

UBE, NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND COHESION

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Abstract

Education is essentially a social process in the maintenance of society since the creation of human beings. It has become the paramount groundwork for sustainable human development, peace, progress and prosperity. Hence the Federal Republic of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument for nurturing productive citizenry and fostering national development. This paper looks at the background of Nigerian education as well as the newly launched Universal Basic Education and its objectives. The presenter of this paper is of the belief that the UBE's objectives and objective of primary schools are adequate and can bring about national integration and cohesion in Nigeria.

Introduction

All the societies with varied groups of individuals acquire and exchange ideas, skills and values in their day-to-day life-supporting interactions. It is necessary for a nation or society to adopt suitable ways and means of satisfying the basic needs of mankind and resolving emerging problems in the course of their productive activities and relationship. Hence, education is essentially a social process in the maintenance of a dynamic society the creation of human beings, even though in Africa in general and Nigeria is particular there existed traditional education that functionalism was the guiding principles. To know how the newly introduced Universal Basic Education (UBE) can bring about development and national integration, let us briefly look at the background of Nigeria's educational objectives.

Background of Nigerian Educational Objectives

There is no better expression of the objectives of Nigerian education than the statement made by the colonial overlord who said:

The chief function of government primary and secondary schools among primitive communities is to train the more promising boys from the village schools as teachers for those schools, as clerks for the local native courts, and as interpreters (Lord Lugard, 1921).

However, the missionaries who pioneered the foundation of formal education in Nigeria saw objectives as Rev. Taylor stated them thus:

"I looked upon them as the commencement of our missionary work. We lost no time but began **to** teach than the A.B.C." From the above observation, it is pertinent to draw the conclusion that **both the** missionaries and the colonial administration in Nigeria saw the objectives of education in Nigeria **as** the following:

- To** convert the boys and girls to the Christian religion by teaching them how to read and **write**;
- To produce those who would help to teach and spread the missionaries' religion in Nigeria;
- To produce village boys who could teach the three Rs in the local schools and others who could **act as** clerks and interpreters in the village courts and commercial houses.

According to Mgbodile (1986), the above objectives remained as the basic educational objectives in Nigeria until the early 1940s and 1950s.

In September 1969, the National Educational Research Council (NERC) sponsored a national curriculum conference (Federal Ministry of Information, 1970) which stated, among other things, the philosophy and objectives of education in Nigeria. The general objectives of Nigeria education were stated thus:

1. Permanent literacy to ensure that the child becomes a better producer and consumer of goods;
2. Sound basis of scientific and reflective thinking;
3. Ability to solve personal and social problems using the method of intelligence;

4. society;
5. Character and moral training and sound attitude development;
6. Adaptability to societal environment;
7. Physical, emotional and intellectual growths;
8. Citizenship education as an-effective participating and contributing member of the Nigerian Identification with humanity and the world around him;
9. Enhancement of the child's creativity and innovativeness through the inculcation of an independent mind;
10. Opportunity to develop mechanical, vocational and manipulative skills; and
11. Self-discipline.

The National Policy on Education

Between 1973 and 1976, several seminars and workshops were held under the auspices of the National Education Council (NEC) to further clarify the educational issues and problems which were raised at the 1969 conference. The outcome of such meetings resulted in what is now known as the National Policy on Education in 1977 which was later slightly modified in 1981.

The General Objective of Nigerian Education

The general objectives enunciated in 1969 became compressed into four broad areas in the National Policy, 1977/1981, namely:

- i. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
- ii. The inculcation of the right type of value and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;
- in. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

In an effort to streamline the educational sector, the search for the appropriate method of implementing these objectives continues. It is therefore necessary to bear in mind that education is one of the greatest, if not the greater force that can be used to bring about equal economic and political opportunity to every Nigerian; it is also the greatest investment that any country can make for rapid progress in its economic, political, social and human wealth. The starting point from where education makes its contribution is mainly at the primary school level.

In Nigeria, primary education is a terminal education for a great percentage of Nigerian children (Mgbodile, 1986). For this reason according to NERC, 1969, primary schools perform two basic functions:

- i. Prepare children for life,
- ii. Give those with the necessary background the opportunity to proceed to the secondary school.

In order to maintain an appropriate balance in the programme of studies for the two groups of primary school children, the 1969 national conference set out the following objectives for primary education:

- i. To help the child to realize himself;
- ii. To help the child to relate to others in an atmosphere of mutual understanding;
- iii. To promote self and national economic efficiency;
- iv. To promote effective citizenship through civic responsibility;
- v. To facilitate national consciousness in the areas of national unity and survival;
- vi. To promote social and political awakening;
- vii. To create scientific and technological awareness. .

