

Universal Basic Education and National Development: Issues and the Way Out

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Education has been identified as one of the best financial investment any government can make. Education is a human right and indispensable means of realising other human right. Studies has shown that a good basic education is a sine qua non for subsequent progress in the life of an average citizen. The National Policy on Education 2004 opined that basic education is the key to the success or failure of the whole system since the rest of the education is built on it. A good basic education provides a background and foundation that guarantees better educational attainment in the future. The Universal Declaration of Human Right in article 13 (1) of the convention stated that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality”. It also added in Article 13(2) that primary education must be universal, ensure that basic learning needs of all children are satisfied and take into account the culture, needs and opportunities of the community. The above stated policies and conventions have serious implication for the financing and management of educational programmes and provision of funds for the realization of the objectives of basic education. Based on this therefore, the paper focused on the discussion of brief overview of universal primary education, conceptual clarification, impact of universal basic education on national development, issues in universal basic education and national development. The paper finally made some suggestions on the way out in solving problems facing universal basic education in Nigeria.

Keywords: universal, basic education, national development

Introduction

Education is a crucial sector in any nation. It is a major investment in human capital development; and therefore plays a crucial role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of education in Nigeria continues to be our national discourse at all levels. Consequently, the implication of the declining quality of education at all levels has far reached impact on a nation’s moral, civic, cultural, and economic sustainability.

Against this background, all over the world, primary education has been regarded as the most important as well as the most patronized by people. This perhaps may be due to the fact that it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit, which is expected to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens. The importance of primary education can therefore be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by necessity have to pass through this level. What this means is that primary education defined as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus constitute the bedrock upon which the entire education

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system is built. Indeed, the success and failure of the entire education systems are determined by it and it is at the heart of the concept of basic education which is also defined as universalization of access of education (Okebukola, 2007).

Recognizing the importance of primary education, all government in Nigeria both past and present, have placed premium on it by making primary education the center piece of their educational polices since the Colonia period; therefore, both colonial and independent government in Nigeria have instituted one form of educational reform or the other. This indicates that there is a link between the past and present in the educational development of Nigeria. That is the country's historical antecedents who have impact on how educational polices are formulated and implemented. Starting with the colonial period, Nigeria, having been colonized by Britain, adopted the British form of education, which consists of primary, secondary, sixth form as well as higher education (Fabuni, 2002). However, the Islamic education had been in the Northern protectorate before the amalgamation in 1914, so the Christian missionaries that came into the country through the Western Region were restricted from spreading both Christianity and Western education to the Northern region.

The colonial administration, before independence, administered education, through the use of education ordinances and education laws. These ordinances include the 1882, 1887, 1916, 1926, 1948, and 1952 educational ordinances and regional laws of 1954. In 1954, the three regions, that is Eastern, Western, and Northern as well as federal Territory of Lagos had the power of making laws for its territory and citizens as a result of the adoption of 1954 constitution. Consequently, the following regional laws on education emerged. Education law of 1955 in Western Region and the Lagos education ordinances of 1957, hence, are the beginning of the introduction of universal education in Nigeria.

The objective of this portion of this paper therefore, is to theoretically, identify impact of Universal Basic Education (UBE) on national development in Nigeria and the issues facing it and to suggest the way out.

Brief Overview of Universal Primary Education in Nigeria

In 1955, the concept of Universal Primary Education began in the Western Region of Nigeria under the premiership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo who introduced the free, universal, and compulsory education, popularly referred to as Universal Primary Education (UPE). With the introduction of the UPE, there was an educational revolution, not only in the West but in Nigeria as a whole. In 1954, there were about 457,000 pupils attending fee-paying schools by January 1955; the figure rose to 811,000 representing over 56% increase in the enrollment. The number of primary school teachers rose to 17,000 in 1954 to 27,000 in 1955. This was possible because the government had gone out to train teachers to meet the demands of the programme. The government of Western Region had to increase the budget from 32.2 million in 1954 to 5.4 million in 1955 (Olagunju, 2010). Actually, 90% of the budget on education was spent on primary education alone. By 1957/1958 the recurrent expenditure on education from the funds of the region was £7,884,110 which covered personal emoluments; other charges, special expenditure and grant-in-aids (Peter, 2005). The feat achieved by the Western Region in terms of the UPE led the Eastern Region to embark upon its own eight years free education scheme. Thus, in February 1957, the Universal Primary Education scheme was launched in the Eastern Region using the fire-brigade approach. The government started the programme without adequate planning; thus, the needed finance for the thorough execution was grossly inadequate. Similarly, Osofisan (2009) stated almost everything except the pupils was absent. Unfortunately, due to pressure and lack of time for proper preparation, the schools were staffed by untrained teachers, therefore resulting to low quality of education. The programme

failed within one year of its implementation.

