

VISION AND MISSION OF THE UBE PROGRAMME TOWARDS THE GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: FOCUS ON CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract

In spite of the various programmes put in place to promote the girl-child education in Nigeria, it is disheartening that disparity still exists in favour of the male-child. It was expected that with the introduction of the USE programme, the issue of educational imbalance between boys and girls would be properly addressed. But the National Report on Situation and Policy Analysis of Basic Education have revealed that some obstacles to female/girl-child education are historically, socially and culturally rooted. This paper discusses these constraints and made some recommendations.

Introduction

Section 18 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), emphasizes the urgency for government at all levels to strive to eradicate illiteracy and ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities for every citizen (both male and female) of the country. The UBE is thus a vital development project that is in keeping with both the constitution and the National Policy on Education. Basic education is aimed at equipping individuals with knowledge, skill and attitudes that will enable them to:

- Live meaningful and fulfilling lives.
- Contribute to the society's development.
- Derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society.
- Discharge their civic obligation competently (FGN, 2000:1).

Education is an important tool for knowledge, skills and the building of self-confidence. Through education, women are able to contribute most effectively in the transformation of their environment and in improving the economic status of their families. For instance, the educational level of a woman according to Muhammad (1999) determines the quality of health attained by her and the members of her family. The social benefit to be derived by females and the girl-children education cannot be exhausted. There is therefore an urgent need more than ever before to ensure the education of the girl-child,

The introduction of the UBE at this point in time is therefore a welcome development. This is more so considering the schemes objectives, viz:

- To provide free, compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.
- To drastically reduce dropout rate through improved relevance and efficiency.
- To cater for dropouts and out of school children/adolescents through various complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education (Muhammad, 1999:83).

If the goals of the UBE are to universalise access to basic education, engender a conducive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time according to (FGN 2000), then the following implications among others according to Anyakoha (2002) are discernable:

- i Inclusiveness - Which implies that persons of all manners and conditions of physical, spatial and psychological existence should be beneficiaries of the programme.
- ii Special attention to special groups:- Which implies that the special needs of all sectors of the population must be considered (FGN, 2000:2).

Hawes (1979) as was reported in Uba (2002:3) had however presented six dimensions through which basic education could be viewed. These are:

- i Basic education is an idea and not a system, and therefore not concerned with the number of years the child will spend in it, but rather as a set of basic skills, knowledge and attitudes
- ii Basic education involves the acceptance of different paths to learning toward its goals. It is most profitable to consider basic education in relation to:
 - Children in formal primary school.
 - Children, youth and young adults following alternative paths towards the same general goals. Such paths would include accelerated patterns of formal schooling for older children as well as many varieties of part-time and non-formal education,
 - ili) Basic education is a concept which relates to individual

attainment of goals rather than to

time spent or ground covered. Which means that it does not involve competitive element. iv) Basic education is very basic. It relates to situations as they are to "minimum survival need"

of a majority of learners, many of whom are studying in difficult situations. v) Basic education is not to be considered as terminal, in contrast to some other forms of education which lead to further study and not as rural in contrast to urban education. On the contrary, it must be thought of as providing the maximum degree of mobility for the learner to meet changing situations and to continue his education to the best of his ability and opportunity.

vi) Basic education must be conceived in the context of partnership. This should be between various educational agencies, e.g. the family, the school, non-formal education and the community.

Drawing from the comprehensive concept of basic education, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN 2000:4) included nomadic education, adult literacy and the education of persons in all manners and condition of physical, spatial and psychological existence in its implementation guidelines.

The realization of these properly articulated visions of the UBE and consideration of their implications require the consideration of gender issues. Various gender discriminatory practices had in the past created enormous gender gaps in education in Nigeria. Such practices had continued to hinder rather than promote development in the country. In fact, in order to address gender along with other crucial issues in an attempt to translate the aspiration of UBE into concrete action, the Federal government of Nigeria (2000) stipulated that:

Awareness of the need for, and the importance of education in Nigeria is characterized by wide geographical generational disparities. Due attention will be given to all these forms of disparities in the process of public enlightenment and social mobilization, as these "disparity areas" have implications for access, retention and successful completion of the educational cycle... (FGN 2002:2).

