
UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW OF APPROACHES TO IMPROVE ITS QUALITY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The quality of education in any country is linked to level of development and productivity because the global market is knowledge-driven. This paper focuses on improving the quality of basic education in Nigeria for national development and productivity. The paper gives an overview of universal basic education in Nigeria and examines some factors of quality education such as teacher quality, funding, academic progress and so on. The significance of education in national development is highlighted and hence the need for improving the quality of basic education for effective human capital development to attain national development and productivity. The paper recommends among other things the need to improve teacher quality at basic education level through recruitment processes and training opportunities for basic school teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education remains the bedrock of any meaningful development. The quality of education in any given country determines, to a large extent, the pace of national development. This is evidenced in many countries which have made substantial efforts to improve the quality of education systems. Quality of education is one of the indicators used in measuring the quality of life of citizenry. Concern about the quality of education available to citizenry has risen over the years and this led to global framework of action necessitated by rising poverty, HIV/AIDs epidemic and population explosion as well as environmental challenges dominant in developing countries. In 1990, there was global declaration of Education for All (EFA) with the target year of 2000. Face with failure to meet the target goals within the stated time frame, in September 2000, over 180 world leaders converged, under the auspices of United

Nations, at millennium summit and committed themselves and their countries to eight goals known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Out of the eight MDGs, two relate to education. The education goal of achieving universal primary education has an associated target of ensuring that by 2015 all girls and boys everywhere complete a full course of primary schooling. Achievement of gender equality is another goal aims at eliminating gender disparity in enrolment at primary and secondary levels by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 (Barrett, 2009).

Nations, the world over, face the challenges of meeting the SDGs. The education systems in many countries have undergone several changes in the area of curriculum reforms, policies and funding streams among others. The federal government of Nigeria launched the Universal Basic education (UBE) programme in 1999 and passed the UBE act into law in 2004 as part of its effort to actualise the education-

based MDGs in the country. The old education structure known as 6-3-3-4 was replaced by the new structure of 9-3-4. The 9 in the new structure represents the nine years of free, compulsory universal basic education of primary and junior secondary school age. Adebola (2007) contended that with the introduction of Universal Basic Education, it is believed that development of Nigeria will be accelerated because of inherent value in education. This means that education is useful tool for national development.

Overview of Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria

Considering the challenges which bedevilled the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the country in 1976 which lead to its collapse, the federal government, lunched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme on 30th September, 1999. This was followed by establishing an act of the national assembly in 2004 known as the compulsory, free UBE Act 2004. Basic education, as described by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013):

- i. is the education given to children aged 0-15 years
- ii. It encompasses the early childhood education 0-4 and 10 years of formal schooling.
- iii. Shall be free, compulsory, universal and qualitative

In order to ensure effective implementation of the UBE programme and subsequent attainment of its objectives, the compulsory, free UBE Act 2004 provides for the establishment of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) at national level and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) at state levels with prescribed functions, membership terms and structures. The ultimate goal is to provide free, universal basic education for all, to enable citizens to acquire appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy communicative, manipulative and life skills. The UBE scheme was introduced in order to take care

of the large population of the disadvantaged groups, the rural community, the girl child, the nomadic, the disabled, the almajiri and the phenomenon of boys drop out (Adebola, n.d). The UBE, as a foundation for other levels of education and total development of child, is believed to have an impact on individual workforce outcome such as employability on one hand, and national development on the other. Universal Basic Education Scheme was conceived of as strategy to equip the Nigerian child with basic skills and knowledge that would enable him to adjust to the changing environment within which he lives. education has continued to receive high priority in the nation's development plans. Efforts were made to formulate a clear vision of how the education system can most effectively contribute to the development of a knowledge-based economy through policy adjustment and curriculum reforms. It is generally believed that knowledge-based economy is totally dependent upon the number of sufficient trained and educated workforce ready to man the various sector of the economy.

Objectives of Universal Basic Education

Basic education is the foundation upon which the rest of education lies. The programme is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. The provision of free, compulsory universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age;
- iii. Reducing drastically the incident of drop outs from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
- iv. Catering for drop out and out of school children/adolescents through various forms of contemporary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- v. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeral, manipulative and

life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying the foundation for life-long learning (Implementation Guideline for UBE, 1999:5).

Given the laudable objectives of the UBE scheme and the conditions under which the scheme operates, it calls for urgent attention on the part of government. However, the forces that brought about the failure of similar programme in the past- universal primary education (UPE) are still around and if not tackled, the present UBE scheme would not be an exception. The forces include lack of proper planning, lack of knowledge of the number of teachers that will be required to implement the scheme, inadequate learning facilities, ill-motivated, and unqualified teaching staff and so on. However, the scheme, if properly implemented, particularly with adequate consideration given to forces that will bring about its failure, will enhance Nigeria's educational and overall development (Aluede, 2006).

