

ACHIEVING SOUND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE THROUGH UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE IN NIGERIA)

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Abstract

A nation that is multi-lingual and multi-ethnic like Nigeria must be concerned with evolving a sound and stable democratic culture that would help in solving the fundamental problems of nation building. According to this presentation, the Universal Basic Education [UBE] would help this country to achieve among other things. This paper looked at the Universal Basic Education and its objectives and later dwelt on the relationship between education and democracy. It ended up with some recommendations that would be very useful to those who make and implement policies for this country,

Introduction

Education has always been seen and conceived as an instrument of liberation from ignorance, disease, superstitious belief and poverty. Osahon [2004]. It is generally accepted as a major factor in the development of modern man. Apart from being a major instrument of socialization and the enhancement of the well being of the individual, education has remain an important factor in the attainment and sustenance of national development and democracy.

The value, essence or importance of education be it to an individual or the nation cannot be over emphasized. Education makes people easy to lead but difficult to drive, easy to govern but difficult to enslave. According to Oni (1999:16), "Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no despotism can enslave; at home a friend, in solitude a solace and in society an ornament, without it what is man? A spending slave, reasoning savage". The citation above is only but one way of showing the importance of education. Education is a means of achieving social, economic and political development. No nation in the present world can or has achieved any meaningful progress or development without education. Any nation that neglects education can never be great. This is the reason that informed the launching of the Universal Basic Education [UBE] by the present government led by President Olusegun Obasanjo.

What is UBE and its Objectives

President Olusegun Obasanjo on Thursday 30th September, 1999, launched or re-launched the Universal Basic Education in Sokoto. Launching the programme, the President said that education is not just a matter of acquiring skills, rather, the term is better perceived when seen and understood as a means of instilling, especially in our young ones, the importance of a number of fundamental values such as the devotion to the continuity of this nation [Nigeria] as one, respect for the constitution and the importance of democracy among other things are the inclusion of sense of work and moral uprightness as well as respect for the right of others.

The UBE programme, is almost the same as Universal Primary Education [UPE], The difference between UBE and UPE is that it is compulsory and it has a broader focus. It now extends to all children from the age of six [6] to fifteen [15] and it also accommodates children from primary to junior secondary school. Apart from focusing on primary to junior secondary school children, it also embraces comprehensive adult literacy programme.

The concept of Universal Basic Education has been widely explained by scholars and educators of diverse background. It is seen as basic or elementary education targeted at substantial proportion of the population. It is educational innovation deliberately designed to facilitate the access of the masses to the acquisition of such basic skills as reading, writing and the manipulation of their immediate environment. One may go further to admit that it is an educational effort targeted at the complete elimination of illiteracy and all its attendant effect through the provision of elementary-education for the masses.

Universal Basic Education (UBE), is a turning point in the national efforts towards civilization and self-actualization therefore, all should not be left to government, everybody must be involved. To show the importance of education and the need to support it, President Olusegun Obasanjo, on the launching day in Sokoto cited the popular Chinese adage which says "if you are planning for one year, plant rice, if you are planning for the future, educate your children. It may be necessary at this point to briefly examine the objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria. The main objective of the Universal Basic Education programme as stated by the Head of States include the following: I. To develop full awareness of the cardinal importance of Education in nation building.

II. To provide office Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child at school age.

III. To reduce drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system.

4. To cater for children who due to unfortunate circumstances may have interrupted schooling.
5. To inculcate ethical, moral and civic value needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning.
6. To encourage the development and use of all the faculties of the man through the acquisition of appropriate vocation and technical skills.

Education and Democracy in Nigeria

There are two major ways that education and democracy relate. Firstly, the provision of basic education for the entire citizenry is a fundamental right in a true democracy. Secondly, the provision of education generally is a fundamental element in the attainment and sustenance of true democracy. Education as a system has some inherent features such as equity, tolerance and a sense of critical judgment among others, which are vital to the sustenance of true democratic culture in any society. At this point it may be necessary to briefly examine the concept of democracy.

According to Olawole [1987], the term is derived from the Greek words 'demos [which means the people and 'Kraits' which means authority]. In Ancient Athens it was practiced as a direct system [government of the people by the people and for the people]. Modern democracy however is indirect and representative. As much as possible and for the interest of the generality of the people it is participatory. The creed of democracy as a modern system of government include the following:

1. Individualism which hold that primary task of government is to ensure that each individual attains the highest potential of development
2. Liberty, which holds that every member of the society has the greatest amount of freedom consistent with order.
3. Equity, which postulates that all men are created, equal and have equal rights and opportunity.
4. Fraternity, which holds that individuals will not misuse their freedom but will cooperate in* creating a wholesome society.

