

CONSTRAINTS ON NIGERIAN UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Universal Basic Education scheme was launched on September 30, 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. However, it was launched and being implemented amid inadequacies. These inadequacies act as constraints to the realization of its set goals. This paper, apart from stating what constitutes Universal Basic Education (UBE), also identified the constraints, which include among others inadequate planning. Suggestions like review of the scheme that would assist to eliminate or reduce the constraints to barest minimum and make for proper implementation and better realization of its goals were made.

Introduction

Education has been adopted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) "as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development"¹ (FRN, 1998). The formulation of the National Policy on Education was premised on this government position among other things. Section 7(5) of the National Policy on Education stipulates that Universal Basic Education, in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities, to be provided for all citizens is one of the various measures to be used by government to implement the policy (FRN, 1998). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria did not compromise Universal Basic Education when it states in section 18 that Government policy shall be directed towards ensuring equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels as well as eradicating illiteracy. To this end government shall as and when practicable provide:

- a. Free, compulsory and universal primary education;
- b. Free secondary education;
- c. Free university education; and
- d. Free adult literacy programmes (FRN, 1999).

It is, perhaps, in recognition of the role of UBE in national development, and in pursuit of the 1990 Jomtien Declaration of Education for all citizens by the year 2000, and in compliance with the group of E-9 Nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy that made the UBE to be launched in Nigeria. It was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on September 30, 1999 in Sokoto without a blue print. UBE confers free and compulsory education on all Nigerian children during their first nine years of schooling which covers primary school education and three years of junior secondary school. The UBE objectives include developing in the citizens a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion, (FRN, 2000). The realization of the objectives of the programme would be a milestone in achieving national development through education. The programme launched in 1999 without a blue print, reveals pockets of evidences that certain developments and achievements had taken place over the four years that it came into existence. There has been ample persistent dissatisfaction at the rate and level of programme implementation and achievements. In addition, there are factors that prevent the proper implementation and realization of the objectives of UBE programme and thus national development. To this end, this paper sought to provide answers to the following questions;

- (i) What are the constituents of UBE programme for national development?
- (ii) What factor pose constraints to UBE and its implementation for national development?
- (iii) How can the constraints on UBE be redressed?

Constituents of UBE for National Development

The UBE launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on September 30, 1999 which took off in October 2000, is different from the universal primary education of the Western Nigerian of 1955, Eastern Nigeria of 1957, Federal Government of Nigeria of 1976 and the Unity Party of Nigeria States of 1979. Its difference from the past UPE schemes is that, it offers free and compulsory education to

all Nigerian children for their first nine years of schooling, in essence, it covers the first six years of primary school and the three years of the junior secondary school. The UBE programme sets out to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency);
- 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;
- 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 (FRN, 2000:2).

To be able to properly achieve the above aims, more appropriate approaches will have to be developed to improve the state of the following: Public enlightenment and social mobilization, for full community involvement; data collection and analysis; planning, monitoring, evaluation; teachers: their recruitment, education, training, retraining, motivation; infrastructural facilities; enriched curricula, textbooks and instructional materials; improved funding; and, management of the entire process (FRN, 2000:4).

In addition, a sequential implementation plan that commenced in 2000/2001 academic session was put in place. Primary one of that academic session were the cohorts. The document believes that during the first nine years of the programme, state and local governments will progressively improve the conditions of teaching and learning in their schools by improving teacher quality, up-dating infrastructural facilities and enhanced availability of instructional materials. However, it is observable that attempts by government to improve on the conditions of teaching and learning, so that, we can better achieve the goals of UBE has been met with constraints which is the concern of the next section,

Constraints on UBE and its Implementation for National Development

The implementation guidelines for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme contains a number of lapses and inadequacies. These lapses and inadequacies are parts of the constraints in the process of executing the guidelines of the programme. These are:

Inadequate Planning

The programme was launched in 1999 but the blue print only came out in 2000. This suggests lapses from inadequate planning.

Planning is the foundation on which management practice is built (Oyedijo, 1983). These could be the reason why Wokocha (2000) claimed that UBE took off on a shaky foundation. Again, the nature of planning which to Oyedijo (1983) is the process whereby specific objectives are set and detailed resources together with ways or methods of accomplishing these objectives are established is lacking or inadequate in most cases in the implementation guidelines. A good case in point is section 20 where it is planned that a strong shift to strategic planning in the education sector would be made (FRN, 2000). However, the document did not proceed to say when and how it will be done.

Another case, is section 46 of the document - which points out that "A sequential implementation plan will also be worked out and vigorously pursued to ensure an early, complete mainstreaming of non-formal and adult literacy programme into UBE". Four years after take off, of the UBE, sequential implementation plan has not been worked out neither has completed mainstreaming of non-formal and adult literacy programme prosecuted. One may be tempted to ask is four years not early enough for a programme that has a gestation period of nine years?

These planning inadequacies and lapses are constraints, which will definitely inhibit the attainment of the goals for which UBE programme was mounted.

Lack of Commitment

When one calls to mind the failure of the Universal Primary Education programme and other governmental programmes meant for the citizens, then launching of a programme and enacting of its enabling laws as done by the National Assembly for the UBE are not indicators of government commitment. One observes, that in the implementation of the UBE programme government has not-matched words with action. That the government, is yet, to put in place strategies that will make-it difficult for another government that may come to power in future to discountenance UBE programme suggests lack of commitment. Again, if government is committed to the programme, she would had defined the word "free" in the document or what constitutes "free". Nevertheless, the free aspect of the UBE is only seen in the form of non-payment of tuition fees in the public schools. Since parents are providing books, uniforms, meals, pay examination fees and different forms of levies, the programme could best be adjudged to be partially free for public school pupils. However, for private school pupils, it is in no way free because they even pay more types of levies in addition to the tuition fee they pay.

