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ACHIEVEMENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The last four decades in the history of Nigeria witnessed series of educational experiments. These experiments were responses to national demands for education that will meet the developmental needs of a developing nation such as Nigeria. Most of these programmes suffered implementation problems that saw their early demise. The Universal Basis Education (UBE), a new initiative for change, with its laudable objectives could provide the catalyst for a steady technological growth of Nigeria if adequate measures are taken to ensure proper implementation. The paper looked at what the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria could do to come to the rescue of the UBE in the face of some indications emerging and calls for early intervention by the academic community. The paper recommended among others, the implementation of the 26% of annual budgeting recommended by UNESCO for the funding of the UBE in order to ensure successful implementation of the programme and regular research support by the academics on implementation strategies and performance monitoring of the programme.

The interest of nations on the education of their citizenry has been on the increase by the day since there is a growing realization that education holds the key to national development. This awareness led to the 1969 curriculum conference in Nigeria and the eventual documentation of the policy on education. The policy gave direction to the goals and aspirations of Nigeria in providing education for her citizenry. The policy indicated that education is a natural right of every child and should be provided for every child to access. UNICEF (1999) in a report on the state of world children, showed that 130 million children of primary school age in developing countries are growing up without access to education. What a colossal



waste of human resources! Babalola (2000) reporting specifically on Nigeria, noted that the literacy rate is 52% while a whopping 48% of the teeming population is illiterate. Also, the Ministry of Education statistics division (1996) revealed that only 14.1 million children of school age are enrolled in primary school out of the 21 million children of school age. The same statistics revealed that completion rate of primary school was 61%, while only 13.5% successfully transit from Junior into the senior secondary schools. These data speak negatively of the commitment of Nigeria to the education of her citizens. In response to this situation, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched in September 1999 with a genuine commitment to making education available to all and sundry. The expectation is that all children of the country of school age will remain in school compulsorily for nine years.

The initiative that education is the driving force of national development has become common place knowledge in the present day world. National education policies have changed in accordance with the needs, aspirations and expectations of such nations. In developing nation like Nigeria, structuring education to help solve problems associated with national development is paramount. Failures recorded in different areas of national political and socio-economic life have been linked with high level of illiteracy. The global initiatives that gave impetus for reforms in education in Nigeria are the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Education for all (EFA)..The MDG goals among others include the achievement of universal primary education by the year 2015. The goals of Education for all(EFA) as declared in Jomtien conference of 2000 also include;

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

- 1) Ensuring that by 2005 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- 2) Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes
- 3) Achieving a 50 percent improvement in all level of adult literacy by 2015 especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- 4) Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving equality in education by 2015 with focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to achievement in basic, education of good quality.
- 5) Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are



achieved by all especially literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Ebenebe (2006) stated that it was in response to these goals and initiatives that Nigeria adopted the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), as a home grown reform measure in 2004 with the following targets:

- a. Value re-orientation
- b. Job creation and employment generation
- c. Poverty reduction
- d. People empowerment through education in order to achieve the first three targets.

Over the years, past governments of Nigeria have attempted and indeed introduced policies aimed at helping and encouraging development. Examples such as (UPE) of the seventies and the 6-3-3-4 system of the eighties and nineties are note worthy. The newest of such policies is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) of the new democratic government with the following objectives:

1. developing in the entire citizenry
2. a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
3. The provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age
4. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
5. Catering for the learning needs of young persons, who for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
6. Ensuring the requisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

The vision of the policy planners is to evolve a strong plan of action and a virile education system that will cater for the needs of persons as well as national aspirations and a consequent translation of these into national development. The achievement of these as matter of commitment desires a concerted effort by all and sundry but more imperatively, the apex literate community-the tertiary institution. The focus of this paper thus is to examine ways in which institutions of higher learning can partner with other sector to achieve success of UBE.

Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Institutions of higher learning the world over are the highest repositories of



knowledge. They have the highest concentration of those certified as experts in their respective fields whose expertise is expected to modernize and advance society (Olaleye,2008). Tertiary institutions are the kernel of societies and it's mouthpiece for liberation, political freedom, economic emancipation and social liberalization. This is expected since education not only liberates a man but also gives him relevance in society. Okolie (2003) explained that Africa's transformation towards sustainable and equitable development must be powered by the force from her institutions of higher learning. The society's expectation from her tertiary institutions is enormous. As a leading sector of the educational system (and its apex at that), there is need for institutions of higher learning to play pivotal roles in the overall system of education. Indeed, there is an interdependence that needs to exist between institution of higher learning and other levels of education. A good higher education depends on solid foundation at the primary and secondary school levels since products of these levels act as feeder for higher education. The higher institutions on their own need by maintaining, planning, adapting, improving and putting in place quality assurance measures for other levels of the system.

