

VISION AND MISSION OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The Vision and Mission of Universal Basic Education Program has been the prime target for Nigerians in this 21st Century. The mid-eighties witnessed renewed efforts and a determination to achieve basic education for all. Greater attention was paid on the needs of such underserved groups such as illiterate men and women, nomads and the handicapped. As, it is quite obvious that scientific advancement in form of computerization of social facilities would have been within reach of our country Nigeria since nowadays the society is tending towards use of computers. In order to face the challenges of the fast approaching twenty-first centuries the future of Nigerian society needs to develop the right skills and the best way of achieving this is through proper and sound education. The focus of this paper therefore is to examine those problems that are likely to confront this aspect of education and proffer necessary solutions to them.

Introduction

The most comprehensive vision at the national level, however has been that provided by the National Policy on Education first promulgated in 1977 and revised in 1981. For approximately two decades this vision with a few

Modification has guided educational development in this country. It is therefore appropriate to regard it as the contemporary repository of the Nigerian National Vision of Education. The few points in the policy document with a view in relating the visions the subsequent missions in the hope that we might learn a few lessons for the 21st century.

Education can no longer be viewed simply as a means of raising political and social consciousness. It is an integral component of an overall development effort. On the basis of a recognition that the development of a country's human resources are essential to its posterity and growth and to effective use of its physical resources Nigerian governments at all levels have been willing to extend education to all segments of the societies, especially the young ones. For education to reduce its key role in education must be provided to the younger segments of the societies, especially the young ones. For education to reduce its key role in development, its major development objectives must be carried out. First education must be provided to the younger segments of the society, which is the grass root.

Dada (1999) said that education should be means of acquiring an outlook of life rather than receiving a ready-made outlook. The schools, be it elementary or secondary are not supposed to set up with the aim of imposing a creed or doctrine on the learner, rather, it should enable the learner to develop a philosophy of life or a social outlook through genuine educative participation. Akinpelu (1988) stressed that education as a means of changing the attitudes and ways of living is not only confined to the intellectual outlook even though it is important, rather it pervades all activities.

Meaning of Universal Basic Education Programme

Basic Education means the type of education in quality and content that is given in the first level of education. This concept changes from country to country. In Nigeria basic education was equated with six years of primary schooling. Every child has the right to free and compulsory basic education, which means basic education, should be free, that no school fee/tuition fee should be charged to their parents for the first 6 years of schooling. The present democratic government has extended free education to 9 years. Compulsory means that parents do not have a choice, all children must go to school by Law.

Eniola and Olukotun (2003) submitted that basic education comprises both the range of formal schooling and a wide variety of non-formal and formal public and private education activities to meet the learning needs of groups of all ages in Nigeria.

Also Okediran (2003) defined it as that pillar of formal education in the education systems any nation that is. compulsory for every child, its possession is supposed to be a pre-requisite socioeconomic, cultural, religious and political advancement and lack of it portends primitiveness backwardness in the scheme of things of a nation.

While Okedara (2000) briefly added that, this kind of education is also meant for adults and youths who either dropped out of initial basic education program in life or are now ready to go back and learn through it.

Finally Uzodinma (1998) gave an operational definition of Universal Basic Education as that which includes instructions at first or foundation level of the formal education system of literacy-education for youths and adults.

Background of Universal Basic Education

The program UBE started back from 1948 when UNO: Universal Declaration of Human Right (Articles 26) States: "Everyone has the right to education; education shall be freed at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory." In 1968, the entire world showed concern for education for all at the Pan's International Conference titled "The World Crises in Education" Obanya (2003). Long after in March 1990, there was the declaration and framework for action at the famous Jomtein world conference held in Thailand on education for all. which UNESCO enjoined every nation to fully actualize this by the year 2000? Series of conferences were later held on the same issue in 1994 UNESCO and the ministry of education and science in Spain and New York in 1999, titled - Submit for Children. UBE in particular is not new in Nigeria (Okediran, 2003). The Nigerian constitution of 1999 (Section 18) specifically stipulated in her objectives on universalisation of basic education that Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

Furthermore, Nigeria was a signatory to the Jomtein declaration of education for all by the year 2000, and also a member of the group of E - 9 nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy (Oyabola & Abiodun, 2003). UBE program was formally launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria on the 30th September 1999, (Okediran, 2003) to cater for her million citizens.