It is therefore necessary to address gender issues in UBE. For instance, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as was reported in Osuman (1972) revealed that of the 154 million additional illiterates in the world, 133 million were females. The report further revealed that the proportion of illiterates was on the increase (refer to Table 1 for "Nigeria females illiteracy rate").

According to Acker in Uba (2002), the girl-child receives less than a fair share of access to schooling, of teacher attention, of school resources and of preparation for well-paid jobs. In the opinions of Blakemore and Cooksey (1981), sexual inequalities is one of the most loose connections between stratification, education and other factors. This according to them is because females suffer social and educational disadvantages in all societies, classes, ethnic and regional groups.

Gender gaps exist at various levels of education in Nigeria. A 1993 Federal Government/UNICEF report indicates that the disparity in access to education continues to exist in favour of males while correspondingly high illiteracy rates persists amongst females. The females literacy rate in 1990 was estimated at about 39.5%, which when compared with 62.3% of male is relatively low. This means that 26.23 million of the estimated 43.9 million women in Nigeria are illiterates (FGN/UNICEF, 1993). Another 1993 report gave the enrolment of girls in primary school as 44%, according to Jimoh (1993). In some States, less than 30% of girls are enrolled in primary schools.

which will enable learners to take charge of their own lives and set them free to learn further.

The scenario in the Southern States could be different however, as majority of the states had attained gender parity. In fact, in some states such as Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, there is presently an emerging dimension of gender disparity at the secondary school levels. In these are-: the population of male enrolment in secondary schools has dropped below 40%, according to The Guardian (1996). A Federal Ministry of Education (1994) highlighted this reversal of gender-disparity, particularly in Anambra State, with 83.74% secondary school students in the state in 199-being females. This situation has been attributed to the zeal of the young males to "make money quickly". Ironically, the illiterate males who make the money quickly turn around to "acquire" **for** themselves the educated young girls who are often graduates. Such marriages often experience educational gaps between husbands and wives. Some wives may not even be allowed by their "rich husbands" to utilize the education they acquired to actualize themselves, their families or to contribute to national development. In the opinion of Anyakoha (1998), gender based domestic violence is a common phenomenon in most cases.

Table 1: A Comparative Literacy Rates of Selected States in Nigeria, 1993/94

Zone	State	Ranking	Literacy Rates (%)		
			Male (M)	Female (F)	Total (M+F)
South	Lagos	1	93.65	85.46	89.7
	Edo	2	85.64	72.64	79.31
	Akwa Ibom	3	85.24	71.38	78.13
	Delta	4	87.54	68.90	78.03
	Rivers	5	86.96	68.95	77.87
	Abia	6	85.09	71.40	77.25
	Anambra	7	83.11	72.34	77.24
	Imo	8	82.86	67.09	73.81
	Cross River	9	82.58	66.27	73.74
	Ondo	10	71.46	57.33	64.25
North	Bauchi	1	39.59	27.41	33.42
	Taraba	2	45.02	19.56	32.12
	Niger	3	34.27	16.04	25.25
	Kano	4	36.59	12.04	24.36
	Katsina	5	29.11	13.86	21.21
	Borno	6	21.31	11.65	19.82
	Kebbi	7	23.68	9.01	16.48
	Sokoto	8	21.43	9.71	15.55
	Jigawa	9	18.82	5.21	12.0
	Yobe	10	15.22	7.43	11.43

Adapted from Federal Office of Statistics, *Socio-Economic Profile of Nigeria (1996)*.

Constraints to the Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Factors that may hinder the education of the girl-child through the UBE programme include: a) Culture

Culture is made up of a group's way of life, including their customs, beliefs, technologies, achievement etc. Culture is difficult to change. Gender and the various "gendered practices" that manifest in Nigerian schools (and may possibly manifest in the UBE programme), are culturally or socially constructed.

Forced and early marriage is the most important single constraint on education of girls in Northern states while in Southern states, cultural bias and socio-economic status are the bane. Other variables include sexual harassment, hawking, domestic chores such as withdrawing the girl-child from school to take care of siblings. Distance from school affects enrolment and regular class attendance and wrong perception by the community who feel that it is pointless investing in female education since the beneficiary will eventually get married and end up in her husband's place.

