

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) IN NIGERIA ESPECIALLY AS IT AFFECTS TEACHERS PREPARATION

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Abstract

It is acknowledge the world over that education is a key to rapid socio-economic development of any country. It follows, therefore, that any society which intends to progress particularly in this jet age overtaken by revolution, needs good educational system. Nigeria like other nations in the world has reached a stage in development when it must tackle the problem of defining its educational goals in terms of concepts, need and overhauling. This paper discusses challenges to implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE) as well as it affects Teachers preparation for the programme. It also focuses on some other problems militating the UBE programme; suggestion for the implementation process was also given.

Introduction

In realization of the role which education plays in national development, the government of Nigeria has ventured into various educational policies and programmes with the great expectation that, the felt socio – economic and political needs of the citizenry would be met. For instance, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced nationwide by the Federal Government of Nigeria in September 1979 with the major intention of taking care of the educational demands of Nigerians. Fafunwa (1986) remarked that a decade after the introduction of the UPE the educational outcomes showed that the national educational objectives were not fully realized due to certain national problems such as financial problems, insufficient competent teachers, overcrowded classrooms, narrow curriculum content and high rate of drop outs.

In response to the agitation for a more functional educational system, a new educational system known as the 6-3-3-4 was introduced nationwide in 1982 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The educational system stressed the point that a child shall spend six years in primary school, three years in Junior Secondary School, another three years in Senior Secondary School and four years in a tertiary institution. After a decade of the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, it was observed by educational analysts that there has been general lack of consistency in Nigeria's educational policies, the system and national objectives. This presupposes that the educational objectives of the 6-3-3-4 system of education have not been fully realized partly because of the inherent problems of the UPE which were not effectively tackled before the commencement of the new educational system.

Furthermore, poor implementation strategy led to the non – attainment of the national objectives of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. This further led to the agitation for a more functional educational system that is very much relevant to the socio economic, political and cultural backgrounds of Nigerians. Therefore, as a positive reaction to the yearnings of Nigerians the Federal government under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo introduced Universal Basic Education (UBE) IN 1999.

The fundamental aim is to get rid of all impediments to educational participation and extend educational provision of good quality to all categories of children and adults. The UBE programme is

distinctive in that it has widened the scope of basic education from the traditional primary level to include junior secondary education as well.

Like all other educational innovation, the successful implementation of UBE lies predominantly on the extent to which the teacher aspects are taken into consideration. Teachers are generally referred to as mediators of educational innovations. It is for this reason that the teacher is recognised worldwide as the most outstanding and significant factor that impact on learning process, especially in the school context. It is equally recognised that competent and dynamic teaching work force would ultimately produce and efficient and effective human resources for individual and national progress. Thus, in the design and delivery of the UBE programme, a great attention has been placed on preparing teachers to meet other challenges of quality educational delivery. Teacher preparation should include minimum standards for teacher education in institutions involved in teacher preparation, curricula, staffing and facilities.

This paper is an attempt at identifying the teacher as a critical factor in basic education delivery and other problems. It will discuss the various efforts being put in place to ensure the recruitment and deployment of good quality teachers in basic education institutions as envisaged by the UBE Act 2004. Furthermore, the paper will argue that our inability hitherto to effectively address such key issues as teacher recruitment, teacher retention and teacher professional development in the design and implementation of educational policy reform at the lower education level had been some of the critical factors that hindered educational progress in Nigeria. It will also identify the role of teacher education institutions in effective teacher preparation for the Universal Basic Education Programme.

Universal Basic Education Programme

The UBE programme is a reform measure, which is aimed at addressing inequality in educational opportunity at the basic level both in terms of access and quality. Specifically, the programme was introduced by the Federal Government in order to remove distortions and inconsistencies in basic education delivery and to reinforce the implementation of the National Policy on Education. These are in addition to providing greater access to and ensuring quality of basic education throughout the country.

The Federal Government was concerned that states and local governments which had the constitutional responsibility for basic education delivery, were unable to effectively drive, and ensure unhindered access to quality, basic education. Consequently, the government resorted to constitutional provision, which empowered it to set and maintain standards in education. The Federal Government enacted the compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004. Meanwhile, it is important to state that the UBE Act drew its power from section 18 (3) of the 1999 constitution, which enjoined government to provide free and compulsory basic education, as well as item 60 (c) of part 1 of the secondary schedule of the constitution, which conferred powers on the National Assembly to make laws with respect to setting minimum standards of education at all levels.