Therefore UBE is situated within the largest conquest of a global quest for education far ail and an integral part of much wider efforts to rebuild the Nigerian nation and her educational system which should not and cannot be isolated from the wider contexts of Nigeria's overall developmental imperatives. It is more ambitious than any previous universal primary education in Nigeria such as the free primary education in 1955, the UPE of 1976 and the UPN free education at all levels of 1979 (Obanya, 2003) Through UBE is a newly packaged educational program, it is however imperative for the government of Nigeria to indicate it in her policy in conformity with the UNESCO's global transformative program in education that all school age children should be enrolled in schools and given sound and appropriate education; this formed the basis for Nigeria's introduction of UBE into her educational programs.

Objectives of the UBE Program

Egunyomi (2003) reported that the universalisation of basic education was in keeping with the requirements of educational objectives of Nigeria as contained in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The UBE objectives are stated as follows:

- (1) Development of the entire citizenry and make them to be conscious of education.
- 2) Making provisions for free UBE to every Nigerian child of school age.
- 3) Reduce drastically the incidence of dropouts from the formal school system.
- 4) Provide learning needs of young persons who for one reason or the other had interruption during their schooling.
- 5) Ensure the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

Mission of Universal Basic Education Program

The national policy clearly states that the UBE program is strictly meant for children between the ages

of six and eleven years, the objectives of the National Policy on Education as summarized by Aleyideino (1991) includes acquisition of proficiency in basic numeracy, development of scientific minds that will re orientate the child to the needs of our techno-scientific age and also inculcation of values held in high esteem by the society. Primary education as proposed by the government is free and compulsory. There are many private and public schools in various parts of the country. The government policy on this program is laudable but as usual with all our programs, there is the problem of implementation of this well planned policy. The compulsory aspect of enrolment has not been enforced. Many eligible students are being used as house girls or hawkers in the streets. There is gender disparity in some parts of the country while in another; males opt for trading instead of reading. Also, some educated parents in connivance with some private schools register students who are not matured. On the country, some classrooms are half empty; it is gratifying to note that government has recently launched an enlightenment campaign to increase enrolment in the primary schools.

Vision of the UBE Programs

The present states of practice of primary schools are inadequate. If the country has to train citizens who will be able to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century, the country should have a free and compulsory education for all by the year 2000. I am sure this UBE program will achieve this. The enlightenment campaign will also be intensified more by the 21st century. The disparity on gender enrolment would have been eradicated.

Under aged students will not be allowed to leave the primary school level for the secondary level. Also by the 21st century more training facilities for teachers would have been provided. There will be more colleges of education for the training of primary teachers to handle the UBE program.

As Maduwesi (1991) asserted, parents will play more prominent roles in the education of their children and will no longer be persuaded to enroll their children for the compulsory education. The teachers of the twenty-first century will be computer literate and will thus pass on their knowledge to their students as we cope with the challenges of the society.

Problems Facing the Universal Basic Education Program

We found out that old problems continued to be new problems as long as they remained unresolved. Some of these problems continued to be the chorus in our educational songs. The following may therefore be considered as current problems of UBE;

1) Funding

The government intends as declared in the policy that UBE, like its predecessor, Universal Primary Education should be free. It is however, true that the financial burden on government often forces parents to get involved in funding this basic level of education. Since most parents are poor, the children remain poorly equipped to learn. It is hoped that the federal government will provide the bulk of funds with the state governments assisting sufficiently to ensure that the poverty - stricken parents contribute minimal funds for this level of education in the new dispensation.