The free and universal education programme was not limited to the Eastern and Western Regions of the country. The Lagos colony, a federal territory, also floated its own scheme in 1957. At its inception, there were 96 primary schools with 50,182 pupils. These pupils had 1,646 teachers (Fafunwa, 1991). The Northern Region had been introduced to the Islamic form of education ever before the Western education came into Nigeria by over 300 years before the advent of Christian education around the 1840s (Quadril, 2001). Hence, the region did not bother itself to embark on providing the Western Education for its citizens. It seemed to be comfortable with the Islamic education, so they opted out of the race for in the provision of free Universal Primary Education. So, the Northern Region education was somehow retarded because the curriculum of education revolved round reading the New Testament, the catechism, and the commandments in Yoruba. Classes were held in churches and teachers' salaries were paid from church funds. Then, Muslim parents had not wholly approved of such Western Education because it was a Christian education in a Christian environment. Their fear was that their children would be converted to Christianity through such education.

Since independence, a lot of education laws, polices, and edict have been put in place, depending on the type of government being experienced in the country. In 1979, the constitution puts education on the concurrent list, which implies that the responsibilities and authority in education would be shared among three tiers of government, i.e., federal, state, and local government between 1983 and 1999, a military era; decrees such as Decree No. 16 of 1985, Decree 26 of 1988, and Decree 36 of 1990 were promulgated in Nigeria to guide and regulate the conduct of education in the country. A major policy made by the federal government was put in place in 1977; this was tagged the National Policy on Education. This policy was the outcome of seminar convened in 1973 after the national curriculum conference. The 1977 policy has been revised thrice, i.e., 1981, 1988, and 2004.

Since independence therefore, the general guiding principles of education in Nigeria are the equipping of every citizen with such knowledge as skills, attitudes, and values, which will give him opportunity to drive maximum benefits from members of the society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Education

To start with, there are certain concepts like education and national development which need clarification in order to drive home facts. The word "education" is derived from two Latin words "educare" and "educere" (Amaele, 2011). Accordingly, "educare" means to train, to form, or to mould. In other words, it means that the society trains, forms, or moulds the individual to achieve the social needs and aspirations. "Educere", on the other hands, means to build, to lead, or develop. This is mostly favoured by the humanist who argues that the function of education is to develop the natural potentials on the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interests, and needs. This is called child-centered orientation.

Ordinarily, education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho productive domain. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. Fafunwa (1991) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills, and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live. Education according to Amaele (2011) is seen as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to

meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the improvement of the society.

National Development

National development is the society that has succeeded in providing a source of living for the majority of its citizens and that in such society; premium is attached to eliminate poverty, provision of food, shelter, and clothing to its inhabitants (Todaro & Smith, 2006). This argument is in line with the definition of development as a multidimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social system towards a better or human life. They identified three basic components for understanding development. These components are sustenance, goals sought by all individuals and societies.

According to them, sustenance is concerned with ability to meet basic needs, self esteem is concerned with a sense of worth and self respect, of not being used by others as tools for their own needs, and freedom is concerned with freedom from servitude-servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions, and dogmatic beliefs, especially, that poverty is a predestination.

Therefore, any definition of development which emphasizes the basic needs of life in transforming the individual in the society to self-actualization is a true definition of development. Any development model that does not reflect these tenets needs a paradigm, shift. Omoyibo and Agbozeke (2010) also stated that the former secretary of United Nations Organization, Boutrous B. Ghali, in May 1994, issued a document which categorizes development into five dimensions which are peace, economy, environment, social studies, and democracy. In Nigerian context, these components are missing as democratic processes are almost completely absent as the government in power most a times abuse the rule of law. In Nigeria, the process does not create opportunities for opposition to strive, until very recently, majority of those in power are there on the basis of what to get and the development of their various communities or constituencies is not their priority.

