

# UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) AS A BASIS FOR LIFE-LONG EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC RELIANCE

*Mr. Pius Adakole Ijiga*

## **Abstract**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched in Nigeria in 1999 to provide basic and functional skills of literacy, numeracy and other essential skills needed for life and living. This paper takes a position that the knowledge and skills provided by the UBE constitute the foundation for life-long education and economic reliance. Since it is the foundation that carries the super-structure, it thus recommends that the programme be properly implemented for it to yield the expected dividends.

## **Introduction**

As a social instrument of change and the bedrock of any meaningful development, education always enjoys a pride of place in every nation's programmes and aspirations. Of course, education has been identified as one of the most viable factors that can effectively mobilize an individual to face squarely the challenges and realities of life, and a prerequisite for a happy and healthy living. In conformity with these lofty ideals therefore, the National Policy on Education (1981:24) states that:

The desire that Nigeria should be a free, just and democratic society; a land of opportunity and hopes for all its citizens; able to generate a great and dynamic economic; and grow into a united, strong and self-reliant nation cannot be over-emphasised. In order to realise fully the potentials of the achievement of these objectives, all other agencies will co-operate with education to that end. Furthermore, to foster the much needed development of Nigeria, imbalances in inter-State and intra-State developments have to be corrected. 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 the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources.

It goes further to state that:

Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because it is the most important instrument of change, and any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.

Basic primary education is said to be the foundation upon which the secondary and tertiary levels of education is built. This is why as early as 1955 and 1957, the civilian governments of Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education scheme respectively (Ochoga, 2002). This effort was short lived because the Federal Government, then, had no constitutional responsibility for ownership of primary schools. As a result the regions discovered that the financial implications of such a project was too enormous for them (Taiwo, 1980).

Consequently in 1976, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria under General Olusegun Obasanjo launched a six-year free Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme. This scheme encountered such problems as non-availability of reliable data. According to Nwangwu (1976), "the estimated enrolment statistics had it that less than one million pupils would register for the scheme, but over three million pupils turned up". This made projections for teacher supply, instructional materials, and equipment unrealistic. Also the UPE scheme witnessed, in the words of Nwana (2000) "two phases of economy - the buoyant oil boom phase and the adverse oil doom phase in the early 80s".

However, in 1999, at Sokoto, in his desire to provide functional and qualitative education for the citizenry, President Olusegun again launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE).

## **The Universal Basic Education (UBE)**

According to Oga (2002), the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched in Nigeria in 1999 in response to the global trend of providing education for all by the year 2002. He enumerated a number of global efforts that were made in that direction to include such declarations as:

- i. New Delhi 1990 Declaration on Education of E-9 Countries;

- ii. Ougadougou 1992 Declaration on Education of Women and Girls;
- iii. Amman 1996 Affirmation on the pursuit of goals of Jomtien;
- iv. Durban 1998 Statement of Commitment on Inter-African Collaboration for the Development on Education;
- v. O.A.U. Decade of Education in Africa, 1997 - 2006. etc.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme provides for four major sections of our educational system namely: Pre-Primary Education, Primary Education, Junior Secondary Education and Non-Formal Education, including Nomadic Education. The main objective of the programme is to wipe out illiteracy and ensure the acquisition of functional skills for alleviation of poverty.

In order to correct the inadequacies of the UPE and lay a solid foundation for the promotion of basic education in Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) came up with the following specific objectives.

- (a) Development in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
  - (b) The provision of basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.
  - (c) Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system (through improved reliance, quality and efficiency).
  - (d) 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 promotion of basic education.
  - (e) Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative and life long learning.
- (Federal Ministry of Education, 1999:1)

The UBE Guidelines also highlighted the scope of the programme to include:

1. Programme initiative for every childhood care and socialization.
2. Public enlightenment and social mobilization strategy that is aimed at sensitizing the people on the objectives of the programme, and the need for them to send their children to school.
3. Data collection and analysis strategy that is directed towards the collection and analysis of information for the purpose of decision-making concerning the pupils, teachers, classroom, etc.
4. Teacher's recruitment, education, training, retraining and motivation strategies that are meant to address the issue of shortage of qualified teachers, retraining of such teachers, and salary and welfare packages.
5. Structures and facilities strategies, the purpose of which is to provide more classrooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops and sporting facilities.
6. Enriched curricula through the modification of the existing ones to reflect the current realities. Introduction to computer literacy and production of well-researched books is essential in this regard.
7. Proper funding of the programme through the efforts of the Federal, State, Local Governments and NGOs.
8. Management through training of competent planners, financial experts and administrators for the successful implementation of the programme.