2) Irregular Payments of Teachers' Salaries

It is well known that the teachers' morale drops with tardiness in payment of salaries. Regular grants to the states should be made by the federal government for payment of teacher's salaries, except where a UBC commission is constituted to handle all the affairs of UBE directly. The later is a better and more effective option.

3) Provision and Maintenances of Infrastructural Facilities, (Such As Buildings, Equipment and Instructional Materials)

Our children must not sit under trees or in open fields for instructional purposes, secure classroom facilities need to be provided especially in rural areas where the number of school child may outstrip the institutional space for learning.

3) Problem of Supervision and Monitoring of What Goes on in Basic Education Centres

Where regular inspection by the inspectorate is lacking, some teachers may branch off into quick money-generating activities such as farming, butchering, petty-trading and so on, even during school hours. This unprofessional behavior creates discipline problems, as children remain

unsupervised.

4) The Problem of the Walking Distance from Home To School

In rural areas, most children trek for more than 2 kilometers from home to school. This practice is likely to vitiate the vitality of children and result in lateness, absenteeism and truancy. Basic Education Centers should be established within 1 at most i .5 Kilometers trekking distance from home.

6) Poor Planning

A dearth of statistics on children's enrolment, number of teachers, their qualification and demographic characteristics, statistics on buildings and other learning facilities all are inadequate at present. This lack of data is capable of stultifying planning.

7) There is no clear-cut program on the interface between parents and the school to facilitate child-care and basic education. This partnership is crucial and basic to the total development of the child. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is a necessary agency. But its scope does not go deep enough to ventilate the child-cared concept. The role of the home in Basic Education is crucial.

8) Competition Between Private Basic Education Centres

(Nursery-Primary Schools) and PUBLIC (Government-owned Centre). In a democratic era such as ours, individuals have a right to operate schools just as parents have a right to seek the best education for their children. Will government legislate against private owned basic education centres in order to curb their excessive charges of fees?

Recommendations

- Funding: - There should be need for fund to be provided by Federal government like as they earmarked 1430 billion approval for the Universal Basic Education by the government. The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Chukwuemeka Chikelu said it would come as grants to run the programmes of the scheme.
- The government should make sure that teachers received their Salaries as at when due, so as to encourage those to work hard and continue in the program, because a hungry man is an angry man which cannot put in his best.
- m As the federal government has approves the N30 billion for the Funding of the scheme, the council also approved the establishment of a maintenance unit in the Ministry of Works. This is to check the state of disrepair of the facilities due to poor maintenance culture and put in place adequate instructional materials for learning.
- IV There are needs for the government to put in place regular inspection by the inspectorate to reduce the excesses of some lousy teachers who are not ready to work.
- The government should make schools very close to the pupils which should be trekable distance from home while in urban areas; provide mobility for them and good road network. There should be blue print records on the number of enrolled students and teachers in each Universal Basic Education centre. For the government to know the budget to provide each year for the implementation of the scheme.
- VII There should be a rapport between the parents and teachers in order to train the children in a disciplined good society that is crime free.
- VIII The government should balance an equation between Private Basic Education Centre and Public Education Centre. The more government has an eye on the public schools, with quality things for learning it will reduce the influx of Private schools in the country. Parents will still get the best, by sending their children to public schools rather than spending huge sum for private schools.

Conclusion

The challenges of the twenty-first century call for the needs for our children to have a sound basic education at the pre-primary as well as the primary level, As Fafunwa (1992) observed most African countries; Nigeria inclusive may not be able to provide more than free primary educations for its citizens since the society is becoming computerized. There is need all level of pre-primary and primary to be computer literate. The need to emphasize code of conduct in the syllabus of primary education is very crucial. If

patriotism is imbibed at an early age; we will be able to eradicate most of the anti social behaviours being exhibited by graduates of primary education.

Furthermore, emphasis on health programme is very essential if students are made to develop health habit at a young age; the problem of sickness such as typhoid will be minimized. The programme should encourage cleanliness. The primary education should have been maintained by some high standards.

Finally government and parents will gain a lot by training the future leaders through Universal Basic Education programme.

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