Above all, the constitution further provides that states and local government are the owners of basic education institutions and should therefore, be the managers of such institutions. However, the powers relating to the setting of minimum standards of all aspects of education in the country are rested with the Federal Government part (1) of the UBE Act states that, “without prejudice to the provision of item 30 of part II of the second Schedule and item 2(9) of the Fourth Schedule to the 1999 Constitution dealing with primary school education, the Federal Government’s intervention

under this Act shall only be an assistance to the states and local governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria”

We can conclude by saying the UBE is a nine year educational intervention programme by the Federal Government, which is designed to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty with the aim of stimulating and accelerating national development, political consciousness and national integration. The guidelines for operating the UBE programme recognise the need to build effective bridges and create linkages between government, civil society organizations, private providers and communities so that the provision of basic education shall be a collective responsibility.

Teachers Factor in the Implementation of UBE Programme

The teacher is a critical factor in any effort which is aimed at improving the quality of education within the context of the Universal Basic Education Programme. The present UBE arrangement has come with some unique features that are revolutionary and which have definite implications for the teacher. For instance, the extension of UBE to cover not only the primary but junior secondary education and Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE) has created a new set of demands on the teacher for the programme.

The UBE programme has recognised that the continual deepening of knowledge and skills of teachers is an integral part of the development of basic education in Nigeria. As Boyle, While and Boyle (2004:46), asserted, “One important means of achieving competitive advantages is the creation of conditions for the rapid acquisition of new knowledge and skills” in teaching profession. Across the world, teachers have been at the centre of education reform movement and teacher professional development has been a major focus of all systematic reform initiative in the education sector (Cuban 1990, Corcocan, 1995, Corcocan, Shieleds and Zucher, 1998).

It is equally being recognised that competent and dynamic teaching personnel would ultimately produce an equally efficient and effective human resources for national consumption. The teacher factor remains critical in student learning. What all this go to show is that, whatever resources that are deployed to improve education might not bring the desired result unless adequate provision is made for the training and professional development of teachers. Teacher’s professional development is thus, a necessary condition for effective teaching and learning in schools.

One basic element in teacher development is Continuing Professional Development (CPD), which is an on going (continuing) process through which the teacher is assisted to acquire, develop and refine the necessary tools for effective performance in a changing environment of practice.

The basic for Continuous Professional Development of teachers lies in the fact that whatever the initial education and training demands of the job, need to be complemented by continuing educational programmes that seek to update the teacher’s knowledge and enhance his/her competence and effectiveness in the teaching – learning enterprise.

It is a common knowledge that the pre- service given to teachers in training institutions does not fully equip them with all the requisite knowledge of the subject matter and skills to impact it throughout their careers as teachers. This is because knowledge is dynamic, complex and shifting (Hargreaves, 1994, 2003; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). As society changes in term of socio-economic and political landscapes, the role of teachers continues to become more transformed, as they have to continuously prepare learners for the ever-challenging and equally complex social world. Teachers must be subjected to constant training and re-training if they are to effectively and appropriately performed their difficult role as change agents.

Any emotional innovation that does not take into account the role of teachers in the change process is unlikely to yield any meaningful impact (Fullan, 2001). It is common knowledge that the Nigerian teacher had suffered from lack of requisite on the job training. Once in the classroom, a teacher was unlikely to attend any professional development programme probably throughout his/her teaching career. As a matter of fact, some teachers lack even the basic knowledge of government programmes such as basic education.

Teacher Preparation in the UBE Programme

Omotayo (2004) stated that in accordance with Section 9 (b) of the UBE Act, 2004, the Federal Government has approved in 2005 that 70% of the 2% of the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) dedicated for the UBE programme should be expended on three key activities of the UBE programme. These are (1) infrastructural development (70%), (2) textbooks and non – consumable instructional materials (15%) and (3) teacher professional development (15%). Funds for the Teacher Professional Development component must be utilized in the following distribution 60% in the primary 35% in junior secondary and 5% in the pre- primary education levels. Therefore, not only does the UBE recognize the need for professional development of teachers, but it has also earmarked a huge sum of funds for its implementations.

Teacher Professional Development

The emergency of the UBE programme has produced a dramatic change in teacher professional development as the teacher now has more access to variety of continued professional development programmes than ever before. It has made a provision to address the consistency problem of teacher quality and effectiveness through their continuous professional development. The aim of this gesture is to build and sustain capacity for teachers to effectively operate the programme and to motivate them through regular, short in service training, so that they become more committed and competent. In 2005 alone, the Federal Government had released the sum of N2.55 billion for training of teachers for the basic education institutions.