These are defined within and through the social structures and institutions of a society including schools (Lorber, 1994). Some cultural practices that manifest as gender have continued to be perpetuated by schools for a long time. They are more obvious in the primary schools, which are very close to the family. This situation will obviously challenge the UBE programme.

b) Low Girl-Child School Enrolment (Table 2)

Table 2: National Summary of Primary School Enrolment Statistics in Nigeria (1970/71-1994)

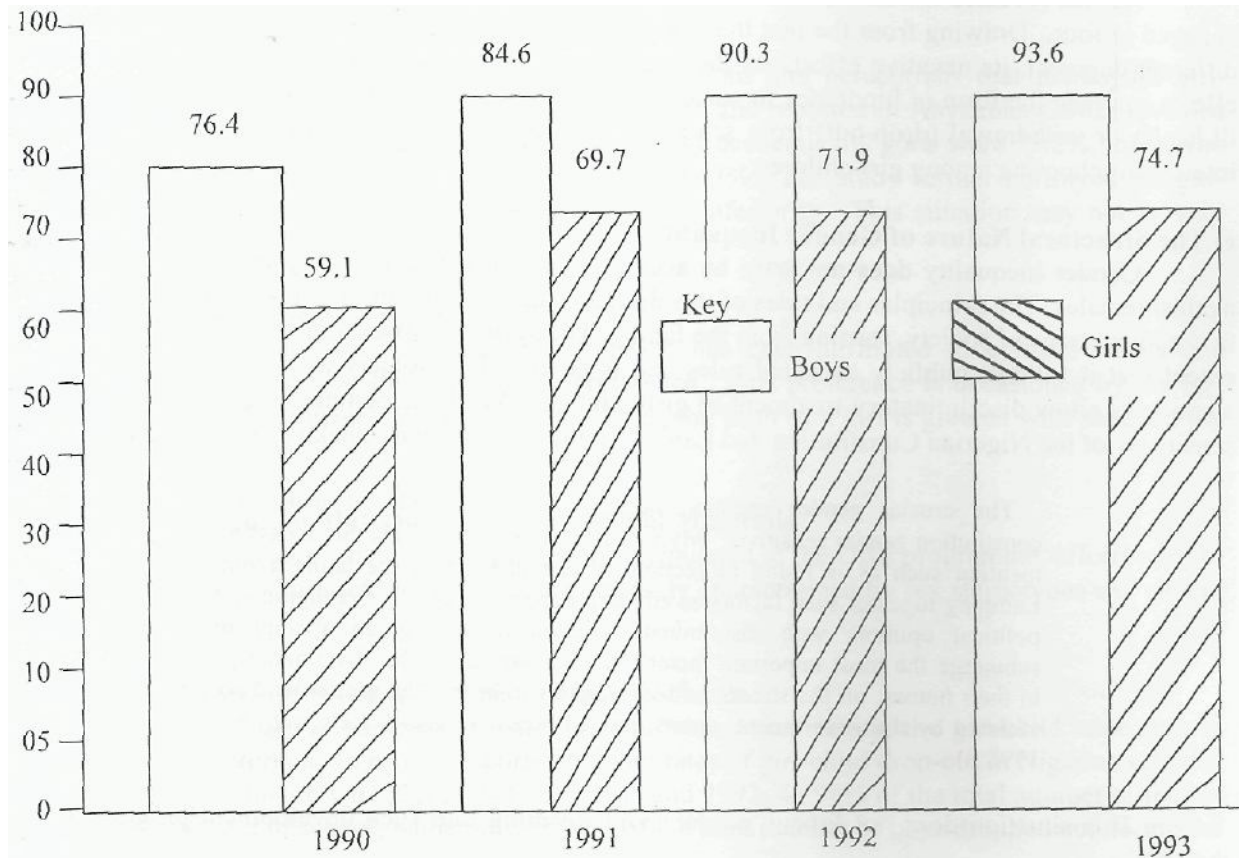
Total Enrolment	Total Male Enrolment (%)	Total Female enrolment (%)
1970-1975	21354	13051 (61.0)
1976-1980	47047	26665 (56.7)
1981-1985	70157	39614 (56.5)
1986-1990	62874	35137 (55.9)
1991-1994	60644	34002 (56.1)

Adapted from Federal Ministry of Education, Statistics of 1 and 2 Education (1994).

