

## ATTAINMENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA A MYTH OR REALITY

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***Abstract:** Education is believed to be an instrument of national development. The realization of this fact is responsible for many countries embarking on one form of educational program or the other. The Nigerian educational system has metamorphosized from the 6-5-2-3 to the 6-3-3-4 system. As laudable as the objectives of the 6-3-3-4 system were, they were not fully attained. In recent times, the nomenclature of our educational system has changed to Universal Basic Education (UBE). This study examined a chronicle of the development of the various educational programs, highlighting the fact that they failed and stressing the fact that if the problems of proper implementation are not addressed, the education system will continue to move in the same circle. It proffers solutions to the teething problems of failure in policy implementation.*

### **Introduction:**

Education is believed to be an instrument of national development. The extent to which a nation can develop depends to a large extent on the level of education of the individuals that make up the nation. Education is capable of bringing about physical, spiritual, social, psychological and economic development in an individual and thus, the society. This is why most nations of the world invest greatly in education.

The investment made in education is often tailored to a country's educational goals. This is attested to by the National Policy on Education (2004), which is hinged on the belief that:

- a. Education is an instrument for national development: to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
- b. Education fosters the worth and development of the individual for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society.
- c. There is need for equality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities of each according to his or her ability...

To achieve equality education, especially at the foundation level, priority attention has been given to primary education all over the world. Oni in Fredrick (2013) notes that the emphasis placed on primary education is based on the fact that all the beneficiaries of the other levels of

education by necessity have to pass through the primary level. Besides, exposing the citizens of a nation to foundational education is instituting literacy as well as numeracy. That is why the government of most nations including Nigeria, have for decades embarked on one educational programme or the other; sometimes, without much success.

The objective of this study therefore, is to follow the trend of the development of various educational programmes in Nigeria as to ascertain why the objectives of the programmes were not attained and to proffer suggestions for the attainment of future educational objectives.

### **The Developments in the Nigerian Education System**

The need for equal educational opportunities for all has ushered in various forms of Universal Education. According to Labo-Popoola, Bello, and Atanda (2009), the concept of universalization of education, especially at the primary level, commenced in 1955 in the then Western Region of Nigeria, and later spread to all other parts of the country when the Federal Government took over the concerns of education to ensure that every Nigerian child benefitted, irrespective of his regional location.

The government introduced the 6-5-2-4 system of education where every Nigerian child of school age was to spend six years in primary school, five years in secondary school, two years in higher school (HSC) and four years in a university. This education system was abandoned with the criticism that it was 'bookish' and inadequate to fulfill the aspirations of the nation. It was replaced with the 6-3-3-4 system in 1976. This educational programme made provision for six years of primary education, three years Junior Secondary education and three years Senior Secondary education. Tertiary education was to take four years.

The curriculum of the aforementioned was well spelt out and quite comprehensive. It had a lot of prospects and appeared to ensure the use of brain and hand (Olaiya, 1988:12). The system was meant to transit its products to the world of work if need be at the Junior Secondary level.

Fafunwa (1974) and Babalola (1996) posit that as laudable as the objectives were, the programme lacked proper planning, leading to inadequate facilities in classroom, insufficient trained teachers and erosion in the provision of quality education. There were also no infrastructure to house the teeming population of pupils.

During the regional era, the Western Region sorely embarked on universal education and succeeded. According to Fredrick (2013), they succeeded because they trained teachers to meet the demands of the programme. They also made provision to accommodate the increase in enrolment. This made other Regions to also embark on universal education. The Eastern Region

did not succeed in its attempt to introduce universal education because it did not imitate the Western Region in its meticulous planning and implementation.

In the same vein, the Federal Government took over the issue of universalization of primary education without proper planning. They rushed in to take over as it were, but could not sustain the 'tempo'. Babalola (1996) observes that no sooner than they took over, their proportion of capital and recurrent allocation on education fell from 21% to 13%, and total capital allocation fell from 7% to 4%. This was collaborated by the World Bank report of 1990, which stated that the financing of primary education in Nigeria was progressively declining.

