emergency should be declared on the primary education segment of the UBE scheme, in Eastern Obolo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, by virtue of her virtual lack of classroom manpower to drive this segment of the scheme.

References


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