
Counselling on the Role of the Three Tiers of Government in the Successful Implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is an expression of the desire of government to reinforce participatory democracy in Nigeria by raising the level of awareness and general education of the whole citizenry. UBE goes beyond the provision of primary education to school age children. It is a package which contains the basic components that will make an individual literate in knowledge and skills so that he fashions out strategies for effective living. It involves both formal and non-formal approaches. The components of UBE include primary education, adult literacy, junior secondary school and nomadic fishermen education. This paper is focused on the meaning, scope, goals and objectives, and the roles of the federal, state and local government in the successful implementation of the programme.

In modern societies, education is provided formerly in schools. This ensures that the contents and processes of education lead toward the production of quality citizens. For that reason, nations and states usually adopt systems of education designed to bring out the best in their citizens. In Nigeria, until very recently, the 6-3-3-4 system of education was in operation. That system allowed for individuals to spend six years in primary school, three years in junior secondary, another three years in senior secondary and four years in the university. This ensured that individuals spent sixteen uninterrupted years in school, being empowered for adult role-playing. Now with the idea of Universal Basic Education (UBE), a 9-3-4 system of education has been adopted. This system allows for nine uninterrupted years of Basic Universal Education, three years of Senior Secondary Education and four years of University Education. (Isangedighi, 2009).

In Nigeria, the educational system has witnessed many changes. Some of these changes have been acknowledged as being desirable and some as undesirable products of confusion (Ayeni, 2000; Alvede, 2006). One of the most desirable changes witnessed by the nation's educational system is this one that has brought in the UBE. The UBE was launched in November 1999 by the government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. In September 1976, the federal government launched a similar scheme, the Universal Primary Education (UPE). The UPE was welcomed massively by Nigerians but was later abandoned due to huge financial burden and inadequate prior preparation, especially by way of infrastructural development and adequate provision for teacher training and retention. That the federal government has gone back to re-launch a similar programme, shows that there is something desirable that the scheme is expected to achieve for Nigeria (Isangedighi, 2009).

The Universal Basic Education (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. It also stipulates penalties for parents who fail to comply with its provisions. Furthermore, the UBE policy stipulates that nine-years basic universal education is free and compulsory in public primary and junior secondary schools. There is constitutional responsibility for the states and LGAs for the UBE to be implemented by SUBEBs and LGAs at the state and local government respectively. The federal government's role is that of intervention to ensure uniform, equitable and qualitative provision of basic education throughout the country. Other characteristics of UBE policy include the fact that it:

- 1 Prescribes punishments for parents and guardians who keep their wards away from school.
- 2 Makes it obligatory on governments to provide adequate basic education opportunities for all school-age children.
- 3 Outlaws fees in public primary and junior secondary school and prescribes punishment for contravention of this provision.
- 4 Provides for free tuition, books, instructional materials, classrooms, furniture and lunch (Uwakwe, 2009).

The term Basic Education is used to describe the foundation of suitable life long learning for all groups of individuals through the acquisition of reading, writing and numerical skills and later vocational competencies using school and out of school agencies. This scheme will help equip the individual with skills and knowledge.

- i. Live a more meaningful and purposeful life.
- ii. Generate and contribute positive ideas for the full development of the society.
- iii. Help to uplift in the social, economic and cultural status of the individual in particular and the society in general; and

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- iv. Contribute in shaping the individual in the discharge of his civic obligation effectively (Kano State Primary Education Board, 2000).

The concept of Universal Primary Education was first conceived by the United Nations under the UN charter as a fundamental right to cover all aspects of the basic requirements of life. The first among these requirements is giving the individual access to education. Nigeria has already recognized this aspect of access to education by becoming a signatory to both the UN charter and OAU charter on the right and welfare of the child (1964 Article 26 on OAU charter).

Objective of UBE

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aims at achieving the following objectives;

- 1 The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- 2 Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improve relevance, quality and efficiency).
- 3 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.
- 4 Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeric, manipulative, communication and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life long learning (Federal Ministry of Education, Feb. 2000).

The Concept

The universalization of basic education is in keeping with the requirements of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the educational objectives of which are stated in section 18 as follows:

... Government shall direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

... Government shall eradicate illiteracy and 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.

The UBE tries to implement a and d above. Basic Education, according to Joseph (2011), education for all, is not defined in terms of years of formal schooling. It is not also limited to formal education in a classroom setting. He views education in a very broad and general perspective, which includes the formal, non-formal, and

informal approaches for an all round development of the human potential. The goal is to lay a solid foundation for life-long learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning, self-awareness, citizenship and life skills.

In the Nigerian context, (Joseph, 2011) stated that basic education should not be considered as a static term, but as a process to be determined by every nation according to its evolutionary development needs. Basic education is seen as encompassing the following:

- a Programmes/initiatives for early childhood care socialization
- b Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills especially for adults (persons age 15 and above)
- c Special programmes for nomadic populations
- d Out of school, non-formal programmes for up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic needed for life-long learning
- e Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescence and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education; and
- f The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

For the successful implementation of the scheme the federal, state and local government have special roles to play.

