

GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BASIC EDUCATION AMONG AFRICAN NATIONS

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Abstract

Basic education is the bedrock on which the sustainability of every nation is anchored therefore, basic education is the prerogative of every human being. In spite of the resolute efforts of nations to provide basic education for her citizenry several challenges crop up to impair the nation's effort. Some of the challenges as discussed in the paper include: hunger and malnutrition, environmental degradation, insecurity and insurgency, lack of infrastructural facilities, corruption. The paper also discussed the role of government in ameliorating these challenges. Conclusions were based on the need for basic education globally.

Basic education in African countries can be traced to the activities of missionaries during the 19th and 20th centuries. After the partition of Africa, Christian missionaries had a mission of making converts and training them to study the bible, take lessons on catechism and sing hymns as well conduct simple arithmetic. All these could only be achieved through formal education hence the introduction of western formal education and churches were charged with the responsibility of providing education for Africans (Fafunwa, 1974). In May 1961, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation sponsored a conference of African States in Addis Ababa on the development of education in Africa which endorsed universal primary education to be achieved by 1980 by all. Some African countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia among others swung into action by setting up commissions on education to design education policies for their countries. By 1968, Kenyan parliament enacted education Act (Mackatiani, Imbovah, Imbova and Gakungai, 2016) Basic education constitutes an essential component of developmental strategy as well as the priority of any developing country. Its importance is recognised all over the world as a sure guarantor for a dignified life for every nation. United Nations' Declaration of Human Right of 1948 enlisted it as a top subject of concern and was approved by virtually all the countries of the world. It was the focus of Education For All (EFA) movement led by UNESCO and featured as goal number 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and re-echoed as goal number 5 in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which replaced the MDGs. It is a basic foundation for

sustainable life-long learning as it inculcates reading, writing and numeracy skills. It is both formal and non-formal system of education with a range of activities and programmes designed to enhance functional literacy skills. International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) categorized Basic Education into Primary and Lower Secondary Education. In most countries, the nationally designated basic education include primary and lower secondary school while others there is no break in between the primary and lower secondary school, Basic Education covers the entire compulsory school period of six years. Primary school education in Ethiopia consists of two cycles from grades 1 to 4 and grades 5 to 8. Basic Education in Ghana lasts 11 years (Age 4-15). The curriculum is free and compulsory and is defined as the minimum period of schooling needed to ensure that children acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills as well as skills for creativity and healthy living" It is divided into Kindergarten, Primary school and Junior High School (JHS), which ends on the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

In Nigeria, Universal Basic Education includes primary, junior secondary and Nomadic Education and Adult literacy programme in Nigeria. Act on Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education of the Republic of Nigeria (2004) provides for basic education. The Act makes a distinction between Basic Education and Universal Basic Education. The Act defines 'Basic Education' as "early childhood care and education and nine years of formal schooling". Universal basic education is defined in the Act as "early childhood care and education, nine years of formal schooling, literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomadic and migrants, girl-child and women, almajiri, street children and disabled groups" (article 15 (1)). According to Okonkwo and Obineli (2013) Universal Basic Education (UBE) encompasses the following levels of education in a hierarchical order: Early Childhood Care Development otherwise Pre-School/Nursery/ kindergarten, Primary Education, Junior Secondary Education and Non-Formal Education. This implies that Basic Education is for children, adolescent and young adults who did not start school early as well as special needs person. In Nigeria, UBE Programme was introduced in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria as a reform programme aimed at providing greater access to, and ensuring quality of basic education throughout Nigeria. The UBE Programme objectives include:

- Ensuring an uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education by providing FREE, and COMPULSORY basic education for every child of school-going age under.
 - i) Providing Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE)
 - ii) Six years of Primary Education
 - iii) Three years of Junior Secondary Education
 - Reducing school drop-out and improving relevance, quality and efficiency;
- and

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Acquisition of literacy, numeracy, life skills and values for lifelong education and useful living.

Universal Basic Education Act 2004

1. The Federal Government's intervention shall provide assistance to the States and Local Governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria.

2. Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.

3. Every parent shall ensure that his/her child or ward attends and completes (a) primary school education; and (b) junior secondary school education.

4. The stakeholders in education in a Local Government Area shall ensure that every parent or person who has the care and custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him/her under the Universal Basic Education Act, 2004.

5. Transition from Primary to Junior Secondary School (JSS) should be automatic; as basic education terminates at the Junior Secondary School level thus entrance examination may no longer be necessary. Emphasis will be placed on effective continuous assessment, while final examination and certification will now be done at the end of the nine-year basic education programme.

The Secondary School system should be restructured so as to ensure that the JSS component is disarticulated from

The SSS as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004).