The failure of the Federal Government to allocate enough resources to education led to inadequate supply of human and material resources such as overcrowded classroom, inability to maintain existing facilities as well as poor supervising plan. The teacher-pupil ratio that was stipulated in the NPE as 1:40 grew to 1:80 or more.

The 6-3-3-4 programme lasted for more than two decades but the research conducted by Amakiri (2005) revealed that the implementation of the transition from Junior Secondary to Senior Secondary was faulty. The records from some of the schools, especially the Baptist High School showed that from 2001 to 2004, 1,288 students graduated from Junior Secondary School. Out of this number, 53 students failed the Junior West African School Certificate Examination. There were, however, no records to show that those who failed were streamed into Senior Secondary, Technical Colleges, Out-of-School Vocational training centres or apprenticeship scheme as stipulated in section 4 sub section 22'b' of the National policy on Education. This trend ran through out Rivers State and beyond.

It is obvious that the Federal Government favoured education but the withdrawal of its direct subsidy for primary education no sooner than they took over, and transferring the responsibility to the Local Government, practically brought the UPE programme to an end in most parts of the country. This was because most of the states introduced fees and levies at all levels of education; thus, depriving many school age children from going to school.

Amanze (2008) notes that the denial of children of school age the basic right of education was so rampant all over the world that a conference on Education for all was held in Jomtien, Thailand, for the purpose of forging a global consensus and commitment to provide basic education for all.

## **THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

Today, the nomenclature of the educational system in Nigeria, has changed to Universal Basic Education (UBE). According to Dike (2000), this programme of UBE grew out of the conference

in Thailand. In line with the deliberations in the Thailand Conference, the then President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo launched the UBE programme in 1999. The programme is expected to be universal, free and compulsory. In fact, the UBE appears to be much more inclusive than the UPE. It emphasizes the inclusion of girls and women, who were before now, relegated to the background. The poor, street and working children, rural and remote population, nomads, migrant workers children, refugees and the disabled are all inclusive.

The Universal Basic Education programme is structured in a way that every Nigerian child would have an average of nine (9) years basic education from Primary to Junior Secondary, three (3) years of Senior Secondary education and four (4) years of tertiary education. The programme was designed in conformity with the Millenium Development Goal (MDG). To ensure the attainment of the goals, and objectives of the UBE, the compulsory, free Universal Basic Education Act was promulgated.

### **The Basic Education Act.**

Part 1 subsection 2 of the Act states thus:

2. Right of a child to compulsory, free universal basic education etc.
  - (i) Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.
  - (ii) Every parent shall ensure that his child or ward attends and completes his
    - (a) Primary education; and
    - (b) Junior Secondary School education, and by endeavouring to send the child to primary and Junior Secondary Schools.
3. Stake holders in education in a Local Government Area shall ensure that every parent or person who has the care and custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him under section 2 (2) of this Act.
4. A parent who contravenes section 2 (2) of this Act commits an offence and is liable.
  - (a) On first conviction, to be reprimanded.
  - (b) On second conviction, to a fine of ₦2,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of one month or both, and
  - (c) On subsequent conviction, to a fine of ₦5,000.00 or imprisonment or to both.
3. Services in public primary and junior secondary schools are free of charge.
  1. The services provided in public primary and junior secondary schools shall be free of charge.
  2. A person who receives or obtains any fee, contrary to the provision of subsection (1) of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding ₦10,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of three months or to both

The penalties spelt out in section 1 sub section 4(a) (b) and (c) and sub section 3 (1) and (2) for failure of parents to send their children to school, and for educational administrators, who collect any fee from the pupils are laudable. However, failure of the Act to spell out penalties for any government or stake holders in education who fail in their responsibility tend to make the Act factitious. The implication is that the governments who are the custodian of the Act are sacrosanct.

