

THE VISION OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION: TEACHER-FACTOR IN THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract

A qualitative education is one that is functional in terms of meeting the desired goals of the individuals and the larger society. The idea of Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a laudable one. However, its successful implementation is of concern. This paper has attempted to x-ray the historical basis of Universal Education in Nigeria. Highlighted teachers' roles and impediments against these roles performance. Qualitative pre-service preparation of teachers, motivation and the need for attitude change towards work by teachers were some of the recommendations towards improving teacher-factor aspect of the UBE scheme.

Introduction

It is evident that societies worldwide have become increasingly complex and competitive. This situation does require a more functional education for individuals to be able to fit into the dynamic societal expectations. One may not therefore be surprised that education has been adopted in all societies as the main instrument for economic, social, political, scientific and technological development. In other words, a qualitative education is needed to meet up with the desired goals of the individual; and the larger society.

The current zeal for education for all members of our society has been further aroused as a result of the declaration of right to education. According to Nwagwu (1976), the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 1948 was the natural growth of the political, social and economic revolutions of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The achievement of the right to education requires that all young people should be provided the opportunities to acquire knowledge, values, skills and attitudes to enable them live a happy and productive life in the society. Also, adults who lost the opportunities in earlier years should be provided some complementary opportunities.

A perusal of some advanced countries like Great Britain, Russia, France, Japan, America and Tanzania on their commitment to popular education would enable us to appreciate the concern of Nigeria and Nigerians for Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 that has currently metamorphosized to Universal Basic Education (UBE).

Indeed, the vision of UBE scheme is a very laudable one if it is appropriately implemented, nurtured, monitored and evaluated towards the achievement of stated objectives. However, for success to be accomplished, several pertinent factors (funding, teaching materials, adequate and qualified teachers and supervision among others) are relevant for consideration. In this paper, the focus is mainly on the area of teachers' factor being the corner stone of any education industry.

Universal Education in Nigeria

The United Nations Declaration on Human Right to Education of 1948 was possibly an eye opener toward a pragmatic consciousness for education in many societies. Shortly after this declaration, specifically in the 1950's, there was also political drive to initiate regional universal education scheme.

Actualizing this drive was led by the Western Region Action Group Party led by Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. That is, the birth of Universal Primary Education (UPE) on January, 1955. The scheme was meant for all children of school age in that region. It was made to be free and called a policy "of expansion and reorientation". Oroka (2001) reported that, during the preceding year (1954), pupils' enrolment in primary school was put at about 450,600. He further reported an increase to an enrolment of 811,342 in the commencing year. This then led to 300% increase in the regional fund for education.

Taking cue from the 'education revolution' from the Western Region, the Eastern Region controlled by National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC) led by Late Dr. N. Azikiwe also introduced UPE in 1957. Their primary school enrolment also rose from 904,235 in 1956 to 1,209,167 in 1957.

Both Governments (Western and Eastern Regions) invested, in all their possible ramifications, into the implementation of the new education. Although, the introduction of the UPE in

these regions resulted in meaningful increased enrolment, Ukeje (1966) and Adesina (1977) reported that the programme in the two regions were improperly planned, hurriedly executed and thereby led to a colossal waste of financial resources. Ukeje further asserted that the UPE recorded a relative success in the Western Region while it was a gross failure in the Eastern Region.

For the purpose of National Universality, in September, 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo (then Military Head of State) introduced UPE within the country's education industry. It was said to be free and intended to be compulsory. Funding was also the responsibility of the Federal Government and campaigns were carried out to lure children of school age into the programme.

Unfortunately, the UPE of the Federal Government of Nigeria equally failed like those of the earlier two regions. According to Ejiogu (1986), lack of and inadequate human and material resources killed the laudable programme. For instance, the initial expected pupils' enrolment was 2.3 million but instead

3million turned up. Also, as at 1977, 196,000 primary school teachers were in Nigeria with about 70,000 unqualified.

