

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR ACHIEVING THE SEVEN (7) POINT AGENDA IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

It is incontrovertible that Universal Basic Education is indispensable in achieving national development. The invaluable role of U.B.E. in training and retraining of human resources for all-round development of the nation is so paramount that virtually all kinds of human advancement be it socio-economic, cultural, technological, political are the result of efficient training process. This paper specifically examined the meanings of operative words in the topic, Universal Basic Education and seven (7) Point Agenda, the structure of educational system in Nigeria and problems associated with Universal Basic Education in achieving the goal of seven (7) Points Agenda were presented. While strategies to overcome the problems and conclusion were discussed.

Introduction

In discussing the topic, it is relevant to look at the meanings of the operative words in the topic. Universal has been defined as “something done by all the members of a group.” (Hornby 1995:1304)

Education has been defined as “the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed. Schooling is only one form in which education is provided” (Farrant, 1980:18). Basic Education on the other hand is the “foundation for sustainable lifelong ‘learning’. It provides reading, writing and numeracy skills and comprises a wide variety of formal and non-formal education activities and program designed to enable learners acquire functional literacy.” (Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja, 2009:4).

7-Point Agenda:

The 7-point Agenda is all about “power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, education and national security with primary focus on Niger Delta” (Chukwuelue, 2008:11). President Umar Musa Yar’Adua told the nation during his election campaign that if elected, his government will focus on a 7-Point Agenda to fast-track Nigeria’s economic development. Many people knew nothing about what he was talking about. It was during his inauguration that he spelt out what the 7-Point Agenda is all about.

Consequently, we can conveniently analyze the topic: Universal Basic Education as an instrument for achieving Seven (7) Point Agenda in Nigeria for sustainable national development to mean universal practice engaged in by societies at all stages of development to restore the country’s ailing economy to good condition.

Universal Basic Education and 7-Point Agenda

Universal Basic Education programme was launched in September, 1999 because of increase awareness of importance of education all over the world. The aims of Basic Education according to Federal Ministry of Education Abuja (2009:4) are to enable individuals to:

- a. Contribute to the development of the society;
- b. Live meaningful and fulfilling lives;
- c. Derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefit from the society.
- d. Discharge their civic obligations competently

Obviously, considering the aims of basic education, the Federal Government has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for achieving the seven (7) Point Agenda in Nigeria for sustainable national development. According to the Presidency, the goal of the reforms is to ensure that Nigeria will become one of the twenty leading economies in the world by the year 2020

(Chukwuelue, 2008:11). Therefore, in many ways, the 7-Point Agenda is geared to compliment the government's Vision 20:2020. Not only is education the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for quick development of its socio-economic, political, technological and human resources (Tonshiket, 2005:2).

The Structure of Educational System in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education articulated in 1977 (revised 1981) remains the most significant attempt at bringing structure and organization to bear on the educational system. This done with a view to meeting the basic learning needs of learners at different levels.

Based on the recommendation of the policy on education, the country operates the 6-3-3-4 system, comprising 6 years of primary schooling, 3 years of junior secondary education, 3 years of senior secondary school education and 4 years of post-secondary school education during which the candidate may proceed to any of the three major post-secondary institutions including, College of Education, Polytechnic or University.

However, some of the objectives of the policy are: that education should prepare the child for a useful living in the society, and that Secondary Education should equip the student to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology. Looking at the general objective for all i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary levels, one can find that such an objective will be merely a nightmare if a programme like the Universal Basic Education is not introduced. This therefore makes the U.B.E. programme an important one. The programme is expected to solve most of the problems associated with illiteracy in the country. The UBE system is 9-3-4 instead of 6-3-3-4 system.

