

Chapter 18

Historical Perspective of Universal Basic Education: Issues and Prospects

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Introduction

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has made several successive efforts in the past to reduce the level of illiteracy in the country and among such most recent efforts is the introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) which was launched in 1999 but was unable to take off effectively until 2004 when it was backed up by an Act establishing it. This paper focuses on issues and problems associated with the Universal Basic Education. It also provides suggestions on how some of the enumerated problems can be addressed for effective implementation of the programme. UNESCO (2012) by its International Standard Classification of Education agreed that the features of basic education should include a systematic instruction in fundamental knowledge, skills and competencies; typical entrance age and duration; and instruction organised typically by one main class teacher.

It is also agreed that basic education comprises primary education and lower secondary education. However, various society determines what constitute basic education. The Universal Basic Education is a reform by the Federal Government of Nigeria, which goes in line with the objectives of 1999 Nigerian constitution. Section 18 of the constitution indicates:

Government shall eradicate illiteracy: to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide a free and compulsory Universal Primary Education, free secondary education and free adult literacy programmes (FGN, 1999).

Universal Basic Education (UBE) Historical Perspective

The Universal Basic Education was formally launched on 30 September, 1999 by the former Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who was the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, while the Act establishing the Universal Basic Education Commission was signed into law on 26 May, 2004 by the same President. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) Section 2 defines Basic Education as education given to children age 0-15. It encompasses the Early Child Care and Development Education (ages 0-4). This type of education also comprises six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary school. The policy stipulates that education shall be free and compulsory. The scheme shall include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary school levels for both adults and out-of-school youths. Although the act further allows for one-year pre-primary education but this is mostly

implemented by private schools in Nigeria. The three main components of UBE are: universal, basic and education. Universal in this context brings to mind that the programme is meant for everyone, regardless of culture, race, tribe or class (Aluede, 2006; Eddy and Akpan, 2009). Further, the term basic provides understanding of something that is crucial to survival or the core on which every other structure is built. This is obviously the foundation for acquisition of any knowledge (Eddy and Akpan, 2009). One can then deduce that basic level of education is more of a right of an individual rather than favour.

UBE aims at ensuring every Nigerian child acquires a minimum of nine years basic education and according to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), the programme seeks to achieve the following major objectives:

- (i) developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- (ii) the provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age;
- (iii) reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from formal system (through improved relevance quality and efficiency);
- (iv) catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- (v) ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level 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 (FGN, 2000).

From the above stated objectives, it very clear that UBE is aimed at building a strong and prosperous nation that is economically stable, whose citizens are useful for themselves and the nation at large. Having realised the need for an educational system that is relevant to our cultural background and suitable to adequately address the agitation for sound socio-economic and political challenges of the country, introduction of UBE is an effort in the right direction. Nigeria Policy of Education recognises that primary education is vital to any learning anyone can acquire and it is on this that every other educational structure is built. Arising from the challenges faced by the former educational policy in the country, which ranges from poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, poor administration and falling standards launched the UBE to replace the former system of education. It is imperative to look closely at the UBE especially now that the whole world is battling with the global pandemic of COVID-19 more importantly now that most of Nigerian citizens in the rural area may not be able to access basic education because of the virus. The justification for this paper is to ensure that the government is called to the numerous problems bedevilling the UBE programme and ensure that every Nigerian child will be able to access basic education post-COVID-19.

Federal and State Government Implementation Strategies of UBE

The Universal Basic Education is not without guideline for implementation. According to (FRN, 2000) the following guidelines were provided for implementation of UBE.

Creation of UBE Commission

Arising from common challenges faced by laudable government programme, the Federal Government, in an attempt to ensure effectiveness of the programme created a commission responsible for coordinating all aspects of UBE programmes and their implementation with a clear vision and mission statements:

- (1) *Vision:* To be a world class education intervention and regulatory agency for the promotion of uniform, qualitative and functional basic education in Nigeria
- (2) *Mission:* To operate as an intervention, coordinating and monitoring Agency to progressively improve the capacity of states, local government agencies and communities in the provision of unfettered access to high qualitative basic education in Nigeria.

Providing Implementation Guidelines

Such as public enlightenment and social mobilisation, for hull community development, data collection and analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation, recruitment, education, training, retraining and motivation of teachers, infrastructural facilities, textbooks and instructional materials, improved funding and management of the entire process (Tsafe, 2013).

Collaborative Partnership

The UBE programmes are implemented through collaborative partnerships. UBEC partners with other stakeholders like the State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). It also partners welcome contribution from individuals, corporate entities, civil societies and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the drive to achieve Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (UBE, 2018).