Basic Features of the UBE Programme

- Free Formal Basic Education
- Compulsory, Uninterrupted Nine years of Primary and Junior Secondary School education.
- Emphasis on Curriculum diversification and relevance to effectively and adequately cover individual and community needs and aspirations.
- Disarticulation of Junior Secondary Schools from Senior Secondary Schools.
- Introduction of rudiments of computer literacy.
- Appropriate continuous teacher professional development.
- Community ownership of schools including participation in decision-making process in schools.

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African countries like other developing countries of the world are making frantic efforts to provide basic education for her citizenry. Accenting International legal texts and normative instruments in the field of education such as conventions, recommendations, declarations, adoption of Provisions in constitutions and national

legislations on education in recent years in various countries in the spirit of EFA are palpable efforts made by some African nations. Also, Provisions on basic education in constitutions in many countries are indicative of importance attached to basic education as a right and the Education Laws elaborated recently in several countries provide similar indications of such relentless endeavors. However, certain challenges insinuated the nation's inability to fully implement the basic education programmes. Macketianiet al (2016) quoting Michael Saddler (1886-1943) stated that in studying foreign systems of education we should not forget that *"the things outside the school matter even more than the things inside the schools, and in most cases they actually govern and interpret the things inside the school"* this implies that to understand a nation's educational system, it is worthy of note to understand that certain factors influence and shape a particular education system. These factors include economic, socio-cultural, religious, geographical, historical, political, language, and technological. While, some of these factors are predominant in one particular system, in another system they may be less dominant. This paper will take a Janus look at some global challenges that have threatened the implementation of basic education in Africa.

Hunger and Malnutrition

Hunger and Malnutrition are often used *peri passu* however they are not the same. Webster described hunger as a very great need for food and an uncomfortable feeling in one's stomach that is caused by the need for food. It is also an uneasy sensation occasioned by the lack of food. While malnutrition according to Webster is the unhealthy condition that results from not eating enough food or not eating enough healthy food. A child eating food that lack the necessary nutrient for health and development can be said to be malnourished. The complete absence of enough food within a period of time can lead to both hunger and malnourishment. Hunger and malnutrition remains a serious problem in many African countries. UNICEF (2018) reported that global hunger continues to rise as 821 million people now hungry and over 150 million stunted. The report warned that hunger has been on the rise over the past three years, returning to levels from a decade ago. This reversal in progress sends a clear warning that more must be done and urgently if the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger is to be achieved by 2030. **Aluko (2017) reported that over 108,000 Internally Displaced Persons, packed into a school in the Ngala community, Borno State, are grappling with a litany of infections and hunger. Similarly, Misselhorn (2018) stated about 12 million children in South Africa live below the poverty line. More than a quarter of households are exposed to regular hunger and around 25% of children are stunted due to chronic malnutrition. Statistics from the South African Department of Basic Education show that just over half who start Grade 1 make it through to the beginning of Grade 12 and well under three-quarters of those registering for Grade 12 complete the year. Many children drop out because caregivers cannot continue to afford to provide the basic household necessities of food and**

clothing, and cover the costs associated with schooling – even where these are minimal. Many children are compelled to find work to augment household income, or to attend household duties, such as the care of younger siblings. Girls are more deeply affected than boys, with nearly 20% of school non-attendance among girls being accounted for by family commitments. Even though Nigeria is Africa's wealthiest, most populous nation, and its fastest-growing economy more than half of the country lives below the poverty line, and northern Nigeria suffers the world's third highest level of chronic undernutrition among children. This inaudible crisis is caused by lack of access to safe water and sanitation, rising food insecurity, the disruption of basic services due to conflict, and poor knowledge of healthy feeding practices for infants and young children. Under such conditions school enrolment, increase attendance levels and improve concentration and academic performance continue to dwindle despite huge investment in basic education.

Environmental Degradation

There is an interaction between man and his environment because the environment affect our healthy and the totality of wellbeing. Remoundou and Koundouri cited in Tyagi, Garg, and Paudel (2014) pointed out the interaction between human health and the environment has been extensively studied and environmental risks have been proven to significantly impact human health, either directly by exposing people to harmful agents, or indirectly, by disrupting life-sustaining ecosystems. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines environmental degradation as “The reduction of the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives, and needs”. Different kinds of the human activities are the main reasons of environmental degradation evidence indicates that global environmental degradation has increased in recent decades. Sub-Saharan Africa suffers from some serious environmental problems, including deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, wetland degradation, water pollution, global warming, and insect infestation among others. Rainfall pattern have been changing with increased droughts in some areas and heavier rain in others. The effect of these on basic education is that children are the most vulnerable; often times schools are shut down for a long period of time either because the serve as camps for internally displaced persons or they are displaced from their homes, some have no access to clean water and sanitation therefore highly susceptible to outbreak of diseases and exposure to other environmental risks.