The National Policy on Education published by NERDC (2004) in section 8 No.5 stated the goals of tertiary institution as:

- a. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- c. Develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- f. Forge and cement national unity; and
- g. Promote national and international understanding and interactions.

Subsequently in No 60 of the same section, the policy states methods through which tertiary institutions can achieve the above goals to include

- i. Teaching
- ii. Research and development
- iii. Articulate staff development programmes
- iv. Generation and dissemination of knowledge
- v. variety of modes of programme including full-time, part time, block-release, day release, sandwich etc.
- vi. Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF)



- vii. Students industrial work experience scheme(SIWES)
- viii. Maintain minimum educational standard through appropriate agencies.
- ix. Inter-institutional co-operation
- x. Dedicated services to the community through extra-moral and extension services.

The above policy desires depict the amount of hope that Nigeria heaps on her institutions of higher learning as agent of change and development. In the face of the emerging universal basic education therefore, this paper seeks to enunciate the roles which the institutions of higher learning need to play to ensure achievement of programme objectives and engineer national development through education. This is considered under the following subheadings.

1. Curriculum
2. Manpower training and retraining
3. Research and knowledge generation
4. Instructional materials provision
5. Programme evaluation.

Curriculum

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria owe it as a responsibility to ensure continuous reform, restructure and amendment of the present UBE curriculum in line with emerging needs and aspirations of the nation. By this means the problem of obsolescence and irrelevance of content will be overcome.

Research and Production of Knowledge

Institutions of higher learning need to collaborate with government and other agencies in the area of research. The dearth of information on the variables that play in any programme under implementation spells doom for that programme. Transformative knowledge.(Dukku,2000) of social issues that may emanate from the UBE and the identification of the problems, formulating of action plan on implementation and consequently advising government, fall on the shoulders of the institutions of higher learning. Such researches must belong to the strand of studies on why previous educational policies failed, cultural issues related to universality of education, ecological issues in equitable provision of education, teacher-related issues, funding and its relationship to implementation success as well as societal issues that engender educational access and provision. Researches on instruction and pedagogy as well as perception, awareness and infrastructural availability and suitability for an effective UBE implementation also need to be undertaken.



The role of universities and other higher institutions in the research agenda is multi dimensional. Onwu (2004) identified the highest mission of universities to be service to mankind and the society in which it is situated and identifies research as the avenue for its achievements. Naidoo (1998) had noted that the aim of research is to understand and improve social conditions and institutions. This is the service aspect of research. In line with this service dimension of research, is the practitioners (academics in institution of higher learning) commitment in discovering truth and knowledge that addresses human problems. Onwu (2004) thus advocates that apart from research being of immediate practical value to the society, it should be of value to others than the researcher.

Success of the institutions of higher learning in engineering UBE through research however, raises some pertinent issues that hinder researchers. Onwu (2004) and Naidoo (1998) recognized the under listed as impediments to research

1. Poor research funding which indicates an underrate of priority of research in education
2. Existing and perceived distrust of capability of intellectuals to carryout useful research.
3. Focusing of research paradigms that are not directed at solving local education problems but interest of donor (foreign) that fund such researches.
4. Research agenda that have no bearing with local or national needs.
5. Production of university-based researches without involvement of other sectors.
6. Poor working condition of researchers in form of loaded teaching allocations that leave little or no time for research.

Beside these obstacles, the research role of tertiary institutions in creating, sustaining and improving educational policies such as the UBE deserves focus and sustained action.

Tertiary Institutions and Instructional Materials Provision for UBE

Success of educational programmes is a direct reflection of availability and use of recommended and suitable materials for implementation. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria must strengthen its capacities to play meaningful roles in the provision, design and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning materials for the successful implementation of the universal basic education. An understanding of such issues as

- i. Who should use the materials?
- ii. What materials are to be used and for which subject?



- iii. Where they will be useful e.g. Cultural issues
- iv. Who should benefit from the use of such materials should underline production of these instructional materials.

Institutes and departments of educational technology in institution of higher learning should design instructional materials for use in the UBE schools. The knowledge of academics in areas of child psychology and learning theories should be imported in the process.

Researches on modern technicalities that influence teaching and learning process and the effect of instructional materials in teaching and learning should be exhaustively explored and improved upon. New teaching and learning aids potent in affecting classroom achievements should be produced and distributed to schools for use. Tertiary institutions exist in position to organize workshop, seminars and retraining exercise for teachers involved in the implementation of the UBE in effective handling, use and application of various forms of innovative instructional materials and technologies.

The recommendation of the national policy on education (NPE 2004) that learners at the UBE level of education should be taught by practical, exploratory and experimental methods makes design and utility of appropriate instructional materials for use in UBE schools all the more essential.