Consequently, in year 2005, 14,023 ECCDE teacher and care givers, 149,638 primary school teachers and 40,003 Junior Secondary teachers were trained on various methodologies of teaching effective school management, computer skills, HIV/AIDs awareness and improvisation of instructional materials, using the FGN – UBE intervention funds. Very recently, the National Teachers Institute (NTI) has also trained 145,000 primary school teachers, using the Millennium Development Goals funds. The training attempted to update knowledge and skills in four core subjects in primary schools, disseminate skills in improvisation of instructional materials, and finally on the understanding of participants on school –based assessment. From the reports received, the training was very successful and the teachers expressed a lot of gratitude.

Guidelines on the implementation of the teacher professional development component which centres solely on professionalization of teachers, were thus developed with active consultation of the State Universal Basic Education Boards and became effective in December, 2005. The guidelines place premium on training of classroom teachers rather than support personnel from the State Universal Basic Education Boards and Ministries of Education. It also specifically compels states to ensure that at least 75% of beneficiaries for professional development programmes under the UBE programme must be classroom teachers in primary (60%), junior secondary (35%) and pre – primary (5%) education levels. However, provision is also made for managers and other personnel of basic education institutions. In addition, the guideline indicates the regular nature of the training programme

for teachers and provided that as a minimum, every teacher must attend a professional development programme at least once in every three years. Thus, for the first time, teachers have become the epicentre of professional development.

To address the issue of quality and relevance of professional development programmes for teachers, the Universal Basic Education Commission has again taken two measures. First, it directed that only recognised teachers training institutions namely, colleges of education, institutes and faculties of education in universities and the National Teacher Institute (NTI) may provide such training using the Federal Government UBE intervention funds. For managers of basic education institutions, too, the guideline stipulates that only the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Ondo, may be engaged to offer its services for this category of staff. This is meant to ensure value for money and to reduce waste of resources that is dedicated for professional development of teachers.

Challenges of Teacher Preparation for Effective Implementation of the Programme Additional Disposition States

It is regrettable to state that majority of the states seem to be less concerned with implementing the teacher professional development component of the UBE programme. Implementation realities have shown that there still some missing gaps that needed to be filled in the matter of continuous teachers preparations by state using the Federal Government UBE intervention funds. For instance, since there was no clear policy that existed on continuous professional development of teachers in the country, some states were found to be exploiting the vague policy to provide 'training' through the use of what may be term as 'road side consultants' whose training package were without recourse to the quality omission to make financial gains from the UBE intervention funds.

Through regular monitoring mechanisms and consequent upon the belief in the centrality of proper retraining of teachers in the UBE programme, the Commission was able to uncover the fact that funds dedicated for continuous professional development of teachers were subjected to abuse, and if left unchecked, the overall objectives of setting aside this colossal amount of money for teacher development would be defeated. Consequently, the Commission concluded that a major issue in effectiveness of the utilization of the teacher professional development fund requires clear policy guidelines and strong coordination from the centre, so also is the type of programmes that would come under CPD which have to be supported by the UBE intervention funds.

Alongside these issues, majority of states keep funds for teachers training unutilized, despite repeated caution by the Commission. For instance, some states had utilized only 33% of the N2.55 billions allocated for teacher professional development in 2005 financial year (Tahir, 2004).

Laudable as this component of the UBE policy is, its implementation is problematic. The various monitoring reports of the UBE Commission on the implementation of the programme by state consistently indicate that the teacher professional development component is the least implemented. It seems plausible that many states are yet to recognise and appreciate the centrality of professional development of teachers in the UBE reform programme. Some states had even diverted funds dedicated to this component to infrastructural development in contravention of the existing law.

Review of the UBE 9 Year Curricula

A new 9-year basic education curriculum, comprising of 19 subjects, has been developed by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and approved by the National Council on Education as follows

- a. Eight core subjects and one elective subject from a list of four electives for primary 1-3 level
- b. 10 core subjects and one elective to be taken from a list of four elective subjects for primary 4-6 and
- c. 11 core subjects and not more than two electives to be taken from a list of five elective subjects for JSS 1-3

The council has also directed that the core curriculum should include Computer Studies at all levels and that thinking should be infused into the Cultural and Creative Arts. Here lies a challenge for teacher preparation, at both pre-service and in service stages. It means we need to streamline teachers' education curriculum so as to be in line with the new UBE curriculum and thereby ensures its relevance in the contemporary Nigerian education system

Teachers for Early Child Care and Development Education

ECCDE has been incorporated as an integral part of basic education. The UBE sharing formula has accordingly provided 5% of the matching grant to support this strand of basic education sub sector. Regrettably, teacher training institutions have largely neglected this strand in their training programmes. This being the case, few teachers are found for ECCDE and even fewer are indeed qualified to teach at that level. For UBE to effectively achieve its aim of enhancing standards and improving quality at the ECCDE level there is need for appropriate and sustained teacher preparation both at the pre-service and in-service levels.