Basic Education and Issue of Quality

Attempt to universalize education has led to increased enrolment without commensurate improvement in standards. Quality has to do with standards and worth of something. Standards are usually set in relation to programme, staffing, teaching and learning facilities, curricular provisions and other inputs which are germane to realisation of quality education system. In Nigeria, standards have been set with respect to all the aspects of quality as entrenched in the FRN (2013). The 1999 Constitution empowers the Minister of Education to ensure that Minimum Standards are set, maintained and constantly improved in all schools of the federation. In this regard, provision has been made for inspectorate services for monitoring and improving standards at all levels of education through relevant bodies/departments of the federal and state ministries of education. The inspectorate services shall cover federal, state and local government levels. Quality Assurance unit has been established under the

ministries of education to ensure that inputs, processes and outputs of the education system meet set standards to bring about improvement in teaching and learning. According to FRN (2013) the goals of the Quality Assurance shall be to:

- i. Set, maintain and improve standards in all aspect of the school system;
- ii. Ensure uniform standard and quality control of instructional activities in school through regular inspection and continuous supervision;
- iii. Obtain information on problems and difficulties of teachers and institutions and offer practical solutions to them; and
- iv. Encourage dissemination of information on innovations and progressive educational principles and practice in the school system through publications, workshops, meetings seminars, conferences and so on.

As seen above, the government has put in place an effective policy mechanism to provide quality education system for the citizenry. However, what is not yet clear is how well the set standards are monitored and maintained to ensure the quality of basic education in the country. Quality standards are the goals to which all learners, teachers, staff and school leaders should aspire (Egwu, 2009). According to Egwu (2009) there are 8 components of quality standards outlined in the approved National Education Quality Assurance Policy and the Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Nigeria namely:

1. Learners' achievement and standards
2. Learners' welfare and participation
3. Care, guidance and support
4. Leadership and Management
5. School community relationships
6. Learning Environment
7. Teaching and learning
8. Curriculum and other activities

Other factors that affect quality education in any education system include: quality teachers,

academic progress, learning environment, governance, facilities, content of the curriculum, funding, family support, discipline, assessment and outcomes, administration and learning materials to mention but a few. Some of these factors as they affect quality education are reviewed below.

Teacher Quality

The quality of teachers is fundamentally important determinant of the type of education system available to citizens since no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2013). Various institutions have been saddled with the responsibility of training the teachers in the country. What we see in recent times is far from expectations. These teacher-training institutions rather than admitting the best candidates into their programmes, mediocre candidates are admitted to be trained as teachers. This situation has resulted into decline in the quality of teachers produced in the country.

The Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) shall be the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession as enshrined in National Policy on Education. However, this provision has not been adhered to as large number of people with grade II and SSCE and all sort of irrelevant qualifications are currently found in the teaching profession. Investigation shows that there is large number of teachers with certificates below the minimum qualification of NCE in the system. In the North-East and North-West regions, the figure is about 70% (Egwu, 2009). Basic education level is characterized by considerable shortfalls in teaching staff. The existing shortfalls in teachers, according Egwu (2009), are 969,078 for ECCDE; 338,147 for Primary education; 581 for JSS; 1,580,000 for adult literacy and 12,329 for nomadic education.

If the teacher remains a key input into achieving quality basic education, then the authorities concerned must train sufficient number of quality teachers through effective teacher preparation. The new bench mark for teacher preparation programmes

developed by the NUC is a welcome development which may yield positive result. Many certified quality teachers are found in other careers where their service is less needed. To bring back these teachers to teaching profession, government shall provide more incentive to attract and retain quality teachers in schools.

Academic Progress

A quality Basic Education is expected to enable its recipients to acquire appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative, manipulative and life skills as a preparation for a productive life and meaningful contribution to sustainable national development. However, this can only be realised through functional and relevant curriculum, adequate provision of school facilities, adequate funding and so on. The curriculum and instructional materials have a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Egwu, 2009). For schools to function effectively and efficiently, there is need for provision of essential infrastructure. Which serve as the physical expression of the school curriculum and therefore no meaningful progress can be made without adequate provision of the school infrastructure. The poor state of basic schools explains why the quality of products from such schools remains low. The various curriculum materials needed by the pupils to develop certain skills are no longer available in schools.

Funding

The success of any educational effort hinges heavily on adequate funding. Most laudable educational programmes in this country are usually wonderfully planned but they usually crumble at the execution stage because of inadequate funding or mismanagement of funds by the individuals whom these programmes are trusted in their care (Taiwo, 2008). Government's commitment to education is judged by its financial allocation to the sector. The education sector in Nigeria is engulfed by declining

resource allocation. According to World Bank (2004) in Egwu (2009):

During the years 1997 to 2002 when the UBE program was supposedly receiving government's attention, the recurrent expenditure on education as a share of the total federal expenditure declined from 12.3% to 9.1% and the share of capital expenditure has remained unchanged (P. 34).

