

# UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION: THE PANACEA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Jimoh - Kadiri, S. O. (Mrs) and Osagie, C I. (Mrs)*

## Abstract

The study examined Universal Basic Education as a panacea for national development through vocational education awareness in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (1998) stated that the Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. In order to achieve this, the government introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) among others. For effective national development to be achieved in a country, it is necessary to inculcate into her citizens the right values, skills and knowledge which will help them promote and sustain cohesion and make progress and this can best be got from vocational education. This paper, therefore examined Universal Basic Education and national development, contribution of vocational education to Universal Basic Education and national development, problems militating against the successful implementation of UBE as a panacea for national development. Suggestions would be made on how some, if not all of the problems, could be solved.

## Introduction

The greatest investment any country can engage in is Education. Through education the necessary skills are acquired to help a nation take a giant stride in the world of development. The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. (National Policy on Education, 1998). In order to take education to the door steps of her citizens, the Federal Government of Nigeria has introduced some programmes such as the following:

Universal Primary Education (UPE) 1976 "

National Mass Literacy Programme (1982)

Nomadic Education (1989)

Universal Basic Education (1999)

UBE was formally launched by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1999 in Sokoto. In his launching address to the nation, he emphasized 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 continuity of this nation (Nigeria) as one, respect for the constitution and the importance of democracy, among other things are the inculcation of the sense of dignity of work and moral uprightness as well as respect of others. (Ngada, 2001).

It is believed that through UBE the problem of educational imbalance will be solved and also it will help in achieving the objective of primary education in Nigeria. According to Moses (1999) "Sokoto State was chosen for the launching because the State currently has the lowest primary school enrolment." **What is UBE?**

The UBE Programme which was launched at Sokoto on the 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1999 is a free and compulsory education for every child in the country. It is therefore a step in the right direction and timely. The Federal government noted that the literacy rates by gender and region showed wide disparities between the North and the South, therefore UBE is meant to redress these inequalities. With adequate planning, it is hoped that a proper implementation of the UBE programme will contribute towards national development, since earlier educational programmes were abandoned by subsequent administrations.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) includes the following six main programmes:-

1. Programmes/initiatives for early childhood care and socialization.
2. Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills especially for adults.
3. Special programme for nomadic populations.
4. Out of school, non-formal programme for up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons

- who left school before acquiring the basic needed for life-long learning.
5. Non-formal skill and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education.
  6. The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school (FGN, 2003).

UBE is meant to cover the first nine years of formal education, that is six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary school. It also cater for adult literacy and inaccessible groups through non-formal educational programmes.

### **Aims of UBE**

The goal of the UBE programme is to universalize access to basic education, eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time and to provide a conducive learning environment.

The aims of the UBE programme as stipulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN 2000:2) are as follows:-

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
2. The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
3. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
4. Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Although, it is the Federal Government that gives the guidelines and policy direction in education, the UBE programme is on the concurrent legislative list in which all tiers of government share responsibility.

### **What is National Development?**

Although there are different definitions of national development in the literature, the following definitions need to be looked into:

Izuegbu (1995) defined national development as the sum total of all the processes by which a nation is transformed from primitivity to contemporary civilization.

Okoro (1999) defined national development as a progressive transformation of economic, social and political structure of a society from relatively less complex, less efficient and less desirable forms to relatively more complex, more efficient and more desirable forms.

Bamgbose (1991), opined that national development is the full realization of human potential and maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all.

For the purpose of this paper, we shall identify three basic factors that will determine the national development of any nation as:

- (a) The economic conditions.
- (b) The educational provision; and
- (c) The political state of affairs.

Of all these factors, education is the most essential, since the use of any resources, political or economic and the effectiveness of these resources depend on the human factor. For this human factor to be developed, education is very vital. Therefore the role of the universal basic education in national development cannot be overemphasized.

National development can also be seen as the level of technological advancement, the extent to which the country's economy can feed the citizens, the quality of social services rendered like, education, justice, transportation, health, the political climate, (in terms of the degree of freedom of participation) the

extent to which political policies are generated from within and in the interest of the people.

### **UBE and National Development**

Basic education is meant to equip individuals skills, attitudes and knowledge in such a way as to enable them to:

- (1) Live meaningful and fulfilling lives.
- (2) Contribute to the development of the society.
- (3) - Derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society.
- (4) Discharge their civic obligations competently.

UBE helps to socialize the growing generation into values, beliefs, behaviour, skills and knowledge, which are generally compatible with the developing national personality. In the Nigerian context, basic education includes primary, junior secondary, nomadic education and adult literacy. It also includes a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners acquire functional literacy. When UBE is nurtured, it yields economic return, contributes to a nation's future wealth and development. It also serves as the foundation for sustainable lifelong learning.