A careful observation reveals that the U.B.E programme has kicked off in earnest but the streets are still littered with children of all ages hawking or begging for alms. At the rural areas, migrant fisher men are moving from shore to shore with their entire family. What has the government done to ensure that that children of migrant fisher men attend school?. Are there schools at the fishing settlements? These are hard facts the government must address if they are sincere.

The truth is that in most urban areas, the government is building schools, but the number available is not enough. This is because other facilities that would have been utilized have been handed over to churches in the name of missionary schools. The qualities of teachers in those missionary schools also call for concern because some of the teachers there are not professional teachers and so, may not be competent in terms of methodology. They may also not be committed because they would want to leave the school system immediately they find greener pastures. The situation is not different, in the rural areas.

It is a known fact that the rural areas are hardly developed. Consequently, teachers who are posted there do so, as a form of sacrifice. The government as a matter of concern should have given them special packages as incentives to motivate them to go there. This, the government have not done and so there is dearth of teachers in the rural areas.

The fire brigade' approach to handling sensitive matters like education is almost being replicated by the present government. Recently, some state governments embarked on recruitment of teachers. One wonders the statistics that was used in recruiting the teachers. Is the number of recruits commensurate with the population of intakes in the school system? What about their qualifications?

The newly recruited teachers were given some form of orientation. However, this study believes that orientation is not enough if we must get the best out of them, especially from those of them that did not study education in tertiary institution.

With this scenario of events, the attainment of the UBE objectives is very slight.

### **The way forward**

If Nigeria would attain the goals and objectives of the Universal Basic Education, it must address the challenges presented by short term plans that have often stalled effective

implementation of policies in the country. Also, the principal step is to fully implement the items on the UBE Act. That is to say, the government of the day should be held liable for any failure on its part to implement its portion of the Act. It is only then, it will be morally right for them to punish parents and educational administrators who contravene sections of the Act.

Furthermore, the government should not lose sight of the fact that many parents especially parents in the rural areas are uneducated; therefore, efforts should be made to properly educate them about the scheme and its benefits. This should be accompanied by an enforcement of the Act. Any parent who contravenes the law should be prosecuted. There should be no room for nepotism or tribalism which is becoming the norm in Nigeria. It has been observed that the fraternization of important policy issues impinges on the proper implementation of such policies. Consequently, educational policies such as the UBE should not be sacrificed on the alter of nepotism.

Another vital issue that the government should address is the area of funding. Adequate fund should be allocated to the education sector. To ensure that funds are not embezzled, credible persons should be made to control the disbursement of funds. In addition, a monitoring team should be set up to oversee the activities of those who disburse funds and those who utilize the funds. This will make room for proper checks and balances.

Government should embark on a long term plan to train teachers. This will reduce over crowdedness in our classrooms as the teacher – pupil ratio of 1: 35 for primary and 1:40 for secondary schools can then be achieved. Government should set up committees to monitor the activities of teachers in the various schools. To achieve this, pupils and students books should be inspected fortnightly. Reports of such inspection should be given to the commissioner in charge of education who should act on it without prejudice.

Reading and writing are key to the attainment of universal education. Consequently, libraries should be provided in all the schools. Such libraries should be equipped with adequate and appropriate books.

## CONCLUSION

The study examined the development of the various educational programmes in Nigeria vis-à-vis the National Policy on Education and the Compulsory, Free Basic Education Act. One big challenge facing the attainment of the UBE educational programme is the fact that Penalties were stated for parents and educational administrators who contravene section 2, subsection (2) and 3, but no penalty was stated for the contravention of section 2 subsection (1). Failure to give a penalty for the contravention of the Act by the government of the day makes the government sacrosanct and the Act factitious. Other challenges identified by the study are lack of proper planning, inadequate facilities and funds. The study therefore suggests that the implementation of

the UBE Act should be enforced and education should be given priority attention if the goals and objectives of the Nigerian education system would be attained.

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