Other implementation strategies for hitch-free implementation include:

- (i) Effective monitoring of UBE implementation to ensure quality.
- (ii) Giving attention to teachers' professional development. To achieve this, the Commission allocates a certain percentage of the fund for in-service training of teachers and this cuts across all states of the federation including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).
- (iii) Education of the girl-child and other disadvantaged groups being given greater attention than ever before – improved infrastructural developments led to increased access to basic education.
- (iv) Transformation of the education terrain as it affects basic education in the area of school infrastructural development. This has been achieved through judicious use of FGN-UBE intervention funds. This is the first time Basic Education has a quantum of funds being released by Federal and State governments (UBE, 2018).

Another strategy employed by UBE to achieve its goal is the commencement of UBE community-initiated self-help project. Here both the community and private sectors are involved in the initiation, implementation and delivery of projects fully owned by them. Through this, funding will not be the sole responsibility of the UBEC but of the organised Parent-Teachers-Association (PTAs) and Community Based Organisation

(CBOs). This has yielded positive impact as different schools have been able to acquire pressing infrastructures and the communities are also able to claim project ownership (UBE, 2018).

Introduction of Federal Teacher Scheme (FTS)

The Federal Teachers' Scheme (FTS) was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2006. The aim of the two-year programme was to address shortage of qualified teachers in the basic education sub-sector. The scheme was targeted toward providing employment for National Certificate of Education (NCE) graduates. It was financed through the Debt Relief Gains (DRGs). Graduates employed under the scheme were posted to serve at various states for two years after which they would be absorbed by states and LGEAs. The first batch of 40,000 participants completed the service in October, 2008. UBEC enlisted 34,000 fresh participants in January 2009 while states have absorbed 27,000 who were products of the first batch into their work force (UBE, 2018, Tsafe, 2013).

Inter-Agency Cooperation

UBEC pursues and implements critical sub-sector related programme in collaboration with other agencies with distinct responsibilities within the federal ministry of education. The collaboration has yielded positive as the UBEC was able to produce and successfully distribute the new 9-year Basic Education Curriculum to all public primary and junior secondary schools across the country. The Commission was also able to develop, produce and distribute training manual to respective stakeholders in the country (UBE, 2018).

Collaborations with International Development Partners

The Universal Basic Education Commission also and collaborates with International Development Partners (IDPs) and non-governmental organisations to boost basic education delivery in Nigeria. The Commission has attracted financial and technical supports from some IDPs among which are Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (2004-2008), Strengthening of Mathematics and Science (SMASE) in Niger, Plateau and Kaduna States (2006), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), among others (UBE, 2018).

Curriculum Improvement

The UBE has achieved a lot in curriculum development and improvement among which are Setting up National Early Child Care minimum standards for Early Child Care and Education Development ECCED, approval of the integrated Early Childhood Curriculum for 3-5 years by the National Council on Education (NCE) for pre-school child growth and early stimulation, production and distribution of the nine-year basic education curriculum materials to all public and junior secondary schools in the 36 states and FCT., introduction of the 9 years basic education curricular into schools for step-wise implementation beginning from 2008/2009 academic year in primary 1 and JSS 1, training 40 master-trainers in each of the 36 states and FCT on the philosophy and content of the basic education curriculum in August 2008. The state level training by master-trainers has also been conducted (UBE, 2018).

Funding of UBE

The UBE Acts (FRN) 2004 made provision for implementation. This includes:

- (i) Federal Government block grant of not less than 2% of its consolidated revenue fund;
- (ii) Funds or contributions in form of federal guaranteed credits; and
- (iii) Local and international donor grants (FRN, 2004).

The Acts further explained that the State shall contribute 5 percent of total cost of project as its commitment in the execution of the project.

Administration and disbursement of funds shall be through the State Universal Basic Education as follows:

- (i) Nursery (5%)
- (ii) Primary (60%)
- (iii) Junior Secondary School (35%)

Disbursement at each level of education is as follows:

- (i) infrastructure (70%)
- (ii) manpower development (15%)
- (iii) instructional material (15%) (UBE Act, 2004).

Arising from the objectives of UBE, Victor (2019) enumerated some of the importance of UBE:

- (1) **A Way towards Achieving Millennium Development Goals:** The author posits that poverty and hunger are major problems of developing nations of the world among which Nigeria is one, UBE helps individual to attain education through which they can acquire knowledge that can lead to productivity and self-reliance.
- (2) **Reduction in Child labour:** The author is of the opinion that if children ages 6-14 grab the opportunity provided through UBE, incidence of child labour will reduce. This age range is among the most vulnerable age group but schooling will help reduce their exploitation especially in the area of child labour.
- (3) **Ensures Quality Education:** According to the author UBE focusses on disseminating quality education to its recipients. The curriculum is designed to meet the areas needed for the development of the country. Through the designed curriculum, the societal ideologies, principles, values are inculcated into the school children. This shows that UBE helps in character formation of the young ones in the society.
- (4) **Reduction of Gender Inequality:** The author is of the opinion that UBE is helping to reduce gender inequality. It is an avenue through which the female child is able to acquire quality education which will enable her contribute to the development of the nation. There is a general saying that what a man can do, woman can do better. Education is the bedrock through which this can be easily achieved in a nation like Nigeria.