As a political system democracy presupposes that man should control his destiny and make moral judgment and practical decisions in his daily life.

For the creed of democracy to take root in any society education generally and basic education in particular has to have a firm root. The objectives of education as already articulated tally perfectly with the realization of a pluralistic society like Nigeria where ethnicity and tribalism are still common features of our national life. Here too, it may be necessary to highlight the intrinsic nexus between education and leadership. As Okafor [1988], observed "A leader cannot be better than his education" Today, one of the major obstacles to the realization of true democracy and indeed nationhood in Nigeria is bad leadership. The opinion of this presentation is that it is when the leadership at the grass root is adequately informed in the process if education that the democratic culture can be firmly put on ground. No leadership can be better than the followership. In democracy, it is from the followership that leadership and leaders emerge. For true democratic culture to emerge therefore, the followers must be well informed enough to be able to separate true leaders from bad leaders, In Nigeria, people of all shades aspire to leadership. It is true that majority of these people are those who should not have anything to do with leadership. Such people often attain leadership positions at the expense of genuine leaders as a result of wide spread ignorance and object poverty occasioned by high rate of illiteracy in the country.

The major threats to the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria today are illiteracy and poverty. Illiteracy and poverty do not allow for critical judgment and sound national decisions among majority of Nigerians. As a result it has remain a mere dream for true democracy to take root in the country.

How Universal Basic Education (UBE) Can Help to Promote the Formation of Sound Democratic Culture in Nigeria

Education will help the citizens of a country to obey rules and regulations of his or her fatherland and fulfill (heir obligation to (heir country. By so doing, peace and understanding will be guaranteed which are essential ingredients needed for democracy to take proper root in the country.

It is evident that non-performance of one's civic responsibility is capable of impeding the pace of social-economic and political development for example, non-payment of taxes reduces the provision of social amenities to our community and this has effect on the economy. Also non-participation in election, colluding with criminals and other form of lawlessness lead to poor governance and insecurity. It is sad that many Nigerians do not perform their civic responsibilities due to lack of knowledge of what their obligations are. Poor educational background of many Nigerians is a serious impediment to the evolution of sound democratic culture; it is on this premise thai the introduction of the universal basic education programme is highly welcome and timely. The targeted audience of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) are children in

the primary and junior secondary schools whose age bracket is mostly between six to fifteen years. According to psychologist, this is the period of habit formation. Therefore, democratic culture can be infused into our youth at the primary and junior secondary schools level through the following ways:

Social studies or citizenship education should not only be taught with renewed vigor, but made as practical as much as possible. During teaching, teachers should teach the concept democracy, all activities and institutions related to democracy in such a way that the weakest student will not have problem in understanding and applying the concept to everyday usage.

Apart from this, excursion that will give students the opportunity to see or visit democratic institutions like the state and National assemblies, National Electoral commission, party secretariats etc. Should be regularly organized. Those in the junior secondary schools should be encouraged to listen to enlightenment programmes on television and radio that are linked with democracy [house ticket; you and representatives].

Election of class or school prefects and executive members of the various clubs at the junior' secondary should be based on free and fair elections. Winners should be taught to be magnanimous in victory, while looser should accept defeat in the spirit of sportsmanship.

On the part of the school administration, all the principles and concept of democracy should be truly seen in the day to day running of the school.

Teachers of religious studies [i.e. Christian or Islamic] should during their teaching emphasis virtues like tolerance, honesty, accountability, humility, hard work etc. which are essential ingredients needed for democracy to grow and blossom in our country Nigeria.

Those in the English Language department should be encouraged to regularly write and present short plays that would show the beauty of democracy.

Recommendation

Citizenship and social studies should be made a core subject in the UBE programme.

Teacher Education in the country should be given its pride of place to ensure that the right quality and quantity of teachers are produced to (each at the primary and junior secondary school levels of education.

The Federal Government should fight the war against corruption with renewed vigor because corruption is a threat to the survival of democracy. Children in the primary and secondary level should be morally taught of the evils of corrupt practices and its legal consequence.

Conclusion

To Oka for [1988] "An educated citizenry is the only means where by a democratic state can survive. In the light of the above statement, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure the provision of education that will develop human resources and promote preserve and perpetuate the knowledge and skills as well as attitudes considered necessary for the survival of the nation and well being of citizenry. In a country like Nigeria with so much diversity, there is hardly any alternative to a robust Universal Basic Education programme for the sustenance of national development and democracy.

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