On September 30 , 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (President of FGN) launched yet another 'new' education programme - Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Sokoto, this time, with a little modification from the UPE. In other words, junior secondary school now inclusive and to be financed by the three tiers of government and people of Nigeria.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme

In adherence to the Jomtien 1990 declaration on, the promotion of basic education for all, and in compliance to the New Delhi declaration requiring stringent efforts by the E-9 countries to drastically reduce/eradicate illiteracy within the shortest time frame, Nigerian Government introduced UBE on 30th September 1999. Education has been recognized as a vital element in the overall strategy for sustainable development, which could ensure a better life for all.

The FRN (1999) in the UBE implementation blueprint explicitly stated that the programme will equip individuals with knowledge, skills and attitude that will enable them to:

- (a) live meaningful and fulfilling lives; • (b) contribute to the development of the society;
- (c) derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society; and
- (d) discharge their civic obligations competently.

With the nation's illiteracy figure put at about 50%, it is rational to embrace any form of education that can change the overall outlook of the individual and the general society, In an explicit manner, the Implementation Blueprint of UBE has the underhsted objectives:

- (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, dropout rate from the formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency;
- (iv) Cater for dropout and out-of-school children or adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- (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 the life-long learning.

A critical synthesis of the above objectives will reveal a thought provoking iaudability and appropriateness in turning around desired knowledge, skills and attitudes in the populace of the nation. Moreso, that the scheme is all embracing and all encompassing. It is also in line with universal concepts of basic education which comprises of:

- a) formal basic education encompassing the first nine years of schooling, that is primary (6 years) mid junior (3 years) secondary education for all children;

- b) nomadic education for school age children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen; and
- c) literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school children, youth and illiterate adults.

Suffice it to note that an objective scrutiny of both the scheme's objectives and those to benefit the vision of UBE is very good and enduring. However, it is important to consider possible militating factors if we must learn from the past. That is, the experience of UPE and other previous confusing (forwarding and backwarding) educational policies. In particular, the role performance of the teachers in the successful implementation of UBE is of interest to this author.

Teacher's Role in UBE Implementation

As an engine is to a car, so also is the teacher to the education industry (Aremu, 2002). According to Anderson and Dyke (1972), a school's fine buildings and equipment, specialized services and all other factors which help to provide a favourable learning environment mean little if the learning experiences-are entrusted in the hands of incompetent teachers.

Adesina (1988) also asserts that the heart of Nigerian education system is the teacher. He stressed further that, at whatever level, the teacher is and will continue to be both the major indicator as well as the major determinant of quality education. Similarly, Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) through the National Policy on Education, acknowledged the fact that no education system can rise above the quality of its teacher.

The teacher is a very significant person in the life of those he/she teaches. He serves as a model for the young ones at the formative stage in personality development. These young ones are known to learn predominantly through observation of significant ones around them. It is therefore important that teachers radiate desirable patterns of behaviour worth being emulated.

How laudable an educational policy is and desirable the curriculum may be are not just the only issue, but the level of competence and motivation of those to practically impart knowledge matters a lot. The knowledge and skills of the teacher may either make or mar a well structured programme.

The teacher may serve not only to strengthen some of the social and cognitive responses that a child's parents may have taught or be teaching him; he may also teach him many new responses. By teaching the child academic skills, values, broadening his store of cultural information, stimulating his needs for achievement and mastery, giving him supervised practice in social relationships both with adults and a wider range of peers, the teacher should make him better able to deal comfortably with the ever widening range of challenges and problems in an ever dynamic society.

Impediments to Teacher's Roles Performance

The amount and quality of learning that takes place depend on the qualify and competence of the teachers. According to Olaitan and Augisoho (1982), these competencies are acquired through 'adequate preparation of student-teachers for their task and successful maintenance of behaviour pattern. In other words, these competencies are fundamental to the pre-service preparation of teachers.