- (5) **Employment Opportunities:** The author states that UBE helps in provision of employment. Many graduates are employed as teachers and posted to different schools where their services are needed. UBE is helping to address this as many teachers have been employed in recent years and thereby also reducing unemployment rate in the nation.
- (6) **Reduction in Poverty:** The author further states that UBE reduces poverty rate. The learning experience of individual beneficiaries bring them to the knowledge of thinking on what they can do themselves to improve their own standard of living. This come through self-help projects, job creation among others.
- (7) **Crime Reduction:** The author further states that UBE helps to reduce crime rate. Many people engage in crime due to ignorance or lack of access to quality education. Since education helps to inculcate societal beliefs, moral values, principles and attitudes that will make an individual productive and resourceful, UBE is means through which this attained as informed citizens will refrain from crime.
- (8) **Help to Parents:** UBE is helping parents reduce their financial burden. Many parents and guidance could not afford to send their children and wards to school for financial reason. Since basic education is now free through the intervention of UBE, all children of school age are able to enjoy the privilege of sound and quality education.

Problems Facing UBE

Uko-Aviomoh, Okoh, and Omatseye (2007) and Tahir (2008) identify the problems facing UBE as lack of proper planning and monitoring, politicisation of the programme, improper funding, lack of accurate data, and lack of involvement of teachers in the programme.

Poor Planning and Monitoring

Lack of proper planning is part of the reasons for the failure recorded in the implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria. Inadequate planning places the success of the programme at serious risk. Up till today, Nigeria cannot boast of accurate figure of its populace. This has affected many sectors of the economy as planning has been difficult since everything has only been based on estimation. Provision of textbooks, laboratory equipment, audio visual materials among others have always been inadequate. Many schools do not have these materials and where available, they are inadequate or outdated (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014; Dare, Ihebereme and Maduwesi, 2008 and Edho, 2009). If the above problems have been there before COVID-19, now that the world has gradually gravitated toward a new normal of hand washing, wearing of facemask, use of sanitisers, the use of infrared thermometer for measuring pupils and teachers' temperature, how prepared is the government in the provision of the above mentioned facilities. And if money is given for the purchase, will the money be judiciously expended?

Lack of Adequate Funds

All over the world, ability to allocate enough funds for a programme remains the greatest

challenge that a programme can have (Labo-Popoola, Bello and Atanda (2009). UBE is not left out of this challenge. Although the Acts that established the UBE, which was signed into law on 26 May, 2004 pronounced three sources through which it will be financed which are the federal, state and local government, the federal government had decided to intervene with 2 percent of its consolidated revenue fund (funds from local or international donor grant), it is rather unfortunate that the fund provided by every tier is not adequate to execute the UBE plans in Nigeria. This has been one of the challenges of UBE and has hampered the implementation and fulfilment of the programme. Between 1999 and 2009 alone, the Federal Government spent more than N1.13 trillion on the education sector with little to show for it (Olanrewaju and Folorunso, 2009). Dike (2001) and Igbuzor (2006) observed that the government is in the habit of allocating less money to education sector and consequently, limit the successful implementation of the UBE programmes. In addition, there are instances where some state government failed to contribute their portion of counterpart fund, thus jeopardising the laudable objective of the UBE programme and policies. Obidike and Onwuka (2013) also identify lack of fund and planning, qualified personnel, effective supervision and poor management as the major factors affecting the implementation of UBE in Nigeria.

Inadequate Data

Inadequate data has made research into UBE programmes difficult. Many researchers find it difficult to obtain adequate data and other relevant information from government agencies. In addition, many offices do not have up-to-date archive where information can be easily retrieved.

Corruption

Corruption has further compounded the problem of shortage of funds in the implementation of UBE programmes. Even where the allocated fund is not enough, the little that is made available is usually embezzled by corrupt Nigerian officials working in SUBEB office across the country (Labo-Popoola, *et al* 2009). This no doubt, is a major barrier to the full success of the UBE laudable programmes in Nigeria. Heavily dishonest officers who are in-charge of allocating money sometimes divert such fund. In some cases, money intended for the schooling of thousands and thousands of young people ended up in private accounts. Corruption is a plague which if not curbed will sink the future of this country. It is pathetic that when palliatives were shared in most rural areas, some middle men did not allow the palliative to get to the downtrodden in the various rural community. The fear in the new normal post COVID-19 era is that even if the government is willing to provide all facilities to ensure teachers and pupils safety in and outside classrooms, will the middle men allow the schools enjoy those facilities? Again, another decadence in our system.