Hope (2007) rated Africa as the poorest region in the world and asserted that the nexus of poverty and the environment has led to a situation where the poor are both the victims and the perpetrators of environmental damage in Africa. If a country cannot address her environmental needs, achieving universal basic education remains a mirage.

Insecurity and insurgency

Sufficient security is a factor of peaceful and harmonious living, which consequently consents to overall national development as well as educational development. Security, according to Francis (2006) is the condition or feeling of safety from harm or danger, the defense, protection and absence of threats to acquire values. Insecurity is formidable for national cohesion, peace and tranquility. According to Achumba, Ighomereho, and Akpor-Robaro (2013) security is the existence of conditions within which people in a society can go about their normal daily activities without any threats to their lives or property. They emphasized that it is the protection against all forms of harm whether physical, economic or psychological. Peaceful coexistence paves way for access and equity in education. The horrific emergence of insurgency and insecurity in Africa has posed a serious threat to the dream of Education for All and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Basic education cannot thrive where there are conflicts, crisis and wars traceable to the activities terrorism across the globe. The activities of perpetrators of insurgencies and terrorisms culminate in attacks on school pupils and students, teachers, other education personnel and education as a phenomenon (O'Malley, 2010). For example, in Libya, Syria, Palestine, Mali, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Sierra-Leon, Liberia, and Nigeria among other nations, the debilitating effects of insurgency on literacy development in these nations cannot be accurately estimated for the degree of its enormousness.

The outbreak of insurgencies culminating in high level of insecurity has hampered children's and adults' access to all forms of education be it formal, non-formal, or adult education. Due to insurgencies, school have been physically touched, destroyed, burnt and broken down. The systems of education in many countries globally have been adversely affected. Communities scattered and destabilized, people displaced and killed Adebisi (2016). The incessant attacks on schools by the insurgents cause unprecedented decreases in pupils' enrollment and attendance in schools particularly nations that are infested with these demeanor. It is practically impossible for the pupils and the teachers to go to schools where both the pupils and the teachers are killed and the schools are burnt down. Leah Sharibu and some others girls who were abducted from schools in Bornu State Nigeria have not been found. Their fate is remains a mystery. Schooling in Bornu, Yobe and Plateau states are nothing but nightmares. Therefore, if global challenges on insecurity and insurgency are not addressed, implementation of basic education will remain a mere allusion.

Lack of Infrastructural Facilities

Infrastructural facilities according to Farrant (1991) and Farombi (1998) include equipments and materials that are available to facilitate students learning outcome. It includes good buildings for classrooms and laboratories, laboratory equipments, experiment materials/apparatus, books, audio-visual, software and

hardware of educational technology; so also, size of classroom and laboratory, sitting position and arrangement, availability of tables, chairs, chalkboards, shelves on which instruments for practicals are arranged. Similarly, Gidado (2004) opined that UBE infrastructural facilities include, permanent, semi-permanent, temporary, mobile collapsible, boat-school and even under tree shade classroom structures. Educational facilities have specifications with physical requirements and special reference to their spatial requirements and special features. Aghenta cited in Akhihero (2011) reported that the specifications of education facilities are usually worked out by planning experts and kept in the Ministries of Education or written into Education Laws. For instance, a minimum of 0.8 – 1.3 square metre classroom spaced per student, 2.3 – 3.3 square metre library space per student are spatial requirements for secondary schools. In terms of special features, UNESCO specifies that, for a classroom with a maximum enrolment of 32 students, there should be: (i) 16 double classroom tables, (ii) 1 teacher's desk, (iii) 32 students' chairs (iv) 1 regular chair (v) 1 classroom cupboard (vi) 1 blackboard (vii) 1 notice board.

Studies conducted by Suleiman (2014) on Harnessing Infrastructural and Instructional Facilities for Effective Implementation of Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeriarevealed that the existing facilities are inadequacy and inappropriate coupled with the provision of additional facilities where the existing ones are in short supply, and no rehabilitation of those facilities that may be in deplorable conditions. There is also a wide range of class size, lack of teaching aids, acute shortage of furniture, poor visual learning environment as a result of constant closure of windows to keep off strong winds (there were no artificial light in the classrooms of the study and poor condition of buildings. However, the permanent structures are the commonest but as the national economy declines and people earning power dwindles, temporary and semi permanent structures are predominating in the school system. In addition as the social demand for basic education increases and the authority's mobility to match such demands with available resources increases, many classrooms' variants will no doubt be introduced. The under tree shade classroom which has been in the educational scene since the colonial period is still visible particularly in the rural areas. A study produced for the World Bank in 2000 on the Nigerian education sector concluded that: "The public perception is that the quality of education offered is low and that standards have dropped. These perceptions are based on lack of adherence to acceptable educational practice. Teacher qualifications are low. The learning environment does not promote effective learning. Basic facilities, teaching and learning resources are generally not available. Teacher-pupil ratios are high. General performance in examinations is poor and the graduates have low levels of competencies in the work environment." The same findings can still be said of education today in Nigeria. Arisi (2002) stressed that inadequate classroom spaces have resulted in over-crowding in schools. Many primary and secondary schools were built long time ago by both government and church missionaries. Hence, most of the