As was revealed in Table 2, there is a below average enrolment of girls into primary schools.

Percentage Gross Enrolment

The gender gap in primary school enrolment in Nigeria (1990-1993).



Adapted from Statistic Branch, Federal Ministry of Education, Victoria Island, Lagos (Dec, 1992).

c) Low Gender Awareness

According to Ohiri-Aniche (1998) as was reported in Anyakoha (2002), there is still low gender awareness among various groups of "Nigerians, including traditional rulers, parents, teachers, policy makers and school administrators. This is a major source of obstacle. As a result, UNICEF has continued to organize series of gender awareness and sensitization workshops for various groups of people in "Nigeria, including professionals, teachers, traditional and religious leaders.

d) Child - Labour

Tfbble 3: Classification of Child Labour (10-- 14yrs) by Occupation and Sex, 1991.

S/N	Occupation	(M + F) Both Sexes		Male (M)		Female (F)	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
D	Professional / Senior technical/ related workers.	-		-		-	
2)	Senior Admin / Managerial workers.	-	-	-	-	-	-
3)	Clerical and Related workers.	-	-	-	-	-	-
4)	Sale workers.	28,104	4.2	16,936	4.0	11,168	4.5
5)	Service workers.	55,539	8.3	16,936	4.0	38,603	15.7
6)	Agriculture and Related workers.	501,854	75.0	338,711	80.0	163,143	66.4
7)	Production and Related workers.	55,539	8.3	33,871	8.0	21,668	8.8
8)	Occupation not stated.	28,140	4.2	16,936	4.0	11,168	4.5
9)	Total occupation.	669,140	100	423,390	100	245,750	100

Adapted from National Population Commission (NPC), The 1991 Census of Nigeria, Vol. 1. Analytical Report (1997).

As was revealed in Table 3 above, of the five sampled occupations, girl-children were mostly engaged in four. Drawing from the fact that the scenario is replicated all over the country (though in different degrees), its negative effects on the education of the girl-child could be wide spread. The effects can take the form of hindrance to enrolment in school, lack of concentration in the classroom, ill-health or withdrawal (drop-out) from school. It can also result into the development of lack of interest in schooling among girl-children.

e) The Structural Nature of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality does not arise by accident, but are the result of systemic discrimination against females. The principles and rules of this discrimination are sometimes unknowingly embedded in the institutions of society, starting from the family. The system of discrimination is structural to the extent that it follows publicly accepted rules and is practiced by society as a whole. For instance, some laws allow discriminatory treatment of girl-children. Available comments question the gender sensitivity of the Nigerian Constitution and Laws. On the Constitution, Izuako (1997) observed:

...The crucial gender question here is, 'Does Section 39 make our constitution gender sensitive?' My submission on this score is that a passing mention such as is found in section 39 is nothing to write home about. Lumping together such factors as ethnic group, place of origin, religion and political opinion, with discrimination based on sex is an attempt to submerge the most important factor, Nigerian women suffer discrimination in their homes, on the streets, offices, schools... In fact the section is daily violated by the government, courts, law enforcement agents...etc. (Izuako, 1998:2).

This situation does not favour gender mainstreaming into such development programme as the UBE.

f) Education Materials and Practices

Most instructional materials and practices construct gender roles. These in turn convey various forms of gender-based discrimination. According to Anyakoha (1998) and Ohiri-Aniche (1998).

...There are 'masculine' subjects such as Science, Technology and Mathematics. There are also 'feminine' subjects such as Home Economics, Literature and Secretarial Studies. The language and readers also betray a gender bias. Boys are generally portrayed as brave, intelligent, decisive and adventurous, girls are shy and timid...do domestic work (Ohiri-Aniche, 1998:53).

Areas in which gender is constructed in primary school activities include: :
Curriculum materials such as textbooks.

Classroom management practices - including mode of writing names in class register,
appointment of boys as prefects while girls are meant to become cleaners / sweepers.

Teacher pupil interaction that favour boys.

For instance, questions in Science and Technology are more directed at boy-children than to girls.

