

Knowledge Review 23(2)52-58

**KNOWLEDGE REVIEW
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL**

**PUBLISHED BY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE**

NAFAK

ISSN: 1595-2126

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

Dr Clara D. Moemeke and Dr. Caroline O. Nwaham

Abstract

The last four decades in the history of Nigeria witnessed a series of educational experiments. These experiments were responses to national demands for an 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 Basic Education (UBE), a new initiative for change, with laudable objectives could provide the catalyst for steady technological growth in 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 26% of the annual budget to the education sector as 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 in 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 the primary school of the 21 million children of school age. The same statistics showed that the completion rate of primary school was 61%, while only 13.5% successfully transitioned from Junior into senior secondary schools. These data speak negatively of the commitment of Nigeria to the education of its citizens. In response to this situation, 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 commonplace knowledge in the present-day world. National education policies have changed in accordance with the needs, aspirations and expectations of such nations. In developing nations 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 a 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 the 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 per cent improvement in all levels 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 a 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 ensuring the 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 homegrown 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 (the UPE) of the seventies and the 6-3-3-4 system of the eighties and nineties are noteworthy. 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 a 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 sectors to achieve success in 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 kennel of societies and their 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 of her institutions of higher learning. Society's expectation from her tertiary institutions is enormous. As a leading sector of the educational system (and its apex at that), there is a 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 institutions of higher learning and other levels of education. A good higher education depends on a solid foundation at the primary and secondary school levels since products of these levels act as feeders 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 institutions 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 individuals 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 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 listed the methods that tertiary institutions can adopt to achieve the above goals. These include

- i. Teaching
- ii. Research and development
- iii. Articulate staff development programmes
- iv. Generation and dissemination of knowledge
- v. variety of modes of the 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 standards 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 agents 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 the 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 a responsibility to ensure continuous reform, restructuring and amendment of the present UBE curriculum in line with the 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 the 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 the action plan on implementation and consequently advising government, fall on the shoulders of the institutions of higher learning. Such research must belong to the strand of studies on why previous educational policies failed, cultural issues related to the universality of education, ecological issues in the 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) 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 institutions of higher learning) commitment to discovering truth and knowledge that addresses human problems. Onwu (2004) thus advocates that apart from research being of immediate practical value to society, it should be of value to others than the researcher.

Onwu (2004) and Naidoo (1998) acknowledged the obstacles to the successful engineering of UBE through research by institutions of higher learning to include

1. Poor research funding which indicates an underrate of the priority of research in education
2. Existing and perceived distrust of the capability of intellectuals to carry out useful research.

3. Focusing on research paradigms that are not directed at solving local education problems but the interest of donors (foreign) that fund such research.
4. Research agenda that has no bearing on local or national needs.
5. Production of university-based research without the involvement of other sectors.
6. Poor working conditions of researchers in form of loaded teaching allocations that leave little or no time for research.

Besides 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

The success of educational programmes is a direct reflection of the availability and use of recommended and suitable materials for implementation. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria must strengthen their capacities to play meaningful roles in the provision, design and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning materials for the successful implementation of 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 the production of these instructional materials.

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

Research on modern technicalities that influence the teaching and learning process and the effect of instructional materials on teaching and learning should be exhaustively explored and improved upon. New teaching and learning aid potent in affecting classroom achievements should be produced and distributed to schools for use. Tertiary institutions exist in a position to organize workshops, seminars and retraining exercises 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 the design and utility of appropriate instructional materials for use in UBE schools essential.

Role of Tertiary Institutions in the 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 funds 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 an evaluation is understood as determining the worth of a thing, programme evaluation by extension is a 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 decisions 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 highly literate communities are expected to act as watchdogs so as to advise policymakers and the political class on the direction of the programme's effect or impact.

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 in 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 propagated through the UBE, there should be a radical approach towards infrastructural development. The dilapidated school buildings, non-functional school equipment, 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 relates to funding. There is a need for strict adherence to the World Bank and UNICEF recommendations on the 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 administrations 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 an urgent need to professionalize teaching, not only by registration through the Teacher Registration Council (TRCN), but 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 the experience was supposed 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. The 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 a 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 a huge amount of money, therefore the government should budget adequate funds for its execution. UNESCO's recommendation of 26% of the 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 the government, residential accommodations should be provided for homeless children.
5. Federal, state and local governments cannot carry the burden of UBE alone; other agencies like voluntary agencies, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), individuals, the 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.

References

- Anderson, S. B. & Bull, S. (1978). *The profession and practice of programme Evaluation*. San Francisco California. Jossey-Bass,
- Dukku, M. G. (2000). A General view on the contribution of universities in the education of the Disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. In M.Abba and E.N. Kanu (eds). *Education of the disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. Challenges for universal basic education*. Proceedings of the national conference of education of the disadvantaged groups in Nigeria, Yola 29 June 1st July 2000.
- Ebenebe, R. C. (2006). UBE and Nine-year Enugu State University of science utilization at the state level. A lead paper presented to the Department of Educational Foundations, Enugu State University. (ESUT) Enugu. 23-27 October.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National policy on education*, Lagos NERDC press.
- The federal government of Nigeria (2004). *Compulsory basic education Act*. Federal Government press.
- Naido, P. (1998). Research in science and technology education. In P. Naido &

- M Savage (eds) *African Science and Technology Education into the new millennium: practice, policy and priorities* 177 - 196
- Nwaham, C. O. (2008). School administration and supervision of instruction in Nigeria. Agbor: Progress printing associates.
- Opute-Imala, F.N. (2006). Evaluation of teaching. In K. A Ughamadu & N. S Okoye (eds). *Principles methods & strategies for effective teaching*. Onitsha, kensuo educational publishers, 168-183
- Okolie, C. A. (2003). *Producing knowledge for sustainable development in Africa: Implications for higher education*. A paper presented at the National conference of the Association for the study of higher Education (ASHE)Richmond Virginia,15-18 Nov.
- Olaleye, F. O. (2008). The relevance of the university in Nigeria's educational development. A paper presented at the 7h conference of registrars of colleges of education. College of Education, Agbor 23rd-24th April.
- Onwu, G. O. M. (2004). *Refocusing research in science technology and mathematics (STM) education*. Mapping out a research agenda for the Future. Proceeding of the 45th annual conference of the Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria.
- Obioma, G. (2006). *Restructuring teachers' education in the context of school curriculum reform*. Being a keynote address presented at the national conference of the Nigerian council of educational psychologists. University of Nigeria, Nsukka 19-22 April.
- Odor, G. O. (1995) Administration of school in Nigeria: Theory and practice Benin-City: Monose Amalgamates.
- UNESCO (1995). Policy paper for change and development in higher education.
- Worthen, B. R (1991). Program evaluation. In A Lewy (ed) *International encyclopedia of the curriculum*. Oxford Pergamon Press 403.