The Role of the Federal Government

The federal government has taken the bold step by formally launching the programme on 30th September 1999 with specific objectives which has been already outlined in this paper. It has also evolved and produced the National Implementation Guidelines for the Universal Basic Education Programme (Federal Ministry of Education, 2000). Other roles expected of the federal government to be played are:

- 1 Co-ordination of the programme in all the states of the federation including Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
- 2 Supervision and monitoring of the implementation of the scheme nationwide
- 3 Sensitization and mobilization of all stakeholders (state government, local government, local communities, voluntary agencies, non-governmental organizations, international communities and donor agencies, and public-spirited individuals) for their effectiveness, involvement and participation
- 4 Initiation and execution of specific programme for the attainment of the objectives of the scheme
- 5 Provision of necessary infrastructure and enabling logistics for the effective implementation of the scheme. Schools have to be built and equipped. Qualified teachers have to be employed in appropriate ratio to student population of 1:40 (Obiechima, 2000).

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- 6 Fulfillment of its financial obligations and support needed for the effective implementation of the scheme
- 7 Seeking and negotiating for international cooperation and collaboration towards the success of the scheme
- 8 Enhancement of the capacities of the state and local governments through funding and training to increase productivity
- 9 Encouraging and facilitating research in all related areas
- 10 Regularly monitoring and evaluating all programme of the scheme
- 11 Ensuring transparency, accountability and probity of all funds allocated to state and local government.
- 12 Provision of advisory and consultancy services to the state and local governments in the designing and execution of specific projects to facilitates the attainment of objectives.
- 13 Use of federal owned media to publicize and enlighten the masses on the goal, objectives and usefulness of the programme. As major aim of the enlightenment programme for UBE will be value orientation in favour of education for its own sake and for the long-term benefits that it gives to the individual and the society at large. This will assist in reducing the lukewarm and sometimes, negative attitude to education among certain groups of people. Some have lost faith in western education because of the lack of paid employment to school graduates. Others are influenced by the increased number of rich illiterates who have become influential and recognized as a result of their financial wealth. Above all,
- 14 Ensuring security of lives and property in all parts of the country regardless of political, ethnic and religious circumstances to avoid disruption in the programme implementation, and
- 15 Training or retraining of needed professionals (Ekpenyong, 2011).
The next tier of governments roles to be discussed is that of the state

The Role of the State Government in the UBE Scheme

Each state government is to implement the UBE scheme in its area of jurisdiction. The expected roles include the following:

- 1 The development and production of the UBE implementation blue print at the state level in line with that of the federal government's aims and objectives.
- 2 Initiation and execution of specific and relevant projects for the attainment of objectives of the UBE scheme. For the project to be meaningful, it has to address the educational needs of the particular state.
- 3 Sensitization and mobilization of the target groups such as parents, community leaders and other stakeholders for effective participation in the programme.
- 4 Ensuring of the necessary support and financial obligations for effective implementation of programmes.

- 5 Coordination, monitoring and evaluation of projects in all part of the state. Quality assurance is vital in the UBE design and implementation process. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation should be a normal practice, which is built-in activity of ministries of education to be carried out professionally (Solarin, 2004). The need to inspect for efficiency requires extensive traveling. Transport or transportation cost have to be provided for inspectors who will be engaged.
- 6 Evaluation and submission of progress reports to the Federal Government as and when due. A lot of projects have not been properly assessed due to irregular and non-submission of reports. Some are sent after the dateline;
- 7 Enhancement of the capacities of the local governments and other implementing agencies at the state level
- 8 Ensuring accountability, honesty and transparency for all funds budgeted for the programme and
- 9 Training or retraining of teachers and other para-professionals who will be employed in the scheme in every state consists of the local government constituencies, which are responsible for administration of project in their domains (Ekpenyong, 2011).

The Role of Local Government in the UBE Scheme

Just as the federal and state governments have specific roles to play in the implementation of the scheme, the local government also has definite roles to perform.

Among the excepted role of local government are:

- 1 Initiation and execution of specific projects and activities within the framework of the scheme in their localities.
- 2 Provision of relevant human and material resources for the successful implementation of the scheme. Teachers and para-professional will have to be trained, retrained and motivated.
- 3 Provision of logistic support and enabling environment for the execution of the scheme in their communities. Schools have to be built, teachers need to be recruited and necessary infrastructure such as equipment and materials have to be purchased.
- 4 Organization and sensitization of parents, community leaders and others to ensure the support effectiveness and participation of the entire community.
- 5 Ensuring safety and maintenance of the scheme through proper servicing of infrastructural materials. In the past, textbooks, technological equipment bought with enormous amount of money or those donated by stakeholders have been left to rust in the sun or rain. Such practices have to be discarded if much progress is to be made.
- 6 Engagement in local research to enhance the attainment of objectives (Iwuji, 2002).

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- 7 Provision of feedback and progress report to state government for proper documentation and referral to the federal government.
- 8 Support and encourage increased enrolment, retention and completion of the target group.

Conclusion

The universal aspect of UBE implies that all persons regardless of their physical and psychological conditions will benefit from the programme. Encouragement and necessary support have to be given to cater for the special needs of targeted population. Formal, non-formal and informal educations are necessary parts of learning. Every situation within the context of UBE is an opportunity to learn. Such opportunities should not be allowed to exclude anyone. There is a need for the Federal, State and Local Governments to encourage individuals to be conscious of learning as a lifelong process so that they can control it to satisfy their various and varying needs at different stages of their lives. The UBE represents democratization of education as it attempts to make education accessible to all citizens at different stages of their lives when properly implemented.

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