

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE CHALLENGES BEFORE THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION COMMISSION (UBEC)

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Abstract

Effective management of Primary Education in Nigeria must be put in place as part of the challenges imposed by the global issue of Education for all, Unfortunately the management of Primary Education has been chaotic during the last three decades. In search of effective management. Primary Education changed hands from one agency to the other, and in the process there were conflicts of interest among the managers and operators of the education system. This paper has highlighted the various problems of the previous agencies that managed Primary Education, and the challenges before the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). It also gave proposals that will enable UBEC perform efficiently and effectively in order to reposition Primary Education.

Introduction

Nations that hope to survive on the world stage in this new millennium will not be able to do so unless they give Primary Education a major priority on their political, social and economic agenda. This is so because Primary Education occupies a highly significant position in the wheel of education in any given nation. Effective management of Primary Education must therefore be put in place as part of the challenges imposed by the global issue of Education for ALL. Egbo (2003) has this to say about the general condition of education in Nigeria.

In the case of Nigeria which remains an educational power house in the region despite the myriad of challenges facing the system. The post-independence educational expansion is best categorized under three periods. The period of exploration (1960 - 1970), the period of growth (1970 -1980), and the period of crises (1980 -present).

The phenomenal growth between 1970 - 1980 remains unparalleled at any time in our history. This phenomenal growth has its implications, One of such implications was that Primary Education became surrounded with controversy and its management became chaotic. This trend has continued unabated, while the management of Primary Education changed hands from one agency to the other.

Management of Primary Education in Nigeria: An Overview

The period 1970 - 2005 witnessed unprecedented efforts and changes geared towards the improvement of Primary Education. Prior to this period the management of Primary Education had changed hands from mission to regional government. Under the regional governments, there were new policies on education matter. This led to the ambitiously planned Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the Western region from 1952 - 1954. Eastern region also introduced the UPE in 1955. This educational development increased in financial burden on the region. For instance the UPE in the East soon became abortive due to inadequate planning and preparation.

By 1979, Primary Education was constitutionally transferred to Local Government Council. During the years (1979 - 1983) education was over politicized as those appointed to oversee the affairs of education were political appointees who showed little or no commitment to the success of Primary Education. This arrangement led to the eventual decay and paralysis of the Primary Education system in the hands of local governments. This management crisis led to government taking decisive action by setting up the National Primary Education Commission in 1988. This gave Primary Education a lease of life as the commission made tremendous impact in every part of the country. Consequently, arrears of staff salaries were cleared, teacher's salaries were paid regularly, new classroom buildings and infrastructural materials were provided.

In 1991, the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) was scrapped because of administrative and personality conflicts within and outside the commission. The key managers of Primary Education at that time were more interested in the money released by the Federal Government than being committed to the cause of Primary Education. This gave rise to conflicts within themselves on how to use the money. Under this circumstance Primary Education fund was not properly utilised. In fact what seemed to be a fraud in NPEC could have been averted with better supervision by the Ministry of Education. Consequently, the management of Primary Education was handed back to Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) as required by constitution.

Nevertheless, the old signs of deterioration soon returned as corrupt Local Government politicians vandalized the resources allocated to Primary Education. The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) embarked on industrial action in 1992 that lasted almost a month, following which Decree 96 of 1993 heralded the second advent of National Primary Education Commission in Nigeria. The NPEC decree 96 of 1993 gave NPEC the statutory function of securing and managing Primary Education Fund and to disburse same to LGEA's and state Primary Education Boards.

In 1999, Local Government operatives and stale Governments mounted pressure on the new democratic government using political party machineries available to regain control of Primary Education. It was at the council of states meeting on 25th August 1999, that the president announced that the management of Primary Education including payment of teachers salaries has been transferred to state Governments. The NUT viewed this development with consternation and lent support to the relevance of NPEC.

The question of how to govern educational systems or who should control education remains a perennial problem in many parts of the world. The problem appears to be even more profound in Nigeria where the Federal Government which by and large controls education (along with states and local governments) appears to be overwhelmed and at crossroads in terms of what to do with the system. (Egbo, 2005).

This historical overview of the management of Primary Education shows that four different agencies managed Primary Education between 1991 and 1999 -NPEC - Local Government, - NPEC - State Government. The reasons for these changes include mismanagement of fund, conflict of interest between the managers, and undue political influence.

The question of which body should be responsible for administering this most important level of education has been laid to rest through the enactment of the Universal Basic Education Act 2004, by the National Assembly. This Act provided for the establishment .of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Stale Universal Basic Education Boards, (SUBEB) and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) to manage Primary Education for the effective implementation of the UBE programme. It is obvious that there is renewed hope of Primary Education getting on track again.

Primary Education is now more focused with the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission through the UBE Act, 2004 The UBE Act 2004 provides for compulsory free Universal Basic Education for all children of primary and junior secondary school age in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The UBE bill was passed into law by the House of Representatives on 5th December, 2003 and by the senate on 15th March, 2004. Section I, Part I of this Act states:

Without prejudice to the prevision of item 30 of Part II of the second schedule and item 2 (a) of the fourth schedule to the 1999 constitution dealing with primary school education, the Federal Government's intervention under the Act shall only be an assistance to the state and Local Governments in Nigeria for the purpose of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria.