Role of Tertiary Institution in Evaluation of the UBE Programme

The UBE is expected to be Nigeria's gateway to social and technological advancement. To this end, huge sums of public fund and efforts are being expended to ensure its success and effectiveness. Programme evaluation in many nations of the world, apart from being a formal educational activity, is an instrument by which questions about the benefits received from huge government expenditures on education are answered (Worthern, 1991). If evaluation is understood as determining the worth of a thing, programme evaluation by extension is series of activities aimed at judging the worth and utility of an educational programme so as to make decisions about its improvement in part or the whole educational system.

Anderson and Ball (1978) listed the purposes of programme evaluation to include

improvement in part or the whole educational system.

- i. Making decision about program installation
- ii. Making decisions about continuing and expanding programme and certification after a program of studies has been undergone.
- iii. Making decisions about modification of the programme when necessary



- iv. Obtain evidence to support a programme
- v. Obtain evidence to oppose a programme
- vi. Understand the psychological and social processes of a programme.

The tertiary institutions and their high literate communities are expected to act as watchdogs so as to advice policy makers and the political class on the direction of the programme effect.

Pertinent Issues Requiring Urgent Attention for Successful UBE

Though the UBE is still at its teething stage, it is ideal to begin now to take steps to nip any identified or perceived impediments on the way of successful implementation of the programme and the eventual achievement of the goals of education in the bud. Some of these envisaged problems identifiable at this stage of the implementation are:

1. Inadequately trained teachers to handle the many innovations in the UBE curriculum. Most of the teachers already in the system need to be retrained to increase their competencies and content knowledge. The present one -week retraining exercise for serving and pre-service teachers is grossly inadequate in bringing about the re-orientation and change in attitude required in the new UBE order.
2. The present state of infrastructure at the lower basic, middle basic and upper basic levels in the UBE schools leaves much to be desired. In order to facilitate the new conception being propogated through the UBE, there should be a radical approach towards infrastructural development. Dilapidated school building, non-functional school equipments, near total absence of equipment for science and technology teaching and other resource materials for teaching should be addressed with the urgency and vigour that they deserve.
3. The universality, free and compulsory elements in the UBE is expected to increase school enrolment and consequently the cost of funding of schools. A major reason why most educational policies fail relate to funding. There is need for strict adherence to the World Bank and UNICEF recommendation on per- head cost of education in the UBE. This will dissuade any form of fee charging in UBE schools. Misappropriation of funds for the UBE schools should be avoided completely.
4. The use of educational policies to propagate political interest is a destroyer of educational programmes. Education is a very central social service upon which all development is built. Politicizing educational funding, management and implementation have been found to affect the genuineness of educational policy goals. Well planned educational programmes such as the UBE must be allowed to transit from one political regime to another without disruption.



Subsequent administration must pursue the laudable UBE programme with sustained vigour.

5. The level of motivation in the teaching profession in society. The apparent low level of motivation and remuneration has relegated teaching to a second class profession. There is urgent need to professionalize teaching, not only by registration through the Teacher Registration Council(TRC),but by according it the professional status in remuneration, motivation, welfare service and recognition. Most teachers have no offices and seats to enable them to work. Facilities that could attract the best hands and heads are completely lacking. The federal teachers' scheme under the millennium development goals project(MDG) in which participants were posted far away from their homes and left unpaid, uncared for and discarded after a two year period when experience was suppose to start taking its toll on their pedagogy and knowledge is not considered adequate by the authors.
6. The dearth of data on the number of pupils enrolled in the basic schools, the number of schools at each level of basic education, the number and qualification of teachers as well as the gender of both teachers and pupils is worrisome. Accurate information ensures proper planning and projection into the future. Availability of accurate data will avail the research community opportunities to explore other variables in educational management and provision.

Conclusion

The success of the UBE in Nigeria is a task that must be achieved. This time around, there must be a mustard effort to dismantle all actual or perceived obstacles on the way of success. To do this, there is need for synergy in educational planning and execution between the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC),the tertiary institutions (research community) and the schools (implementers) in ensuring the achievement of programme goals. The role of institutions of higher learning in this process must not be underestimated.

Recommendations for the Achievement of the UBE programme

1. Due to the diversified nature of the UBE programme, it requires huge amount of money, therefore government should budget adequate fund for its execution. UNESCO recommendation of 26% of annual budget should be upheld.
2. Adequate infrastructural facilities should be provided.
3. Qualified and competent teachers should be trained for the programme.
4. As recommended by government, residential accommodations should



- be provided for homeless children.
5. Federal, state and local government cannot carry the burden of UBE alone; the other agencies like voluntary agencies, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), individuals, international community and donor agencies should be involved.
 6. There should be adequate monitoring and supervision of the programme.
 7. Research on the strategies that can bring about the success of the programme should be sponsored and conducted.
 8. UBE programme should not be politicized so that aims will be achieved.
 9. UBE programme should be cleared of corrupt practices which have eaten deep into the fabric of our national life.



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