A part from the above, Oke (2004) stressed that sustainable national development starts with the ability of a nation to satisfactorily provide the food and fiber that are needed by its people and industry. Hummelstren (1984) has supported this statement by stating that food security must be given adequate attention to solve problem of mass starvation in sub-Sahara Africa. Even though, these researchers have given credence to agriculture; national development should be able to transform individuals in virtually all sectors of the economy.

Universal Basic Education and National Development

The concept of Universal Basic Education may not be a new idea totally. From all indications, the Universal Basic Education can be regarded as an offshoot of the Universal Primary Education scheme which was launched in the country in 1976. As usual with Nigeria, this scheme was abandoned mid-way (Fabuunwe, 2002). The fact that scheme of UPE had something to offer perhaps led to the re-introduction of the programme in another name and concept known as Universal Basic Education in 1999 by the former president Olusegun Obasanjo. UBE is a policy reform measure of the Federal Government of Nigeria, aimed at rectifying distortions in the UPE. Universal Basic Education is conceived to embrace formal education up to age 15, as well as adult and non-formal education including education of the marginalized groups within the Nigerian society. The National Policy on Education, 2004 Section 3 defines basic education as a type of education comprising six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary school. The policy stipulates that

the education shall be free and compulsory. This scheme shall include adult and non-formal educational programmes at primary and junior secondary school levels for both adults and out of school youths. The UBE has the three main components—universal, basic, and education. Universal here means the programme is for every one irrespective of tribe, culture or race, and class (Fabunmi, 2004). The term basic refers to something which is a fundamental or crucial that must be given or had. It is on this basis that every other thing rests on. Without it, nothing may be achieved. It is the root for acquisition of any knowledge (Ajaye & Afolabi, 2009). Hence, UBE can be seen as that type of education which every individual must have. It should not be a privilege but a right and it should be the sum total of an individual's experience.

The Universal Basic Education mission is to serve as a prime energizer of national movement for actualization of the nations UBE's vision, working in concert with all stakeholders. This will mobilize the nation's creative energies to ensure that education for all becomes the responsibilities of all (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2005). The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in its annual report in 2005 listed the objectives of the UBE to include: ensuring unfettered access to years of formal basic education, the provision of free primary education for every Nigerian child of school-going age, reducing drastically the incident of dropout from the formal school system, through improved relevancy, quality, and efficiency, and ensuring the acquisition of 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 lifelong learning. In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives and indeed the UBE's vision and mission of the scheme, an act was enacted on the 26th May 2004. It was named Act to provide for compulsory, free, primary education, and other related matters. Following the enactment of the Act, the UBE commission was established. The Act provides three sources of funding for the implementation of the UBE, which are Federal Government grant of not less than 20% of its consolidated revenue fund, funds of contributions in the form of federal guaranteed credits, and local or international donor grants. Although, this Act covers both the state and the local governments, the state government can only benefit from the government block grant meant for the implementation of the UBE if it can contribute at least 50% of the total cost of the project. This is to ensure the state's commitment towards the project. To ensure that the UBE project enjoys wide coverage, the Act provides sanctions for parents who fail to send their children or wards to school. Also in order to ensure that poverty is not a hindrance to schooling, the scheme should provide free textbooks in core subjects as well as abolishes tuition at the primary school and at the junior secondary school levels. The enactment of the UBE Act had legal implication, which makes it compulsory for provision of universal, free, and compulsory six years of primary education and the first three years of secondary school education.

Based on the objectives of the UBE mentioned above, the child should have a continuous, uninterrupted stretch of education for nine years from primary school to the 3rd year of the junior secondary school. Apart from this, the UBE scheme plans cater for the adults who have been out of school before they acquired the basic skills needed for lifelong learning inform of non-formal programmes. So, the UBE programme is planned in such a way that it shall provide non-formal skill and training for youths who have not had the opportunity of accessing formal education (Jaiyeoba, 2007). The scheme has therefore changed the education system from 6-3-3-4 to 9-3-4. It is expected that there shall be a smooth transition from the primary school six years to junior secondary school (three years). This also means that there should be no entrance examination before pupils could enter into junior secondary schools which are expected to last three years. It is also expected that junior secondary school shall be autonomous body not having much to do with the senior secondary school. In

order to accomplish this, all states of the Federation have given the junior schools their autonomy. Thus, the junior secondary schools function as separate entities, having their own principals, vice-principals, and members of tutorial and non-tutorial staff.