It is observable that mobilization efforts by government is at its lowest ebb. The local communities that were supposed to be used for mobilization have not been used. Till date, the migrant fishermen's children are yet to avail themselves of the UBE opportunities.

Furthermore, compulsion of the programme suggests that one form of punishment should be meted out to the child who refuse to go to school or to the parents or the community under the UBE programme. But, this is non-existent currently. This definitely puts the compulsion aspect of the programme to question.

Physical Infrastructural Inadequacies

Before the advent of UBE programme the Nigerian primary and secondary schools were faced with the dearth of infrastructural facilities, (FRN 2000). The schools were adorned with inadequate dilapidated buildings, unavailability of laboratories and workshops and other facilities that could usher in effective teaching and learning (Farayola and Vadima, 2001). In addition, one also observes, that, most of our secondary schools do not have typing pools and shorthand laboratories for the teaching of business studies at junior secondary school level. The above claims still hold for the schools, four years after commencement of the programme. In fact, Falola (2003) reported that the public primary schools system in the country are dead. The inability of government to provide adequate infrastructural facilities or revive the schools suggest that she is faced with financial problem. There is no way the infrastructural facilities on the ground can help to properly implement UBE and ensure meaningful attainment of its aim.

Manpower Shortage

The importance of manpower in terms of quantity and quality in the successful implementation of the UBE cannot be over-emphasized. There is no doubt that the school system is faced with shortage of staffs for effective teaching and learning. It is likely in appreciation of this and the fact that government expected pupil population explosion that led to the introduction of pivotal programme for training of senior secondary school certificate holders as pivotal teachers. The method of their admission, place and mode of their preparation puts a lot of questions to their quality upon graduation. These crops of teachers will not meaningful assist in successful implementation of the UBE.

Three years to the UBE becoming operational at the junior school level, one observes that no frantic efforts are being made by government to address the shortage of teachers at that level of implementation of the programme. One also observed that there are no reasonable training and development provisions made for primary and junior secondary school teachers before and during the commencement of the programme, so their likelihood of knowing and facing the challenge of UBE as it concerns them is remote.

Attitudinal Constraint

According to Soyode (1983), many Nigerian workers in public employment have "poor work ethics", that they arrive late to work, leave before closing time even when they arrived late, in the

hours during which the worker is expected to work the commitment to the job is half-hearted. He further pointed out that the wrong attitude to work gives birth to low productivity and equally breeds other ills like corruption.

This behaviour of the Nigerian public worker observed twenty years ago, holds true today for the public Nigerian teacher. Today, we have more of teacher hawkers, who are not prepared to teach rather, they inflate continuous assessment scores, collect money from students in place of craft and assist them to pass examinations. These actions are attempts to cover up the inadequacies in their teaching and learning process. This attitude of most school teachers would likely hamper the successful implementation of the programme.

Suggestions

The constraints identified above hinder the successful implementation of UBE programme. This would likely make achievements of its goals unrealistic. To make the UBE programme and its implementation meaningful and goals realized, the following are suggested:

- (i) The government should hold a conference of all stakeholders in UBE programme, to evaluate and review the programme in terms of its planning, management, marketing and finance. The conference among other things should also come out with how the programme could be made enduring as well as how strategic planning could be used to further the goals of UBE;
- (ii) For the programme to be free in its true sense, government should provide uniforms, books and meals for all pupils and equally pay all forms of fees;
- (iii) The programme should be extended to pupils who attend private schools;
- (iv) One of the possible way of changing teachers' poor attitude to work is through resuscitation of the supervisory unit of the Ministry of Education. Empowering head teachers and the supervisors to discipline teachers in accordance with existing public service rules;
- (v) The pivotal teachers programme should be stopped. While current students should be transferred to the nearest college of education for grooming;
- (vi) Teachers should be recruited from the pool of unemployed NCE graduates that abound in the country;
- (vii) Since the implementation of the UBE at the JSS level is about 3 years from now, government should ensure that sufficient teachers are provided before that time. In addition, laboratories workshops and typing pools should be put in place;
- (viii) To properly finance UBE programme and provide the necessary infrastructure, government should adopt the following:
 - a. All Federal Government houses across the country that were supposed to be sold as a result of the monetisation of fringe benefits policy should not be sold. Rather, they should be given to estate firms to manage for the purpose of regularly financing the UBE;
 - b. Sixty percent of the value of proceeds from the sales of vehicles from the monetisation of fringe benefits should also be channeled into UBE;
 - c. The Educational Tax Fund provision for primary and secondary schools should be used for provision of instructional materials as well as training and development of teachers through seminars, workshops and what have you; and
 - d. Launching of appeal fund at the local government, state and federal levels for implementation of UBE;
- (ix) The training and development of UBE teachers to enhance teacher quality should be left with the colleges of education that have mandate to produce primary and junior secondary school teachers in the country.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper identified the clog in the wheel of progress of UBE and its implementation that will make its desired objectives not to be achieved. These constraints include attitudinal behaviours of Nigerian teachers. One cannot conclude this paper without pointing out that managerial factor that was not mentioned in this paper could equally hamper proper implementation of UBE. Finally, it is

the belief of this paper that if the alternative or additional sources of fund are adopted lack of finance in implementing UBE will be a thing of the past. Therefore, it is hoped that the implementation of the suggestions contained in this paper will likely adequately lead to the realization of the goals of UBE, and hence, attainment of national development.

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