Between 1969 when the seven objectives were written and 1977 when the new National Policy on Education (NPE) came into being, a great deal of change has taken place in Nigerian education. For instance, the UPE was introduced in September 1976. The new National Policy on Education took a hard look at the 1968 primary education objectives and came out with the following seven primary education objectives:

- i. To develop in the entire citizenry a strong, consciousness for education and a strong commitment to the vigorous- promotion;
- ii. Provide free, compulsory Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age;
- iii. Reduce drastically the dropout rate from the formal school system through improved

relevance and efficiency;

- iv. Cater for dropout and out of school children (adolescents) through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; Ensure the
- v. acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulation and life skills (as well as the ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying the foundation for lifelong learning (FME, 1999).

The programme is intended to be UNIVERSAL, FREE and COMPULSORY. Talking about universalisation of educations, this is in keeping with the provision of the various constitution this country has ever had and which is equally re-echoed in the present 1999 constitution under the educational objectives which in section 18 states as follows: "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels ..." Government shall eradicate illiteracy, and Government shall, as when practicable, provide:

- a) Free compulsory universal primary education;
- b) Free secondary education;
- c) Free university education;
- d) Free adult literacy programme (Kayode, 2001).

There is no doubt that the president meant well by launching the UBE programme borne out of concern about the deplorable state of the nation's educational system and our inability to attain parity with the leading nations of the world despite our enormous wealth and good will. But what has been happening to this new baby since its launching in September 1999?

The introduction of the scheme is borne out of conviction that the sure path to meaningful individual development, enduring peace and sustainable prosperity of emerging nations is functional literacy; a productive ability to engage in efficient reading and creative writing. A fruitful implementation of the UBE scheme will facilitate efforts to increase literacy rate and productive literate work force in all sectors of the economy. These creative self-reliant UBE beneficiaries shall not be easy prey of ignorance, violence, political enslavement and economic exploitation as they would engage in production of sustainable wealth and efficient services to live a decent, gainful life. In defence of this programme the president at the 25th anniversary of National Teachers Institute in Kaduna says "UBE shall shape Nigeria".

UBE, National Integration and Cohesion

From the understanding of the presenter of this paper the words integration and cohesion means how two or more things or people or group of people combine so that they can work together effectively. If this thinking of the meaning of these words are correct, then education and enlightenment can bring about this. In other words development and achievement of any nation is determined by the level of her education because it is agreed that education is the key to the development of any nation. This in essence means an educated citizenry is a valuable investment in its human resources for effective citizenship and functional self-reliance. Functional education ensures effective acquisition of relevant knowledge, process skills and ethical orientation to work and changing environment of the learners.

In this contribution to national integration and cohesion through UBE programme, Oyekari (2000) says "our generation of learners today shall become our durable symbols and creative leaders of tomorrow. If they are collectively provided with functional sustain, medical care and gainful employment opportunities for the total development and use of their talent". In support of this statement, the president Federal Republic of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in his speech of the 25th anniversary of the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) says "with basic education children will be able to contribute to the development of the society, derive maximum special, economic and cultural benefit from the society and also discharge their civic obligations competently". The president is of the belief that education through UBE will also ensure rights and well being of children and promote a stable unity of this country. If properly followed to the latter, because it forms a basis for functional education to make an educated man; and an educated man or woman is a person who regards education as a pleasurable way of life in the celebration of excellence and service to human kind. He or she is an intelligent, responsible and productive citizen who strives for a good life and a prosperous society. Such an individual knows the important values of education as sacred ingredient of nation building. The relevance of educated citizens in a nation building is manifested in their creative imaginations for preventive diplomacy, maintenance culture and technological evolution.

It is of the belief that the UBE scheme can produce educated citizens that should be reasonable persons who are sympathetic, humble and considerate in making viable attempts to educate others by popularizing the significance of functional education thereby promoting national unity and integration. Again, it is expected that the product of this scheme should have acquired adequate or sufficient language competence finely tuned on creative listening, clear speaking, efficient reading and constructive writing skills. This communication ability would inspire and strengthen the capability to think, read, write and converse rationally with people on issues that affect the veracity of human life. By the time functional literacy is wholly extended to both boys and girls, men and women as well as adults and street children/adolescents, this illiterate population will be transformed to live a productive life with rational development aspirations.

Having seen the objectives of Nigerian education as well as the objectives of primary and secondary schools as been adequate by the writer of this paper therefore for national integration and **cohesion** to be more meaningful through UBE. It is my candid opinion that the following recommendations should be addressed immediately:

1. The syllabus for the programme should be streamlined to accommodate what is called exchange programme right from primary school for example: there is what is called acculturation in NCE programme for those studying a particular language or dialect other than theirs e.g. Igbo or Yoruba students studying Hausa will come to Hausa land for at least one month to study and know more of the Hausa culture and vice-versa.
2. There should be Federal Unity schools in each state for primary school pupils where the pupils are not indigenes of the state where the school is located.
3. The clause "as and when practicable" should be expunged from the constitution to give UBE the full legal backing; funding and participation by all the state holders in qualitative education without any procrastination.
4. There should be educated funding and proper monitoring of the objectives earmarked for the programme. The objective of secondary school should be adhered to in order to have a more united Nigeria.
5. Personnel to teach the skills needed in the scheme should be appointed without discrimination.

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