Re-Focusing on Teacher's of Junior Secondary Schools

The greatest casualty in the distortion of the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 systems of education is the Junior Secondary School level. Over the years, we tend to teach a comprehensive six years of secondary education with a principal focus of producing students for university admission. Through this process, the pre – vocational aspect of the JSS, which is supposed to be the major focus of JSS education, became almost completely neglected. For this trend to be reversed there has to be competent teachers in sufficient number to implement the reform at the JSS level. For now, most universities focus their training on producing teachers for senior secondary schools to the detriment of the JSS level. This is a serious challenge confronting the UBE programme.

The Role of Teachers Education Institutions in Implementing the UBE Programme

For effective implementation of the teacher component of the UBE programme, teacher training institutions, have the responsibility of ensuring that

- (a) The right calibres of teachers are produced in sufficient quality for the basic education institutions. Teachers education institutions must provide technical support in carrying out needs assessment of teacher professional development, monitoring, supervision and inspection, for the implementation of the programme in particular, they need to adjust their curricula so as to be in line with the new 9-years basic education curriculum. Graduates of teachers' education institution need to be well trained so as to be capable in teaching the new curriculum. In addition, university teacher training programmes must

address the specific teaching needs in the Junior Secondary Schools, which has been neglected since the inception of the policy in 1982

- (b) Faculties and institutes of education need to collaborate with SUBEBs with a view to designing appropriate training packages for serving teachers on a continuous basis. In so doing, the universities themselves need to critically examine problem of curricula delivery, assessment, learning achievement, teacher competencies, etc, as they affect teacher performance in the classroom. In addition to that, since the role of inspectors and supervisors in ensuring quality basic education is becoming increasingly manifest and most of them are poorly trained and ill equipped to perform their expected roles, teacher education institutions need to organize specialized programmes for them in order to make them more effective in monitoring standards in basic education schools.

Other envisaged problems of UBE programme include:

1. Inaccurate Data for Planning

Inaccurate data for educational planning can constitute a threat to the envisaged benefit of UBE. Nigeria's literacy, according to Baikie (2000) literacy rate is estimated at 52% of the population and about 21 million children were of school going age as at year 2000. The disturbing scenario arising out of the quoted statistical information above is quite daunting in Nigeria. The problems of statistics for planning are associated with a number of factors. For example, the national populations' census which is expected to provide the most reliable data for educational planning and implementation has always been politicised. Therefore, more often than not educational planning in Nigeria has been based on projected statistical data is often inaccurate for educational planning.

2. Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding which crippled effective implementation of UPE and the 6-3-3-4 system of education is likely to affect the implementation of the UBE programmes. According to UBE Programme Planning and Implementation Document (2000), the sum of 500 million dollars was estimated for renovating the existing school structure in the whole country. This estimated amount does not include the cost of building new classroom structures. The fact of matter is that it may be difficult if not impossible for the government to allocate such huge amount of money to education.

3. Inadequate Supply of Facilities and Equipment

This is another envisaged problem of effective implementation of UBE programme and most of the existing structures are dilapidated are in a state of disrepair and most of school libraries and laboratories are ill equipped. Again, other educational related materials such as tables and chairs are either damaged or in short supply. According to Baikie (2000), the cost of providing essential educational facilities is about 300 million US dollars.

4. Inadequate Supply of Component Teachers

The UBE Implementation Committee (2000) estimated that about 1.2 million pupils will be registered for the scheme at a ratio of 1:40. This means that additional teachers will be required to cater for the number of registered students. However, the figures of primary schools pupils for the UBE indicate that there are about 21 million pupils enrolled in the schools in Nigeria in 1999/2000. By implication of this enrolment figures, about 84,270 trained teachers will be required to effectively

cater for the number of registered children. The question that can be raised from these destabilizing figures is that with the cost implication, is the government prepared to employ such large number of teachers?

5. Problem in Achieving UBE Objective

Implication of the UBE objectives is likely to suffer a great set back due to the huge financial demands involved. UBE scheme is capital intensive and unless the Federal Government is financially committed to the project implementation might be ineffective. Effective feed back of the UBE programme is also very important. This aspect can be rendered ineffective in view of poor communication system and shortage of trained personnel. It should be noted at this point that, the attainment of the objectives of any educational system depends to a large extent, on effective implementation strategy.

