

The Nine – Year Compulsory Basic Education Programme in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects of Policy Implementation

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Abstract

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was introduced into the education system in Nigeria following the 1990 Jomtien & Dakar 2000 Declarations, on achieving education for all by the year 2015. Backed by an Act of parliament, the implementation, as with most policies in Nigeria, seems to be bogged by a lot of setbacks. Access to basic education for Nigerian children of school age is still a problem. Many factors affect the advancement of compulsory and universal basic education for all children. They include: government attitude/political will, poverty level of parents/illiteracy of parents, poor infrastructure/learning environment; inadequate teachers; and corruption. In order to implement this policy successfully it is recommended that all stakeholders be brought together and made aware of the importance of it. There should be a synergy between all the different agencies concerned with the implementation of the programme. Defaulters should be appropriately sanctioned.

Key Words: Compulsory, Universal Basic Education, programme, policy implementation.

Introduction

Education is a means of liberating the mind and making one a very useful member of the society. It is in the realization of this and its importance that the Nigerian government made education free and compulsory at the basic level. The Nigerian education system is structured with a compulsory nine straight years of basic schooling. This system of education is captured under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which was launched by former president Olusegun Obasanjo in September 1999. It is a nine year basic education programme aimed at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. UBE came into place as a result of the 1990 Jomtiem Declaration as a strategy to achieve Education for All and the Dakar 2000 Education Conference. Backed by an Act of Parliament in 2004, the objectives of the Universal Basic Education are:

- Ensure unfettered access to nine (9) years of formal basic education.
- The provision of free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian of school going age.
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

UBE Law and Policy

The fundamental features of the UBE Act, 2004 are: Compulsory, free and universal basic education.

1. Without prejudice to the provisions of item 30 of Part II of the Second Schedule and item 2 (a) of the Fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution dealing with primary school education, the Federal Government's intervention under this Act shall only be an assistance to states and local governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria.

2. (a) Every government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.
(b) Every parent shall ensure that his child or ward attends and completes his/her (i) Primary school education and
(ii) Junior secondary school education

By endeavoring to send the child to primary and junior secondary schools

3. The stakeholders 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/her 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 1 month or both; and
 - (c) on subsequent conviction, to a fine of ₦5,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of 2 months or to both.

In order to achieve the above a UBEC Standard Implementation National Action Plan (NAP) based on the UBE Act 2004, was drawn up to be carried out by the different stakeholders in order to achieve Education for all and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015.

Basic education as described by Obanya (2000) as cited in Adepoju and Fabiyi (nd) is that level, type and form of learning needed to build firm roots of literacy and numeracy, to inculcate basic life skills and more importantly, to consolidate the skills of learning how to learn. Osakoya in Okoroma (2006) describes education as a distinctive way in which the society inducts its young ones into full membership, so every modern society needs some educational policies to guide it in the process of such initiation.

Status of Programme Implementation

The UBE programme has been domesticated in all the states to ensure effective delivery and the local governments are also assigned visible roles. Yet this level of education which is the bedrock of any educational system, is the most troubled (Illo and Bolaji, 2007). The Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2003 as cited in Bolaji (2014) showed that 60.1% of all children of primary school age were

not attending school. Contributing, Ogunjimi, Ajibola and Akah also in Bolaji (2014) stated that, of the 42.1 million children below 14 years of age, only 25.8 million (61.2% of the total population attended school). This shows that access to education for all school age children is far from being achieved. UNICEF in its state of the World's Children Report for 1999 highlighted that about four million Nigerian children are not in school. National Population Commission and RTI (2011) survey data revealed that 7.3 million children of primary school age were out of school and this is 10 percent of the global total. This is very alarming.