The UBE programme is for all regardless of age, gender, occupation, social class and creed. It aims at providing the skills and knowledge for literacy, socialization, continuing education, self-employment, self-actualisation and enlightenment. It thus provides hopes and aspirations for the suffering masses of the country.

### **Features of the Universal Basic Education (UBE)**

According to Nwana (2000), the following levels form the policy provisions of the UBE.

- i. The programme is to cover the educational levels of Pre-Primary, Primary, Junior Secondary and Adult and Non-Formal Education.
- ii. It is to kick off in all states of the federation in the year 2000.
- iii. It is to be funded by the 3-tiers of government and the community.
- iv. It will be a national programme but will depend on the inputs from the entire people (governments and the masses).

In an effort to implement the programme, the Federal Government has charted the following actions among others.

- (a) National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) has been replaced with a UBE outfit under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), which has acquired the assets of NPEC, including staff, infrastructure and equipment.
  - (b) A National Co-ordinator of UBE in the person of Professor Pai Obanya has been appointed.
  - (c) The Federal Ministry of Education has developed a document titled "Implementation Guidelines for UBE Programme", and this has been approved by the Federal Executive Council.
  - (d) UBE budget has been drafted by the Federal Ministry of Education. This has been defended before the National Assembly, a defence that include detailed brief on the UBE. The National Assembly, satisfied with the National Co-ordinator's briefing, has approved a handsome budget to make the programme a reality.
  - (e) The Government had had policy dialogue with such bodies as the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE), the National Council on Education (NCE), the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), etc.
  - (f) Some international bodies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, USAID etc. have expressed interest in the funding of UBE.
- (FME, 2002)

### **Universal Basic Education and Life-Long Education**

According to Oga (2002), Basic Education may be defined as "the articulation of formal, non-formal and informal approaches and structures for the promotion of an all round development of human potentials". In other words, it is the education that prepares an individual for life and living.

The broad aim of Basic Education, therefore, is to lay the foundation for life-long learning through inculcation of appropriate learning, of self-awareness and life skills. It is from these broad philosophies that the Nigerian Universal Basic Education (UBE) draws its inspirations and effect; and is related to life-long education.

Life-long education as stated in the National Policy on Education (1981) will be the basis of the nation's educational policies. Earlier than now, the UNESCO Report, "Learning to Be" (Faure in Alaezi, 1989) had recommended life-long education as the master concept for educational policies.

Biggs (1973) maintains that life-long education begins and ends with life. It should be seen as a preparation for life, and an aid to self-development and self-actualisation. It seeks to establish a link between the school and community and home, hence, learning should be related to the community realities.

Iduh (2002), quoting Dave (1976) asserts that, "life-long education seeks to view education in its totality". It covers formal (planned course in non-school setting), informal (unplanned course in non-school setting) and non-formal (planned course in non-school setting) e.g. Open University activities etc.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is thus expected to lay emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills of literacy, numeracy and other essential competencies that the citizen needs to function properly in present day Nigeria. This is what is called functional literacy. Here attention is focused on the relation of literacy and, or numeracy to practical needs of the learner and his community. Thus, a UNESCO committee in 1962, in Paris, defined a literate person thus:

A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainment in reading, writing and arithmetic makes it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development (Ijiga, 2002).

Therefore, UBE must seek to provide functional and self-reliant education by providing the basic foundation for life-long education. Such foundation should develop and awaken in the individual learner, the consciousness of the life-long character of education and provide for greater educability of the learner. It would also expose the learner to several sources of education and help him to link life itself with education.

