

The Challenges Affecting the Implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The reduction of illiteracy to the barest minimum by 2015 by world nations and the achievement of item two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) prompt the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria by the Obasanjo's led government in 2000. This paper was motivated by the need to investigate the challenges affecting the implementation of the UBE programme in Delta state. The paper examines the UBE and past educational policies in Nigeria aimed at reducing illiteracy and providing affordable and accessible education to all citizens. Attempt was made at identifying current problems of the UBE in Delta state, which include: poor funding; poor motivation of teachers; improper supervision and monitoring of the UBE programme; inadequate teaching and learning facilities. Possible working solutions were also provided aimed at overcoming the challenges of the programme in Delta state, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) item two adopted by world nations in 2000 proposed that, by 2015, children of educable age should have free, affordable and accessible education. The item is a response to the world conference of "Education For ALL (EFA)" held in Jomitten, Thailand from 5th to 9th March 1990, which was the major trigger for the birth of basic education. The conference, which was well attended, came out with a blue print document entitled 'World Declaration On Education For All' and framework of actions to meet basic learning needs. (FGN/UNICEF 2003). Nigeria as a world nation became encouraged to setup educational activities to achieve EFA goals. EFA in Nigeria could be traced back to the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the 1950's in two of the then regions of the country and at national level in 1976. Denga (2000) contributing "our memories may be flashed back to 1950 when the universal declaration of human rights asserted that every one has the right to education".

The right to EFA citizens of educable age in Nigeria has witnessed a renewed determination to achieve it before the targeted 2015 as Obasanjo (2006) puts it "educating a child is closing the prison gates". The strength of EFA cannot be over-emphasized as the future of the child and nation at large depends on educational gains.

The National Policy on Education (1977

revised 1981, 1985, 1998 and 2004) attest to Nigerians commitment to EFA in particular, basic education for all as each of the four policies introduced in Nigeria lays emphasis on universal, functional and qualitative education. The guiding principles of EFA in Nigeria is the "equipping of every citizen with knowledge, skills, attitude and values as well as enable him/her derive maximum benefit from his membership of society as thus, lead a fulfilling life.

The determination of the government under the admirable leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to achieve EFA by 2015, introduced the UBE programme. Launched at Sokoto on the 30th day of September 1999 but actually took off in the 2000/2001 school year. The launch became necessary as the Obasanjo's led government came into power in 1999 and met an educational system that was in a state of decay (FGN 2004). Teachers were poorly trained and motivated, high rate of illiteracy as a consequence of high drop out rates, poor infrastructure conditions of schools. Thus, the introduction of the UBE came as a result to positively transform the nations basic education sub-sector (FGN 2004) and to meet the context of the global vision of EFA. Today, the UBE is here with us as it aims at equipping individuals with knowledge (Obinaju 2001).

UBE AND PAST EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

Before the introduction of the UBE by the

Obasanjo's led government in 2000, several educational policies geared towards providing accessible and affordable education for all citizens of Nigeria of educable age existed. The UBE is the fourth in the ladder of educational policies in the country.

The origin of Nigeria's educational policies dates back to the 1955 comprehensive education laws of the western Nigeria, 1957 Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the Eastern region and the 1976 UPE programme then, the baby programme in 2000 which is still been natured to maturity.

Each of the policy existed and was established by different government administration and was criticized when a new government rides into power as Utibe (2001) asserted, "The UPE contributed to a lowering of the standard of education in Nigeria at the primary school level".

The UPE of 1956 was faulted in scope, planning, financing and a general lack of accurate data of children that would be affected by the scheme as absence of accurate census data in the country at that time prompted the failure. The UPE was primarily designed to reduce the educational imbalance between the North and South backed by the oil boom. The government embarked on the full responsibility of training teachers for the scheme. 163,000 teachers gotten from the emergency training programme which made various school leavers to obtain the TC II certificate and thus, raising the quality of staff strength in the primary school sub-sector throughout the federation.