The estimated primary age population (6 – 11 years) was 24.7 million and junior secondary school age population (12 – 14 years) was about 10.9 million. On the aggregate about 10.1 million children who are supposed to be in basic education were not in school.[Unicef 2012] This basically means that almost one third of those who are supposed to be in school are not. This ugly scenario seems to defeat the main objectives of the UBE programme; which is to ensure literacy, numeracy and civic responsibilities. The situation of course gives rise to a populace of uneducated and dependent citizens without awareness of their civic responsibilities. This has also given rise to street children who ordinarily should be in school. Education is a fundamental right of every school age child in Nigeria. And so should be given to every child.

Problems and Challenges of Goal Attainment

1. Government's attitude/political will towards UBE implementation
2. Poverty/Literacy level of parents
3. Poor Infrastructure/Learning Environment
4. Inadequate Teachers
5. Corruption.

Government's Attitude/Political will towards UBE Implementation

The federal government has shown that it has the good intention of providing free, universal and compulsory basic education for all children by the launch of the UBE programme in 1999 and the subsequent enactment of the UBE Act 2004 to give it a legal backing and even drawing up a National Action Plan. These actions are commendable, but it needs to go a bit further. The implementation

outcomes unfortunately does not correspond or match the stated objectives of the UBE.

The administrative structure in charge of coordinating human resources, controlling financial expenditure, supplying material resources and monitoring the programme is not up and doing. The funds needed may be made available but the bureaucracy involved in accessing it hinders the effectiveness and efficiency of the UBE programme. Funds are supposed to be available to run the programme but many at times the states are not able to access their own percentage of the money from the federation account thereby strangulating the programme. According to the MDG 2013 Report, low use of Federal Government/UBE matching grants by states continues to pose a problem. The use of matching grants has been low over the years as only three states have fully accessed 2012 UBE matching grants. When grants are not accessed the provision of the needed materials for the effective implementation of the programme are adversely affected.

One of the goals of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015. UBE has many unresolved issues affecting its implementation which Enemuoh as cited in Abdullahi and Abdullah (2014) enumerated as lack of government support, enrolment quota and limitation. Education is supposed to be the responsibility of the state at this level, yet, a non-challant attitude seems to be the case. Enlightenment programmes to create awareness about the UBE are inadequate if any. Appropriate sanctions to serve as a deterrent, to defaulters in the programme implementation have never been applied.

Policies are made by government in an attempt to address social / public issues that affect members of the society. These policies are normally implemented by people in government who take actions in the right or wrong directions in its implementation. These policies are backed up by enabling laws, statutes or decrees as the case may be. The government of Nigeria formulates numerous beautiful and laudable policies, but the problem of implementation always rears its ugly head.

Aminu, Tella and Mbaya (2012) defined political will as total political support for a policy by top government functionaries. For the successful implementation of the UBE programme, government must have political, social and economic will to sustain it. Penalties for the violation of the laws guiding the implementation of the programme

have never been used. Nobody has ever been tried, let alone be convicted to serve as a deterrent and show the importance government attaches to the programme.

As government changes the new government usually might not have the urge to continue a policy programme it did not initiate. Okoroma (2003) This has affected many policies, educational policies according inclusive.

Poverty/Literacy Level of Parents

Another very pertinent issue is how free is the free UBE programme. Arbitrary imposition of all manner of levies has ensured unequal access to education among school age children. There are a lot of hidden costs – school uniforms, buying of text books registration levy to mention but a few. The introduction of levies is a way of keeping children from poor backgrounds out of school. According to UNESCO (2011) Survey, children from rural and poor households are more likely to remain out of school than children from urban and rich households. Yau in Ejere (2011) stated that expenditure by parents ranges between ₦1,000.00 to ₦2,400.00 per pupil per year for various costs such as local government area levies, registration costs, uniform and stationery. This hidden cost is keeping many children away from school given that many Nigerians are living below a dollar a day, many parents may not be able to afford sending their children to school. Household spending on education might be a cause of not sending children to school as education spending is diverted to food and other immediate more essential necessities. Further laying credence to this, UNICEF (2012), reported that urban children are much more likely to be in school compared with rural children in both primary and junior secondary age groups. This report went further to state that the largest difference were encountered for socio economic status:

among the wealthiest quintile of families (or top 20 percent) only 5 percent of their primary school aged children are not in school. However, among the poorest quintile (or bottom 20 percent), the percentage is higher than 60 percent.