As a result of the foregoing, it can be found that the UBE scheme in Nigeria has its own unique characteristics features. First and foremost, the scheme makes it compulsory for every government throughout the federation to provide free, compulsory primary education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age. Furthermore, it enforces all parents to ensure that their children or wards attend and complete their education and junior secondary schools as stated in Section 20 of the Act, which provides some fines for any breach of the Act. All these measures are geared towards achieving national development.

Impact of Universal Basic Education on National Development

Education shapes the needed manpower for national development. Afolabi and Lottol (2012) supported this assertion by buttressing that developed or educated polity is the one that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position to ensure that the society is on high growth rate. More so, education is perceived in Nigeria as an indispensable tool which will not only aid in meeting the nation's social, political, moral, cultural, and economic aspirations but that which will also inculcate in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character, and desirable values that will foster national development and self actualization.

Based on the definitions of education, it is therefore clear that education transforms an individual to be useful in the society and to meet up the need of the society for national development. Therefore, it should be noted that without education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for material advancement and enlightenment of the citizenry. The trained engineers, teachers, medical doctors, etc., are all the products of education. This explains why it is argued also that quality of a nation's education determines the levels of its national development.

In addition, education promotes social and group relationship. In this vein, Obasanjo (2012) maintained that education trains individuals to relate to and interact reasonably with others in the society and to appreciate the need for effective organization for human advancement. Here, the school system within the educational system fosters this development. The school brings people of different cultural background together for a common purpose. This enhances mutual co-existence among the different students or pupils. Learners who strongly identify with their schools are thought to have a more positive attitude towards teachers, other learners, and the entire educational enterprise (Armstrong, 1981).

Again in the school system, there are official clubs and organizations in existence. Learners who participate in these organization and clubs gain experience in working with others outside the individual organization and to some extent in working and competing with outside groups with minimum friction and this goes a long way to promote national unity and peaceful co-existence which will lead to national development.

Sometimes, organizations not formally sponsored by the school in some cases make arrangements to use school facilities when classes are not in session. Learners derive benefits from their association with these groups in the same way they profit from participation in schools sponsored organizations. By doing this, education provides a setting with in which different learners organizations flourish and a context for helping young people learn appropriate patterns of inter personal relations. Through this, it provides a forum for the development of many kinds of acceptable person-to-person behaviour patterns as the school classes comprises, different individuals. In these arrangements, pupils/students meet people from different social, ethnical, and

cultural backgrounds from their own. Here, male-female relationship begins to manifest as young people mature. It is obvious education through this system to inculcate much to learners beyond the prescribed academic curriculum and also encourages the development of social behaviours that will be useful to them as adulthood.

Education also promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same to the improvement of the existing skills and techniques of performing specific tasks, by so doing to increase the efficiency of their personal societal energies (Obasanjo, 2012).

Education teaches people to be useful to themselves and their society. As a result, they have to be productive and discover their creative abilities and use this to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualization. Education also develops in individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, education, hard-work, and personal integrity, all of which creates an avenue in which good relationship crops up. Finally, in the light of this, it is clear that education has critical functions in national development. However, in the Nigeria context, education has not fully played its roles in this regard. This is as a result of certain issues facing the Nigeria Universal Basic Education scheme.

Issues in Universal Basic Education and National Development in Nigeria

Although the new basic education scheme started in 1999, it did not take off at the same time in various states of the federation. The implication of this is that its full assessment may be too early, considering the time it actually took off at the state level. All the same, as young as the scheme is, some of the issues it is facing both at the federal and state levels are obvious. This includes:

1. Poor funding: Education in Nigeria has been properly funded and this leads to poor infrastructural development in the primary schools, secondary schools, and universities. This poor infrastructure makes the environment very hostile. The following data help to indicate how poorly education in the country has been funded. For instance, Federal Government percentage budgetary allocations to education are in 1999 11.12%, 2000-8.36%, 2001-7.00%, 2006-8.77%, 2008-10.02%, and 2009-8.08% (Abubakar, 2010).

2. Unsteady political environment: Another point to be considered is unsteady political environment. From independence till date, there have been several administrations in Nigeria. The successive political leaders, both military and civilian, often suspend the existing educational polices and replace them with newly fashioned ones which typify their own political agenda. By this, the educational policy planners are compelled to jettison a plan still on the drawing board and take up new polices which must be geared towards meeting the current political demands. This has become a serious bottleneck to UBE scheme in terms of achieving national development.