For effective national development to be achieved in a country it is important to inculcate into her citizens the right values and acquisition of desirable skills and attitudes which will help them promote and sustain cohesion and make progress.

### **Contribution of Vocational Education to UBE and National Development**

Obinne (1999) defined Vocational Education as that aspect of education which provides the recipient with the basic knowledge and practical skills needed for entry into the world of work as employees or as self employed. It nurtures skills that are necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development and thus builds a self-reliant nation. The Universal Basic Education will give the individuals the basic foundation towards self dependence and self sufficiency by equipping them with the knowledge that would eventually give them gainful employment, where they can contribute their quota towards the development of their nation.

Proper human development through training in Vocational Education will bring about an increase in the supply of highly educated people, which has become the absolute prerequisite for social and economic development in modern societies.

The Vocational Education for UBE emphasizes on the development of the individual towards developing himself on his local environment for a healthy and harmonious living. For a society to progress, grow and survive in the modern world there is need for such a society to be "educated". The highly educated man has become the central resource of today's society and the supply of such men have become the true measure of a country's economic, military and political potentials.

According to Udeolisa (1999) "It is quite obvious that the Nigerian economy is fast growing, and therefore there is need for a geometrical increase in the quantity and quality of skilled work force and experts in various fields of human endeavour". The quantity and quality of the needed skilled work force can only be got through vocation education and UBE.

The relevant basic education emphasized by the UBE programme should provide vocational education that will give the individuals the necessary basic foundation toward self sufficiency by equipping them with the knowledge and skills that will help them gain employment.

Since up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic needed for life-long learning is one of the six main programmes of the UBE, it is important to stress here that the recipients of these skills will become self-reliant and be able to fulfill *his/her* duties as citizens.

The role of vocational education in national development and survival are numerous. These include:-

- Training of manpower of a variety of the nation's socio/economic sectors.
- Development of occupational competence
- Acquisition of practical and entrepreneurial skills for self employment.
- Enhancement of technological growth and production of a self-reliant society.

Maintenance of economic, social well being for the survival of the society.  
Production of teachers of vocational skills with marked flexibility, versatility and competence  
(Obinne, 1999). \*

### **Problems Militating Against the Successful Implementation of UBE Programme**

Most educational programmes in Nigeria failed because of improper planning and implementation, and the Universal Basic Education programme is not an exemption. Some of the problems militating against the successful implementation of UBE Programme are as follows:-

- 1. Unqualified Teachers** Most of the teachers available in our schools today are not well trained. Some of them have no knowledge of education at all.
- 2. Parental Problems** Most parents are not willing to carry out their responsibilities as parents. They failed in areas such as lack of supervision of their children, over dependence on teachers for both academic and non-academic work of their children and inadequate guidance and counseling.
- 3. Society Attitude** The society at large no longer value education as before, instead more recognition is given to monetary or material achievement. To many Nigerians, "money is everything".
- 4.** Other problems that hinder the successful implementation of the UBE Programme include inadequate funding, facilities and equipment, lack for dedication and commitment on the part of both students and teachers.

### **The Way Forward**

In order to solve most of the problems militating against the successful implementation of UBE, the following measures are recommended:-

- 1.** The parents/guardians of the children that the programme is specifically meant for should be encouraged to make their children available in schools. This can be done through public enlightenment campaign programmes to educate people on the importance of UBE.
- 2.** The Nigerian National Policy on Education (1981) has recommended that the minimum qualification for teachers in the primary school in Nigeria should be NCE. Therefore, for the success of the UBE programme, government should make sure that no teacher below NCE is allowed to teach at the primary school level,
- 3.** The general public should be made to understand that, the UBE is not a solely government project. Rural and urban communities should not only be educated about the programme, but should also be made participants. This will bring about a sense of belongingness and ownership, Organizations such as the parent-teacher association, educational committees in the villages and traditional rulers should be mobilized to get involve.
- 4.** The UBE Programme should be constantly reviewed and evaluated in its curricular content, personnel, funding and infrastructure. Problems in any area should be promptly tackled.
- 5.** The right caliber of people to train teachers are teachers themselves. Therefore, to make UBE effective, the quality of teaching and the welfare of teachers involved should be addressed. This will encourage the teachers and make them put in their very best in their teaching " profession.

### **Conclusion**

Basic Education is the foundation for sustainable lifelong learning. Since UBE is directed at solving the problem of education imbalance and also achieving the objective of primary education in Nigeria, it is hoped that a proper implementation of the programme will contribute towards national development. Attention should be given to skill acquisition through Vocational education, as it would enhance self-employment.

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