Misappropriation of Available Funds

It is sad to note that some money supposedly approved for implementation of UBE projects are not used for the purpose for which the money was approved. This has resulted in having pupils sit on the floor during classes. Others do not have chalkboard while others lack important items that make schooling interesting.

Nepotism

Nepotism which is prevalent has additionally affected the recruitment exercise of UBE in Nigeria. Many officers got their job through who they know and not level of competence. It is always difficult to reprimand this set of people for misbehaviour. Meanwhile, some of them are not even qualified for the job in the first instance. This has remained a clog in the wheel of progress of UBE.

Inadequate Personnel and Lack of Motivation

There are shortages of human materials. Unqualified teachers still teach in Nigeria. For example, World Bank Group Education, 2015 reported that a large proportion of recruited teachers are unqualified, especially in north-western and north-eastern states even after the teachers' minimum qualification criteria in basic education has been established. In addition, many state governments owe teachers up to 6 months salaries and those politicians who do not understand the vision and mission the UBEC are not ready to support the efforts of the Commission when they get to power. This has slowed down the implementation of the UBE programme. Anytime untrained personnel are made to handle obligations meant for certified personnel, it will always lead to drastic drop in the development and fulfilment of the objective of the programme.

Inadequate Inspection and Monitoring of UBE Projects Nationwide

On 7 October, 2004, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was given the mandate of overseeing implementation of UBE programmes. This function was further decentralised to the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). However, inadequate and proper inspection and supervision have led to poor execution of the programme in some states. Proper inspections would have allowed the Commission detect employment of unqualified employees and misappropriation of funds that have really brought a setback on the programme.

Poor Management of Projects and Programmes by Non-Qualified Contractors and Vendors

When laudable programme is handled by unqualified personnel, the result will be nothing but failure. This is among the problems facing UBE. Many time, the hard earn resources are committed to the hands of incompetent personnel. Whereas it takes a long time to get the meagre allocation from different levels of government to expedite action on the pressing needs at various schools. It is rather unfortunate that even when these resources are allocated, they are squandered by visionless personnel.

Non-Completion and Abandonment of Projects

There are times when projects are commenced without adequate funding. There are times when government refused to release promised funds for ongoing projects. This has caused many projects to be abandoned. Flagging-off new initiatives while some other ones have not been completed is not a good sign for any nation that is really working toward advancement in education sector. This has done more damages to the UBE.

Lack of Trust, Commitment and Integrity among Personnel and Workforce

Many staff of the UBE are not committed while others do not cherish their integrity and

therefore show less concern for achieving the goals and objectives of the Commission. The activities of this set of people have overwhelmed the good work and intentions of UBE in Nigeria.

Recommendations

If the UBE will be able to achieve its primary objectives, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration.

- (1) The Federal, State and Local Governments should make real their promises in terms of counterpart funding. This will enhance speedy development of UBE programme in Nigeria.
- (2) There is need for thorough and continuous evaluation to scrutinise the activities of UBE Commission from time-to-time and their programmes with a view to identifying their challenges and possible way forward.
- (3) Continuous training of recruited UBE officials and teachers at various schools. The Commission should also conduct periodic in-house training for its officers in order to avoid lapses in implementation of programmes.
- (4) Periodic inspection of facilities in the post COVID era is of almost importance as well as documentation and evaluation of on-going and uncompleted projects. This will help to determine the progress of programmes. The goals of the UBE in Nigeria will be substantially achieved.
- (5) Continuous advocacy and frequent sensitisation of parents on the prospects of sending their children and wards to school as well as the danger of ignoring the western education and the government should be ready to implement penalty on defaulting parents. Children found roaming the streets during school hours should be taken to custody by appropriate body and their parents sanctioned by the provision of Section 2 (2) of UBE Acts.
- (6) The Home-grown School Feeding Programme for primary school pupils among selected pilot states, which is a United Nations project should be implemented in all states of the Federation to encourage children to return massively to school after COVID-19. States should be advised to support the initiative with counterpart funding to ensure execution of the programme.
- (7) Proper and adequate incentives and health insurance should be given to teachers at this period and every stakeholder involved in implementation of the UBE programme. Salaries should be treated as priority and government should not feel like doing anyone a favour when salaries are paid to deserving personnel. Protective gear should be provided for teachers across board and their work should be seen as essential services at this period. Every life matters.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Universal Basic Education is a good initiative of the Federal Government meant for advancement of the Nigeria. This paper has examined the factors responsible for its ineffectiveness despite efforts being made by the government at various levels. If some of the issues raised are logically addressed, it is hoped that the many of the challenges militating against the programme will be overcome and its primary objectives achieved.

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