3. Incessant changes in educational policies: Closely related to the above is incessant change of educational polices which also impacts negatively on national development. A policy requires sufficient time to mature from planning phase. For example, a policy that affects the secondary level of Nigerian educational system would certainly require 12 years to have just two complete cycles that are junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary. This is the opposite in the Nigerian context as the usual practice is to jettison such policy, and drastically modify or completely abandon it for reasons best known to the policy makers who are political leaders in power. For instance, the phasing out of Teachers Grade II Programme in the late 1990s and replacing it with Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) as the minimum teaching requirement. Moreover, replacement of modern mathematics in schools with General Maths and incessant change in school calendar for flimsy

reasons is another example.

4. Politicization of education policies and implementation strategies: In the same vein, education in Nigeria is politicized. This is because educational policy decisions in Nigeria are highly political orders, directives, and assertions bereft of synergy. This happens when the envisaged educational plans and objectives are being politically manipulated to suit the whims and caprices of policy formulators. This explains why some political appointees are given portfolios as commissioners and ministers which they are least qualified for. This explains Amaele's (2011) view on how Nigerian politicians would rather advocate unrealistic populist educational schemes than risk their constituency through technically derived and obviously realistic and productive educational programmes.

5. Corruption: Also important to be mentioned is corruption. In most cases, budgetary allocation to the sector is always embezzled. At the same time, politicians use their offices to accumulate more money. For instance, Nigeria has spent over ₦1.1 trillion on national assembly for the past nine years. With this, much will not be spent on education as a result cannot contribute more to national development.

6. Lack of proper planning: Another major issue facing UBE and national development is improper planning on the part of the government (UNESCO, 2010). One of the factors responsible for the improper planning is faulty census exercises. Almost all the census exercises carried out so far in Nigeria, either before independence or after, have been marred with massive irregularities. The national population census exercise has always raised political hysteria leading to hyper inflation of census figures, which makes it impossible to know the exact figures for school age population.

7. School drop-out rate: Another issue of UBE scheme is the drop-out rate in primary schools considering the aims and objectives of the scheme, which is education for all school age children. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2003 revealed that only 60.1% of all the children of primary school age were attending primary school at the time of the survey.

From the forgoing, it can be seen that the drop-out rate depicts the level of access to education by the Nigerian children, which by implication betrays the universal policy of education in Nigeria. Many reasons have been put up for inadequate access to education, which among others includes cost of schooling (cost of books, equipment, uniform, tuition, and examination fees), illness, poverty, and economic benefits of education. This therefore explains why in general terms, anytime tuition and all other fees are abolished; there is increase in enrolment rate in schools.

The Way Out

Though there are issues in the implementation of UBE scheme, they are not insurmountable. The way out lies with both the government and the people. This way out included but not limited to the following:

1. Being a people oriented programme, the people should be properly educated about the scheme by emphasizing educational guidance for the parents. In particular, parents need to be educated on the need to give their children the basic education for a lifelong education and national development.

2. Stemming from this, government, especially the state and local government, should put in place an educational police force that would go out to arrest children of school age who are not in school during school hours.

3. To do this, government should popularize or publicize this section of the UBE Act through the media of the nation especially the radio.

4. The issue of funding should be looked into properly by all educational stakeholders so as to improve on inadequate funding.

5. Since Nigeria is now getting rooted in democratic system of government, the next government should be strictly advised not to change or stop the implementation of UBE because it has been found to be far better and more rewarding than the previous programme.

6. Government should re-address the issue or stereotype of teachers qualification meant for primary education in the country. The primary education teaching staff should be liberalized to accommodate for efficiency of teaching and learning in foundational education.

7. Government should implement the national minimum wage along robust allowance for primary school teachers such that salary becomes competitive with other international or multinational workers; this may boost their morale and ego, thereby making them more conscientious at work.

Conclusion

The study has examined Universal Basic Education and national development, issues, and a way out. Attempt was made to review the evolution of universalization of education since 1955 and other moves by various governments in Nigeria to provide basic education for her citizens in the context of the challenges facing the UBE scheme in particular. Some of the issues raised in this study are inadequate funding, poor planning due to incomplete data, the inability of the scheme to reduce the rate of drop outs, inadequate facilities in form of physical structures, instructional materials, and even quality teachers and corruption. These issues were found to be militating against the objective of the UBE programme. It was later suggested that these observed issues should be given serious attention so as to remove the bottleneck which impends on the effective administration of UBE and national development.

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