## **Universal Basic Education for Economic Reliance**

The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education "as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. Earlier, Awolowo (1968) stated that education is the instrument that can bring economic prosperity and autonomy to Nigeria. He writes:

In order to attain the goal of economic freedom, however, developed countries (like Nigeria) must do certain things as a matter of urgency and priority. It must provide education... for the masses of its citizens.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a programme that was conceived and implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria to enhance the nation's economic well being and the alleviation of poverty among her citizenry. Since the programme aims at providing the skills and knowledge for literacy, socialization, self-employment and self-actualisation, it has the potentials to positively turn around the economic fortunes of the citizens and the nation in general.

Acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy, which the UBE provides, is a major pre-requisite for entrepreneurship, basic agriculture and middle scale business enterprise. It has been observed that

literate farmers, entrepreneurs and artisans usually bring to bear their basic literacy knowledge on their performances, which often improve their output economically.

Since the UBE scheme also encompasses the junior secondary school where the learners are introduced to basic technological and vocational skills, such basic training or knowledge would enable the Nigerian child to be self-reliant, self-employed and contribute meaningfully to the economic development of the country and their economic well being.

The life-long education posture of the UBE also makes it an avenue for economic gains for the recipients. Since the scheme provides for non-formal and informal education, it gives room for the learners to combine learning with their jobs. In so doing, education received will continue to impact positively on their job performances and thus improve their output for maximal economic gains.

The scheme will witness mass employment of teachers and other supporting staff when fully implemented. This in turn will improve the economic fortunes of the beneficiaries. This is in line with the poverty alleviation bid of the Federal Government.

## **Conclusion**

The Universal Basic Education is another attempt by the Federal Government of Nigeria to "Tune-tune" her educational policy to provide a functional, qualitative and quantitative education for her citizenry. Its objective, scope and implementation strategies are carefully chosen and articulated to correct the shortcomings that led to the crumbling of the erstwhile UPE scheme.

The UBE programme draws its inspiration from life-long education, which aims at transforming the individual to be more relevant to himself and his society. It views education as a characteristic of living and not just an accomplishment of schooling. This means that the bond between education and life is immeasurably strengthened and the purpose of education is seen more in terms of amelioration and socio-economic improvement of human condition than in terms of social prestige and paper qualification.

As a programme that aims at providing the basic and solid foundational knowledge which is to be the gateway for life-long education, it demands that its proposals be adequately implemented for it to serve as a *sine qua non* for the individual learner's and the nation's economic reliance and well being.

## **References**

- Alaezi, O. (1989). *The Nigerian New School Curriculum: Issues and Insights*. Jos: Ehindero Press.
- Awolowo, O. (1976) Education in Nigeria. In Gani Fawehimi's *Awo on Free Education*. Ibadan: Daily Sketch Pub. Co. Ltd.
- Biggs, B. (1973) Content to Process. *In Australian Journal of Education*. 17, 225-238.
- Dave, R.H. (1970) *Foundation of Life-Long Education*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Federal Ministry of Education. (2000) *Implementation Guidelines for UBE Programme*. Abuja: Fed. Min. of Edu. Press.

Federal Government of Nigeria. (1981) *National Policy on Education (Revised)*. Lagos: NERC Press.

Iduh, S. A. (2000). Life-Long Education and Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A Paper Presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Education for National Development, School of Education, College of Education, Oju, Benue State, 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October.

Ijiga, P.A. (2002). Adult Literacy Instruction in Second Language Learning Situations. A Paper Presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Education for National Development, School of Education, College of Education, Oju, Benue State, 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October.

Nwagwu, N.A. (1976) *UPE in Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospects*. Nsukka: Zenith Press.

Nwana, O.C. (2000) Problems and Prospects of a Successful Implementation of UBE in Nigeria. A Commissioned Paper Presented at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Conference of All Nigerian Principals of Secondary Schools. Umuahia, August 16, 2000.

Ochoga, E.A. (2002) Funding the UBE in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Problems and Prospects. Conference Paper Presented at 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Education for National Development School of Education, College of Education, Oju, Benue State, 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October.

Oga, G. E. (2000) The Challenges and the Future of UBE in Nigeria. Conference Paper read at 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Education for National Development, School of Education, College of Education, Oju, Benue State, 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October.

Taiwo, O.C. (1980) *Nigeria Education System: Past, Present and Future*, Lagos: Thomas Nelson Publishers Ltd.