The incessant political changes in the past constituted the problems of ineffective implementation of the policy statement of EFA. In decades past, military intervention occasioned by changes in government in quick succession, variations in the non-uniformity in the system of primary education, instability, which characterized the Nigerian political scene, has always led to changes in educational policies most especially, at the primary school level. Each government regime rationalized the policy on education on its own accord.

Utibe (2001) asserted that, 'the UPE programme in the then two region of the country was improperly planned and hurriedly executed' leading to a waste of millions of Naira. The Taiwo commission of 1960 charged to investigate the crisis rocking the UPE scheme reported among other things 'a fall in standard'. The Dike commission recommended its 'Abolition and

subsequent modification'. Following several recommendations to government, the federal government approved the third National Development Plan (1975-1980) UBE, 2006. The quality of a nation's education is a process and product of its educational policies as "education is an instrument of change Utibe (2001) and a major instrument for socio-economic as well as political development.

The general outcry in the falling standard of basic education and a sharp depreciation in the morals of primary school children brought about the introduction of the UBE. The UBE challenged with the problems facing basic education in Nigeria before its introduction include: Dearth of facilities, inadequate supervision, shortage of personnel, lack of funds, high prices of textbooks, incoherent implementation of the curriculum, drop-out rates...(Denga 2000).

UBE Vision Statement

"At the end of 9 years of continuous education, every child through the system should be acquire appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, communication, manipulative and life skills and be employable, useful to himself and the society at large by possessing relevant ethical, moral and civic skills".

UBE Mission Statement

To serve as a prime energizer of a rational movement for the actualization of the nations UBE vision working in contact with all stakeholders thus, mobilizing the nation's creative energies to ensure that, EFA becomes the responsibility of all.

UBE Objectives

- (a) Ensuring unaltered access to 9 years of formal basic education.
- (b) Provision of free, universal education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- (c) Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- (d) Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulation, communication and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needful for laying a solid foundation for life long learning (Source: UBE 2000)

THE DELTA STATE UBE SCHEME

At the launch of the UBE programme, state government was charged with the responsibility of providing accessible and affordable education for all citizens at the grassroots. The delta state government spurt into action with the establishment of the Delta State Universal Basic Education Board (DSUBEB) charged with the task of providing and managing basic education in the state.

Without education, man is but a splendid slave as education is not everything but nothing strives without education. Obasanjo at the launch of the UBE in Sokoto decried “a child starved without education is like a child without food”. The success or failure of the UBE is a reflection of the overall outcomes of the pupils/students after school. Pupils’ enrollment in the state is a numerical contribution to the overall pupils’ population which is 24,768,497 pupils strength as at 2006 (UBE, 2006)

Delta state with its vast mineral deposit and robust financial base has a mere percentage of 1.82% of the total number of public schools in the country and contributes only 2.32 % of the total number of pupils’ enrollment in Nigeria (UBE, 2006).

As acclaimed of the Ibori’s led administration, before pupils in some schools sat on classroom floors because there were no chairs and desks. These conditions depressed staff morale and made pupils uncontrollable and difficult to teach. The maximum renovation and provision of infrastructure/instructional materials has restored staff morale and fortified professional confidence.

Delta state with an estimated population figure of 4 million as at 2002 had 46 % of the population in the basic education level. A few of the unprivileged are from the rural/riverside communities of the state where little or no attention has been supplied. The success of the UBE in the state can be felt by the maximum strife in schools construction. As at 1999, the state had a total of 1,012 primary schools but rose to 1,552 in 2003 (UBE, 2004). The enrollment rate also increases tremendously as at 1999, the pupils’ enrollment was 574,042 but at 2003, it had risen to 616,597-enrollment rate of pupils.

Some constraints which affects the success rates of the UBE programme in the state include; payment of staff salaries in arrears; non-completion of new constructions and school rehabilitation; insufficient teachers guide; teaching aids and sport equipment; schools

didn’t receive impress from the LGEAs or DSUBEB; the inflation of pupils enrollment figures; poor maintenance of school records instructional materials; non-budgetary provision to carry out supervisory activities and lack of grants from the national funds. Also, in the rural communities, teachers are inadequate and if posted, refuses posting.