Folk tales/stories that portray boys as strong, serious achievers and girls as weak, lazy and sometimes stupid or childish. Types of play materials provided for boys and girls. Some female teachers tend to exhibit certain behaviours that portray them as inferior to their male counterparts. For instance, a female teacher may refuse to take on an assignment that demand serious mental and physical exercises. Under such circumstance, the pupil see the female teacher as a role model, thereby propagating gender inequality.

Some teachers perceive male-children as academically superior to girl-children. This wrong perception, no doubt influences their reactions/interaction patterns of the teachers and pupils. For girl-children, this could mean "grooming for inferiority complex, for boys superiority complex".

A study by Manyire (1997) on gender conceptions and perceptions that predispose girl-children to premature termination of education in Uganda and reported in Anyakoha (2002) revealed that while teachers who perceived their boy-children to be academically good were 72.2%, those who considered their girl-children to be similar were only 53.3%. The study further portrayed the girl-children as having internalized self-images of academic inferiority. This situation may not be very different in Nigeria.

g) Son Preference to the Girl-Child

The phenomenon of girl-child discrimination has been attributed to cultural values and practices which gives rise to the issue of son preference. This preference is occasioned by the fact that sons carry on the lineage and family name. Thus, the birth of a girl is greeted with subdued joy and happiness.

h) Existing Curriculum Materials and Instructional Materials

In order to ensure equality of opportunity as stipulated in the UBE programme, efforts need to be made to destroy certain school texts that are seriously characterized by sex stereotypes and gender biased illustrations.

i) Girl-Child Drop Out Rates in Nigerian Primary Schools

As a result of the numerous constraints / problems confronting the girl-child education in Nigeria, it is not surprising to receive reports of higher rates of girl-child drop-out in Nigerian schools. For instance, according to Uba (2002), between 1987 and 1992, 46.94% of the total number of female children dropped out of school, while only 15.92% of the total number of boys dropped out during the

Cohort	Male		Total
1980/81-86	42.79		42.2
1981/82-87	51.08	52.44	51.6
1982/83-88	NA	NA	50.3
1983/84-89	NA	NA	49.3
/1989	15.92	46.94	29.70

same period. **Table 4: Dropout Rates in 5 Cohort Between 1980-1992 (%)**

Female
41.15

1987

NA = Not Available

Adapted from FOS (1980 1984 and 1985-1990).

This development calls for a serious concern if the girl-child education must succeed through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme. It is in the light of this that the following recommendations have been suggested.

Conclusion

For urgent priorities to be accorded in order to ensure easy access to and improving the quality of female and girl-child education as was stipulated by the UBE programme, government with other stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations, traditional and religious leaders, UN and other donor agencies and parents must all work together to facilitate successful implementation of the girl-child education as we march into the 21st century.

Recommendations

- 1) The Federal and State Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations should establish strong grassroots enlightenment programmes to mobilize and sensitize people towards a positive attitude in the area of girl-child education. Massive enlightenment campaigns could be organized through production of documentaries and jingles to sensitize the public on the plight of the girl-child and the consequences of early marriage, girl-child illiteracy, large family size among others. Religious institutions should be enlightened through seminars and sermons on the importance of girl-child education.
- 2) Government should encourage increased female participation in educational opportunities to serve as role models.
- 3) More female primary and secondary schools should be built in or around communities where girls at puberty are not allowed movement for fear of sexual harassment.
- 4) Action should be intensified on revision of school curriculum to discourage and eliminate gender stereotyping.
- 5) Government should ensure the implementation of laws prohibiting withdrawal of girls from school for marriage or for any other reason before the completion of at least the junior secondary school.
- 6) Girls who drop out of schools as a result of pregnancy should be encouraged and provided opportunity to continue with their education after delivery.
- 7) Governments, NGOs and wealthy individuals and multinational organizations should identify and award scholarships and grants to female students who show outstanding performance in or make noticeable contributions to science and technology knowledge, thereby ensuring that girls are equally exposed to science subjects as boys.
- 8) Functional education programmes such as the UBE / 6-3-3-4 should be properly articulated and implemented in order for women to be self-reliant and resourceful in gainful employment.
- 9) Both male and female teachers need to have their inherent gender misconception that predispose girls to negative self-image (inferiority complex) addressed in seminars and workshops.
- 10) There is need for continuing research into gender construction practices in every activity of the UBE programme, especially at the primary school level. Efforts should be made to eradicate such practices.

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