6. Poor Monitoring and Evaluation System

Quality control is a must in the design and implementation process. Monitoring and evaluation of UBE programme should be a normal practice of Ministries of Education and should be carried out in a highly professional manner. This should be related to the issue of full professional status of planning and research unit of the ministry and other educational policy implementation agencies at all tiers of government. Ironically, the monitoring and evaluation system under the UBE programme was very ineffective. This ineffectiveness is capable of thwarting effective implementation of UBE programme objectives in Nigeria.

7. UBE Programme and National Development

Nations of the world have now recognized and accepted education as powerful instrument of national development. In view of this, investment in education and training has also been recognised as one of the key conditions for a competitive and cohesive society and national development. National development as viewed by Harbinson and Myers (1964) is the socio- economic and political advancement attained by a particular country within a given period of time, measurable against an acceptable global standard. The UBE programme if properly implemented will foster and facilitate national development in the socio-economic and political realms of Nigeria as discussed below:

8. Economic Development

Economic development suggests that developing nations realize short cuts to industrialization and national development by the wide spread provision of education which is capable of raising the level of scientific knowledge which is an essential factor in economic development. Economic development as it relates to the UBE programme is reflected in the growing recognition that investment in both formal and informal education and training which will provide enhanced skills, knowledge, attitudes and motivation necessary for socio-economic development. Therefore, the UBE scheme if properly implemented will contribute directly to the growth of national income by improving the skills and productive capacity of the labour force.

Another function which the UBE scheme is expected to perform is the imparting of functional skills to the youth. The acquired skills will enable them to participate productively in the economy of the country for national development. The outcome of the study carried out by Taiwo (1983) on education and productivity in some selected farmers shows that educated farmers have higher

productivity than the uneducated ones. It should be transformed to industrial nations through the means of functional education.

9. Social Development

The UBE programme if properly implemented is expected to play the function of socialization and integration of the entire population. Again, the curriculum content of the UBE is expected to inculcate in the learners the appropriate values and attitudes that will foster social goals of living together and working together for national development. UBE is also expected to prepare the youths to play dynamic and constructive parts in the development of a society for the future progress which is measured in terms of human well being. UBE is therefore expected to inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community and also help the youths to accept the values to the nature and diversity of Nigeria as a country.

10. Political Development

The political culture of Nigeria is still unrefined, although there has been tremendous improvement as from the second republic. In a country like Nigeria with socio-economic and political differences, it may be difficult to find general agreement on the set of values which can help solve some of the pressing political problems. For instance, the political system of Nigeria is subject to severe strains emanating from fears of tribalism, mistrust, suspicion, insecurity, victimization and prejudices. The UBE is therefore expected to instill relevant political values in the youths which will help to eradicate such problems and help to inculcate values such as tolerance, fair play, social justice, integrity in public and private life and a strong condemnation of political violence

Conclusion

This paper has so far identified gaps in the practice of professional development of teachers for basic education institutions in Nigeria in the wake of the UBE policy reform. From the discussion thus far, it has become obvious that there is lack of coherent and articulated policy framework for teacher recruitment, retention and professional development. Believing that the qualities of teachers have a tremendous impact on learning process and outcome of the UBE programme propelled the compelling need for teacher professional growth. This being the case, a lot of emphasis as expressed through policy pronouncement and financial backing, has been made by the Federal Government to ensure that the right calibre of teachers are recruited, retained and continuously retrained in basic education institutions throughout Nigeria.

As laudable as these efforts are, the implementation of the teacher component of UBE reform programme is still a major problem. The various monitoring reports of the UBE commission on the implementation of the programme by states consistently indicate that the teacher professional development component is the least implemented. It seems plausible that many states are yet to recognise and appreciate the centrality of professional development of teachers in the UBE reform programme.

Recommendations

- (1) Government at the various levels and its accredited agencies should intensify efforts in the area of public enlightenment and social mobilization on the importance of education to individuals for national development

- (2) The curriculum of instruction for UBE should be designed to meet the pressing demands of the 21st century through skills acquisition and computer literacy
- (3) Managers of UBE programme should be adequately equipped with accurate statistical data for planning and implementation of UBE objectives for national development
- (4) Adequate funding is necessary for effective implementation of the UBE objectives
- (5) Adequate supply of trained teachers and educational facilities in quality and quantity should be guaranteed
- (6) Monitoring and evaluation of UBE programme should be carried out periodically and constantly in a professional manner
- (7) There is the need for collaborative action, especially between the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and other related civil society organizations
- (8) State and Local Governments should rise up to the challenge by advocating for the right thing to be done
- (9) Universities and other post – secondary education teacher training institutions must also rise up to the challenges by development of relevant degree, diploma and certificate courses that are in line with the new UBE circular for Nigeria of today and the future.

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