Unfortunately, the expected entry qualification of the pivotal teachers (senior secondary school or equivalent with a minimum of three passes at not more than two sittings) is rather too low. This is tantamount to enlisting low achievers to be trained under a less tasking situation (self-study, weekend contact and holiday contact). The question is, how much can they acquire within about one year coupled with their poor academic background?

The NTI crashly trained teachers will not be adequately exposed to required rudiments of guidance skills. Meanwhile, this is important considering the number of pupils from divergent backgrounds expected in the UBE scheme. Bojuwoye (1993) for instance stressed the need to integrated rudiments of Guidance and Counselling into the mainstream of teacher education curriculum as a means of acquainting teachers in-training with a wide range of teaching, counselling and other human relations skills all aimed at improving their intra and interpersonal relationships with the pupils. It is believed that better teacher-pupils relationships will facilitate the pupils' personal growth and development.

Another pertinent factor is the motivational level of teachers. It is evident that when workers are adequately motivated (externally), they become dedicated, hardworking and more productive. But in a situation where teachers' take home that cannot even 'take them home' are not promptly paid or their

other allowances are denied, motivation will be low. Sidi (2002) opines that professionally trained and highly motivated teachers are indispensable in the successful implementation of any educational programme like UBE. He observes that there is inadequate professionally motivated teachers especially at the primary and secondary levels of the education industry in Nigeria.

Increasing negative attitude to work by public primary school teachers has been observed by Inikori (2002). This is manifested in their attendance in school, dedication and general teaching pattern.

Similarly, Inikori also notes that many of the practicing teachers are not knowledgeable about new teaching methods. We are now operating in a computer age, whereas many primary and even secondary school teachers have not seen a computer before not to talk of its operations. Information technology - internet and multimedia are appropriate new teaching-learning process. It is unsavoury to note that these categories of teachers will soon outlive their usefulness.

Recommendations for Improvements in Teacher Quality

According to FRN (1998), in section 9, subsection 74, no matter the efficiency of the pre-service training we give to teachers, there will necessarily be areas of inadequacies which will be filled through in-service education. In particular, products of NTI pivotal teachers would need a host of re-training on-the-job programmes to further reshape them for the enormous task that they could not be adequately exposed to during their crash training.

Also, teachers on the field need to be exposed to modern strategies and innovations in educational services such as evaluation techniques (with special reference to affective area), continuous assessment, rudiments of Guidance and Counselling, information technology and others. There is need to closely monitor the recruitment preferences for TC II by local councils or LGEA because of their low take home instead of NCE teachers that is supposed to be the minimum teaching qualification. The exploitative treatment of NCE holders by private schools should also be checked. A pay of #5,000.00 or even less to NCE graduates is ill-motivating and frustrating.

It is high time that the entry qualification into any teacher education programme should not be mortgaged for quality. The entry background matters a lot in determining the quality and competence level of the teacher to emerge. Conditional admission into teacher education institutions should be stopped.

Teachers' attitude to work must be more positive. Truancy, lateness to work, none preparation of lesson notes or not completing diaries are all retrogressive to the achievement of stated educational objectives. Proper re-education, re-orientation and attitude change workshops and seminars are to be constantly organized for teachers.

Outstanding teachers should be made public and rewarded to encourage others to emulate such reward pattern of behaviour/performance. It is also very important to organize workshops and retraining programmes on new teaching methods and information communication technology (ICT) should be organized for practicing teachers to make them become more relevant in a new society. The society is changing every day, hence, the need for those preparing people to serve the changing society to be well equipped for the performance of their roles.

Conclusion

Today's preparation of the young ones is the determinant of adults of tomorrow. A quality and functional education is a major panacea to this preparation, hence, the laudability of Universal Basic Education. Education is said to be the door to national development and modernization, but, the teacher holds the key to unlock the door.

It is therefore very desirable that qualitative and motivated teachers should be enlisted and trusted with the nurturing of the young ones in our schools. History has shown that the teachers' factor has continued to impede successful actualization of education programmes in this nation and that Universal Basic Education may not be an exception if the right and prompt steps are not taken.

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