Apart from government's lack of commitment to funding of UBE, a possible gross mismanagement of funds is the bane of UBE programme. Absence of transparency and accountability in the administration of FGN-UBE intervention funds has made it difficult to make significant progress toward actualization of program objectives. Many states could not access their FGN-UBE intervention funds for lack of accountability. Corruption has become endemic among government officials who are now enjoying high degree of impunity prevalent in the country. There is the need to put in place an effective mechanism that will ensure all funds are judiciously utilized. Funding to education sector must be given priority through increased budgetary allocation to the sector (Daily Trust, August, 4,2015).

Curriculum Content

The Basic education curriculum (BEC) is designed not only to address the issue of access to education, but also to create an exit point at which individuals who could not go beyond basic education level must have acquired the basic competencies and skills necessary for them to succeed in the society and contribute their quota toward national development. As part of curriculum transformation, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) was directed by government to

review, restructure and re-align existing curricula for primary and junior secondary school (JSS) into a 9-year basic education programme (Mustapha, 2011:173). Emerging issues that include Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), HIV/AIDS and entrepreneurship skills are included in the contents of the revised curriculum. The BEC is designed to allow curriculum planners to properly target pupils' needs and interests at respective age levels and to promote appropriate core and elective subjects for well round education (Audu, Kareem, Sani, 2011).

However, major challenges include low capacity of curriculum implementers, inadequate teaching and learning resources as well as the support facilities such as libraries, laboratories and computer facilities. Without these facilities no meaningful implementation can be achieved.

Quality Basic Education for National Development and productivity

Education has been rated as index of development and productivity. Today, countries are rated not based on available material resources but on the basis of their stock of human capital resources available to man the various sectors of the economy. Many countries now invest more on education to get competitive advantage in the knowledge-driven global market. The role of education in development and productivity of any country can not be over emphasised. Education has been described as efficacious economic investment, which uplifts not only the quality of life but also increases the productivity in market and non- market work (Jaiyeoba, 2015). Investment in education is investment in human capital and increase in investment in human capital will bring about the efficient use of labour and capital resources, which in turns boost productivity. It has been generally recognized that an educated population is productive one. Therefore, the quality of education receive by the citizens is highly determinant of their contribution toward national development. There is general consensus that the quality of human resources has a

significant impact on economic development and growth (Onuoha, 2008). This view confirms the productive impact of education on the individuals, society and nation at large. Education is a means of emancipation from poverty which retard development in a country or region.

In view of the foregoing, education has continued to receive government's attention in the priority order. Education in Nigeria, is an instrument "per excellence" for effecting national development (FRN, 2013). Various development initiatives and programmes are channelled toward education sector for realisation of set objectives, example, UPE, MDGs, entrepreneurship. Quality education is the bedrock of national development. No country can develop without quality education system that empowers the learners with appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities for sustainable development. However, the general public have continued to express concern over the declining standard of education in Nigeria. Most products from the system are judged as half-baked due to non possession of necessary skills and knowledge. The persistent challenges of unemployment, poverty, economic stagnation, massive importation, youth restiveness/insurgency, rampant kidnappings etc are nothing but manifestation of government's failure to provide quality education that makes live more flourishing among citizenry.

The UBE scheme was introduced to serve as panacea to many of our development challenges. Aluede (2006) stated that the desire to inculcate in children the knowledge of literacy numeracy and the ability to communicate made the UBE scheme worthwhile. However, the UBE as it is today is marred by many unresolved challenges ranging from low quality teaching staff, inadequate teaching and learning materials, poor condition of service, ineffective supervision mechanism to corruption and over populated classes in basic schools. It is obvious that the state of education in Nigeria is poor, necessitating urgent remedial actions (Egwu, 2009).

The only to ensure quality basic education is to: increase UBE funding, review the current UBE funding mechanism to ensure judicious utilization of funds, recruit quality teachers, improve the condition of service for basic school teachers, evolve an effective and efficient organ for quality control at basic education level, supply adequate teaching and learning facilities etc

CONCLUSION

Education has been regarded as a means of achieving national development. The UBE as sub-sector of education system in Nigeria is described as worthwhile scheme that can lay sound foundation for quality education in order to attain development through the instrumentality of education. Improving the quality of basic education curriculum is imperative if the UBE scheme is to play its expected role and help build technological base for development and productivity. In this regard, it is necessary to create conducive learning environment in basic schools for effective curriculum implementation of basic education and subsequent realisation its objectives. In view of the foregoing,

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward:

1. Government and education authorities concerned should improve the quality of basic education teachers via recruitment of only quality teachers and provision of training opportunities for those already in the service to enable implement the curriculum effectively;
2. There should be a complete overhaul of the UBE funding mechanism to provide for adequate funds and subsequent utilization and channelling of same to key areas that ensure quality education; and
3. In view of the ineffectiveness and inefficiency associated with existing quality control mechanism, there should be in place an

effective quality control system to ensure standards are maintained to bring about improvement in basic education sector

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