The curriculum for the new education system, stipulates that "a child will go through a nine-year free universal and compulsory school program at the end of which the pupil will either terminate his or her education for whatever reason or proceed to a three-year Senior Secondary School Education program". (Dukku, 2008:14)

What the new system is apparently trying to do is to cut off the present Junior Secondary School (JSS 1-3) from the senior secondary school (SSS 1-3). The former system, now regarded as a component of the free, universal and compulsory nine-year basic education system, includes the erstwhile six-years primary school. A Nigerian child will now have to undergo the usual six years of primary school and then move on without any entrance examination into the three year junior secondary school. At the end of the nine years, the child relevant aspects of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that stipulated unfettered access to education for all (EFA). The nine years of basic education (Basic 1-9) will be free universal and compulsory for all Nigerian children of primary school age. Previous drop-outs from the primary school system are free to join the train as it were. This concept has gained ground and accepted in Nigeria as indispensable instrument for achieving the Seven (7) Point Agenda in Nigeria.

Factors Militating Against Universal Basic Education as an Instrument for Achieving Seven (7) Point Agenda in Nigeria

School Administrative Factors: These include: "reckless expenditure on the part of School Administrators, fund meant for educational facilities (including libraries) are diverted or outrightly misappropriated, contracts are highly inflated thereby increasing the cost of running educational programmes" (Umar, 2005:33).

Examination Malpractices Factor: Dubious ways of passing examination have been perfected. Students no longer read let alone of going to the library, some teachers pay less attention to students' affairs because of poor payment and some do not teach thereby encouraging examination malpractices. Adomu (2004:17-19) identified the causes of examination malpractices to include:

- a. Lack of commitment on the part of teachers. Some teachers engage in activities other than teaching during official hours.

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- b. Receiving bribes from students or parent to commit examination fraud.
- c. There is also this dimension of inadequate preparation for examination by the students. With this, fear sets in and thus breeding loss of confidence, anxiety and a feeling of insecurity. This category of students cannot do without cheating in the exam.
- d. Most parents pre-occupy their wards or children with domestic activities so much so that they have little time for themselves to do extra readings.

Conclusion

The role of universal basic education as human resource development in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. The government is investing heavily on education, but this is not enough when compared to other sectors like sports. U.B.E. is a programme that must not fail, hence adequate funding and all other strategies indicated above towards overcoming the identified problems are very important for successful achievement of Seven-Point Agenda for national development.

Strategies Adopted to Overcome the Problems

1. **Funding:** Financing education is the sole responsibility of the three tiers of Government i.e. Federal, State and Local Government. The government should place much priority on the funding of the U.B.E. programme, provision of fund must be accompanied by appropriate monitoring to avoid wastage, embezzlement and misappropriation of funds.
2. **Adequate Supervision:** It involves the act of checking, inspecting, rating and monitoring. Generally, supervision is the improvement of instructions, instructional programmes and learning programmes. It is to improve the teacher, student as well as the school. "The Inspectorate Divisions of the Ministries of Education should be better equipped for them to live up to their responsibilities. The only way government's huge investments in education could be justified is to ensure high quality education". (Borisade, 2003:4). The Inspectorate Division should at all times be dedicated to its job. Teachers are therefore, urged to see School Inspector as partners in progress, friends and colleagues, rather than fault finding bosses.
3. **Adequate Manpower:** Teachers have great roles to play because they are the key implementers of this programme. Since it is generally believe that no educational system can rise above the level of its teacher, it becomes imperative that more teachers be trained and employed. Teachers need to be adequately motivated from time to time through prompt payment of salaries, fringe benefits and incentives. "For UBE to succeed, teachers' salary deserves an enhancement" (Ayilara, 1990:2). This is because in Nigeria, today, money (salary) is the greatest motivational factor for workers.
4. **Facilities and Equipment:** These refer to the school buildings, the classrooms, libraries, laboratories, school farms, workshops, sports field. All these help to promote the teaching and learning process. These should be adequate because it will go a long way to achieve a successful UBE programme for sustainable national development.
5. **Instructional/Learning Materials:** The availability of relevant and adequate textbooks, stationery, learning/instructional materials are pre-requisite tools for teaching and learning. An effective teaching and learning environment is essential to bring the best from teachers and pupils.
6. **Computer:** We are now in computer age. Computer literacy and application are necessary in UBA programme for achieving national development.
7. **School Curriculum:** Curriculum should be enriched from time to time to keep abreast of changing time and should be relevant to the present needs of the society.

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