buildings, roof-tops, desks, chairs, tables, floors, etc., have become extremely bad. Many village schools which were built with self-help efforts have been damaged due to long neglect especially blown roof-tops, damaged floors, destroyed windows/doors, and have been occupied by reptiles, while the children take lessons under the trees or shades.

Corruption

Corruption can be described as any form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. Corruption may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement, though it may also involve practices that are legal in many countries. Webster defines corruption as dishonest illegal behaviour especially by powerful people (such as government officials or police officials). It further stated that something that is being changed from its original form. For instance, inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means. Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the national system of some African countries. A 2010 Transparency International report gathered that African children were incredibly denied education in large numbers in Ghana, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. It was alleged that a lack of parent involvement, especially as an overseer of government activities also leads to enormous corruption. Evidence abound show that there is unavailability and incompleteness of records in schools which is a common practice. Parents are forced to pay illegal fees, embezzlement of school fund, power abuse among others. Sometimes teachers are denied their wages and salaries. The TI report also found that many schools were plagued by teacher absenteeism and alcoholism. Basic education that is meant to be free has plague with unethical practices therefore denying children free access to school.

Similarly, another level of corruption that has plagued implementation of the universal basic education in Nigeria is what Akhiero (2011) described as inherent decaying behavioural patterns of highly placed Government officials in charge of work stations. A vast number of Africans subscribe to some supposedly “decaying behaviours” to influence their thinking in the course of discharging their duties. Both government and private officials who are concerned with the various degrees of implementation of programmes resort to carrying out decaying behavioural patterns as ways of siphoning the funds and materials allocated to them so as to get “rich quick” and enhance their personal aggrandizement to the detriment of the general well-being of citizens/environment. Aguan (2007) asserted that many government officials tell lies right from the beginning of implementation. The author further explained that such officials in charge of implementation plan carry out at will: (i) Criminal wastages of huge sums of money and other material resources through telling lies of varying degrees by issuing fake receipts and certificates to contractors so as to cover high costs supposedly incurred or expended on construction of roads, bridges, buildings and

international stadiums including electricity power supply, pipe-borne water supply, provision of drugs to hospitals, etc. Such funds or materials would later settle in their private hands. (ii) inflated contracts for the procurement of supply of tools, gadgets, instruments, equipment, machines, laboratories, furniture and fittings, etc, to schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. (iii) inflated hotel bills; (iv) inflated kilometer or mileage coverage between work stations and official headquarters; (v) frequent repairs of supposedly vehicle break-downs, (vi) inflated cost of petrol/diesel for vehicles, and so on.

In this regard, so much money has been amassed through the above decaying habits, thereby relegating the implementation plan for the general good of citizens. This is why Saraydarian cited in Akhihero (2011) opined that when many people are involved in telling lies with a view to gaining monetary or material reward, it is a sign that such people are personality or self-centred, and their actions will never favour other people and their environments. Hence, they misuse their positions to enhance their greed.

Conclusion

African countries like the rest of the continents of the world have strong desire for development. Today, more than ever before, it has become an irrefutable fact education is the crucial thing that any nation desiring progress and development must of necessity give ultimate priority in order to develop human resources. The Basic Education programme has been launched and kicked off in most African countries to provide quality basic education free to all citizens that do not have it. It therefore necessary to ensure effective implementation and consequently the success of the programme across the globe.

Recommendation

Economic Community of West African States and other international cooperate bodies like UNESCO, UNCHR, UNICEF among others should ensure regularly effective monitoring and evaluation to ensure the programme is fully implemented.

It is recommended that government of state, communities, NGOs should ensure adequate provision of schools facilities for all government schools in both urban and rural areas. Government should create awareness of the danger of lack of inadequate infrastructural facilities in schools to the entire public. Government should through media, encourage parents, individuals and organizations to assist government or support government in provision of adequate facilities in schools for effective teaching and learning.

Government should take the lead in eradicating all forms of corruption through practical examples and good governance by politicians. When this is done, the much desired good electricity power supply, provision of basic infrastructures and good democratic polity will usher in the promotion of a sustainable national development.

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