The walking distance of pupils to school affects their performance and overall success of the UBE in the state. Arubayi (2005) the distance traveled to school by some pupils has some relationship to school attendance, punctuality to schools and absenteeism’ some schools in the state are located so far from pupils as the travel more than 5 kilometers to get to school.

Poor Funding/ Planning of the UBE in the State

The intent of the UBE as declared in the policy statement is that, education should be free like its predecessors, UPE. The financial burden of government often forces parents to get involved in the funding of the basic level of education. How free is free education policy in Delta State? Since most parents are poor, the children remain poorly equipped to learn. The release of funds from the national fund to the DSUBEB is diverted thus, shifting the burden to parents in terms of levies. The UBE declaration of 2000 stipulated that

“The Federal Government shall provide the bulk of funds while the State government assisting sufficiently to ensure that, the poorly stricken parents contributes minimal funds”

Despite huge budgets allocated to the DSUBEB, education still eludes millions of Deltans. The adverse effects of under funding have led to payment of teachers salaries in arrears, non completion of new constructions and provision of incentive for teaching and learning. As Ikoya (2000) asserted that

“Despite bloated annual budgets for funding the UBE programme including massive aids from local and international communities for successful implementation, the are indications that, several schools are still plagued with inadequate physical facilities for effective implementation of the UBE.”

Poor Supervision and Monitoring of UBE Centers

Lack of supervision and monitoring of schools

for several decades was one of schools for several decades were one of the major drawbacks in the education sector. Obinaju (2001) “ educational supervision is concerned with those particular activities and aspects which maintains and promote the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools as Onoyase (1991) perceived supervision as an action directed towards the improvement of teaching-learning process. Supervision is the life wire concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of the UBE scheme. Ezenkwasili (2007) ‘there has been no inspection and supervision of schools in the decade’. Supervision of schools is the heart of quality assurance in education.

The constraints to effective supervision and monitoring of the UBE scheme is attributed to inadequate vehicles for monitoring, inadequate number of qualified vehicles for monitoring officers, inadequate office accommodation, lack of funds, transport equipment and time factor militate against effective supervision of the UBE programme in Delta state.

An overview of the challenges affecting the UBE in Delta State include: inadequate manpower to handle effectively subjects in schools; inadequate chairs and desks in school which makes pupils seat on classroom floors, poor planning of the scheme; increased drop-out rate in rural areas in the state; short payment of teachers salaries; improper administration of DSUBEB; non-conduciveness of school location; far distance trekked by pupils to and from school daily; poor funding which affects enrollment rate; evasion of classroom by teachers due to poor motivation from state government; poverty of families amongst others.

Possible Solutions to Identify Problems of the UBE in Delta State

Maximize strife in classroom construction, which will bring about the success of the UBE in the state.

Establishment of more schools in the state to compete with the increased enrollment rate.

Improved teachers/pupils supervision throughout the state to increase teachers’ service delivery.

Regular provision of teaching aids by government.

Proper implementation of the education reform of the education ministry.

Improved funding of the basic education sub-sector by government.

Adequate provision of instructional materials to enhance teaching/learning effectiveness.

Regular payment of teachers’ salaries and proper motivation of teachers through loans (car, motorcycle grants) to increase inputs to the success of the UBE programme in the state.

Recruitment of qualified teachers as teachers’ qualification and working experience affects the overall success or failure of the UBE programme. Community recruitment of teachers in the rural areas of the states is also recommended as teachers posted to these areas do reject their postings.

If the power, rail, oil and agricultural sectors deserve special attention by government, the education sector deserves the more funding from government. They should be a nation wide UBE awareness and enrollment campaign similar to the national immunization programme and the 2006 census.

CONCLUSION

Much has been faulted of failed educational policies in Nigeria. The UBE is a policy all and sundry should embrace to nurture to maturity. All hope is not lost as the UBE programme promises to bring about a face-lift to the county’s dream of achieving education for all by 2015. Education is more national development and without a policy like the UBE, the possibility of EFA by 2015 will become a mirage! Education will help the nation achieve global relevance as continuous and improved funding by government and the private sector concerned about improved education, the educational future of the Nigeria child and generations yet unborn will be secured.

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