The significance of this is that the major responsibility for primary school education lies with local and state governments while the Federal Government Supervises and oversees to ensure uniformity and to maintain standards (Maduwesi 2005). The implication of this is that primary and secondary education are so basic and crucial that they require the collaboration and attention of the three tiers of government. Section (2) Part I of the UBE Act 2004, states:

There is established a body known as the Universal Basic Education Commission (In this Act referred to as the " Commission")) which shall have a Board

It is hoped that the provisions of this Act has put to an end the spate of spurious demands for the transfer of the management { or fund) of Primary Education to either local or state governments. The Federal Government in a bid to ensure the success of UBE, perhaps considered the need to have national management system like the defunct NPEC whose successes restored public confidence in Primary Education. This will ensure a democratic control with the SUBEB and LGEA also put in place.

It is expected that the UBEC will reposition Primary Education through the implementation of the UBE

programme. In order to achieve this, UBEC has been assigned various functions as stated in the UBE Act, 2004.

Functions of The Universal Basic Education Commission

The Functions of UBEC are encompassing reflecting the enormity of expectations from the commission.

The following Functions Among Others were Assigned to the Commission

1. Formulating policy guidelines for the successful UBE programme in the Federation;
2. Receiving Fund from Federal Government and allocating same to all relevant agencies implementing the UBE programme;
3. Prescription of minimum standards for basic education throughout Nigeria;
4. Enquiring and advising Federal Government in the funding and orderly development of basic education in Nigeria;
5. Collating and preparing, periodic master plans for the development of basic education in Nigeria, including areas of possible intervention in the provision of adequate basic education facilities;
6. co-ordinating the implementation of the universal basic education related activities in collaboration with non-governmental and multi lateral agencies.
7. Carrying out such other activities that are relevant and conducive to the discharge of its functions under this Act.

Impediments to the Implementation of UBEC Mandate -

The basic education programme is likely to bring about problems in magnitude never experienced before, in the following areas- enrolment, teacher factors, infrastructure, management of resources, allocation of fund, and political influence. In this paper, we shall confine our comments to two major issues that are likely to constitute an impediment to the UBEC mandate — Funding and political issues.

Funding

The effective implementation of any educational programme rests on the availability of adequate financial resources. Maduewesi (2005) has this to say.

In 1998 State Government contribution to funding primary education was 13 percent, to the Federal Governments 14 percent while the Local Government bore the brunt by putting in 73. percent 35.4% of Education expenditure was spent on Primary Education spending on primary education has sharply declined while that for tertiary education has increased.

It is necessary to state that Primary Education cannot function without sufficient funds. There is need to ensure adequate budgetary allocation for this level of education. Anukam (1994) emphasizes that adequate funding is fundamental to all other development issues in education. Fund is needed for the provision of equipment and infrastructure, payment of teachers salaries, and general running costs.

The USE Act 2004, Provides that Funds shall be Mobilized from Different Sources as Follows: from

- (i) Federal Government block grant of not less than 2% of its consolidated revenue fund.
- (ii) Fund contributions in form of federal guaranteed credits; and
- (Hi) Local and international donor grants.

No system can function effectively without adequate financial support, no matter how noble its objective. Related to the issue of adequate funding is the issue of efficient management of funds (Egbo, 2005). Misappropriation of fund and massive over expenditures were identified as problems which led to the failure of previous agencies in managing Primary Education. UBEC is therefore expected to ensure financial discipline.

Political Dispensation

One major issue that is an impediment to implementing the UBEC mandate is political influence. In

this country, political interest and sentiments have always taken precedence over all

professional considerations. Some politicians elected into office have no goals to achieve other than to recover the money they spent on their election into office. Yunusa and Abubakar observe that:

Many of the laudable educational programme such as UBE are unfortunately sidelined due to inconsistency in government policies. For instance, UPE started in 1976 but completely stopped when a new civilian government took over".

According to Maduewesi (2005), the issues surrounding the implementation of the UBE some 25 years ago, under the name of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) are still very much alive today. However, this time around the issues and approaches are more focused as the responsibility of implementing the UBE has been effectively shared by all tiers of government. It is believed that UBEC will rise up to the challenges.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, the UBE programme provides a welcome and unique opportunity to reposition Primary Education. The establishment of UBEC through the UBE Act of 2004, has been described as a step in the right direction. The challenges before UBEC are enormous. It is generally feared that two major issues funding and political influence will constitute impediments to implementing the UBEC mandate. The UBEC would not make the desired impact unless Primary Education is properly funded and political interests controlled.

Recommendations

- * Adequate funds should be allocated to the implementation of UBE .
- * Federal Government should monitor the use of funds provided.
- * The full intervention of Federal Government in Primary Education delivery must be allowed to flourish by allowing the provisions of the UBE Act to be implemented.
- * Key officers in UBEC should disburse funds to states and Local Government in accordance with the provisions of the Act.
 - * Change in government or minister of education should not necessarily lead to suspension or cancellation of good policies. Changes destabilise the system and should not be made unless it is absolutely necessary (Yakubu, 1998).
- * UBEC must ensure that states and local governments contribute their quota in respect of funds.
- * Frequent changes in the Chief executives of UBEC should be discouraged as this is unhealthy for continuity in administration.

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