Adepoju and Fabiyi (n.d) found that about 82.2 percent of students claimed their parents were largely involved in funding their school expenses: This is contrary to the UBE Act 2004, 3(1) which states that services provided in public primary and junior secondary schools shall be free of charge. It even stipulate a fine for anyone who contravenes this section.

Humphreys and Crawford (2014) stated that the 2010 NEDS (Nigeria Education Data Survey) revealed that the main reason parents and guardians gave for the primary aged children having never attended school were the distance to school, child labour needs at home, and the monetary costs.

A National Literacy Survey (2010) conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria estimates the adult-literacy rate of 56.9 percent with huge variations between states.

Lagos 92,0% and Borno only 14.5%

Regions urban 74.6% and rural 48.7%

Sex male 65.1% and female 48.6%

Literacy Among Adults

Percentage Distribution of Men and Women by Level of Schooling Attended and by Level of Literacy, and Percent literacy

		Secondary School Higher	Cannot Read at all	Can Read Part of Sentence	Can Read whole Sentence	No of Respondents	Percent Literate
North Central	Male	60.8	5.1	7.1	26.1	2,143	73.0
	Female	38.7	2.1	6.2	52.3	4,577	47.0
North East	Male	33.1	7.3	10.8	48.5	1,923	51.2
	Female	16.6	1.7	4.7	76.9	4,330	23.0
North West	Male	35.9	8.5	14.0	39.7	3,603	58.4
	Female	14.4	2.5	4.7	78.7	7,775	21.6
South East	Male	65.1	13.0	14.1	7.6	1,686	92.2
	Female	70.7	3.3	7.8	18.1	4,293	81.8
South South	Male	75.8	4.8	7.3	11.8	2,574	87.9
	Female	67.5	2.2	7.4	22.6	5,065	77.1
South West	Male	75.4	5.3	7.8	11.0	3,655	88.5
	Female	67.1	4.7	8.0	19.3	7,156	79.8

NDHS 2008

Percentage Distribution of Educational Attainment of Male and Female Adults According to Geo-political Zones, 2010 NEDS

		No. Schooling	Some Pri.	Comp. Pri.	Some Secun.	Comp. Secun.	More Than Secun.	Total	Number	Mean No. of years of schooling
North Central	Male	26.6	7.0	15.5	22.5	17.0	11.4	100	3,774	6.9
	Female	45.5	8.6	15.6	15.4	9.7	5.2	100	4,394	4.5
North East	Male	55.3	7.2	9.7	13.5	9.1	5.2	100	3,427	3.9
	Female	71.2	6.1	8.7	8.4	4.2	1.4	100	3,866	2.2
North West	Male	51.7	4.5	13.4	12.4	10.1	7.9	100	6,755	4.4
	Female	75.0	2.4	10.1	5.4	4.8	2.2	100	7,259	2.1
South East	Male	8.8	9.3	28.9	23.4	20.3	9.3	100	2226	8.1
	Female	18.5	11.1	19.1	20.7	21.5	9.1	100	3,006	7.4
South South	Male	6.0	6.4	19.8	27.2	27.9	12.8	100	3510	9.2
	Female	14.7	8.9	21.3	26.3	20.3	8.6	100	4231	7.6
South West	Female	11.9	4.5	17.0	20.1	32.7	13.8	100	4457	9.0
	Female	21.6	5.5	18.5	19.5	24.0	10.9	100	5317	7.6

2008 NDHS

Poor Infrastructure / learning Environment

With expected increase in enrollment the facilities to match it is not in place. Alumode (2010) posits that the available number of schools and classroom are grossly inadequate. UNICEF (2007) as cited in Alumode (2010) reported a pupil-classroom ratio of 87 in 2005. Annual school census report Enugu State, Nigeria (2014). gives a glimpse of the situation of facilities in the primary and secondary schools. The 7,015 classrooms in public primary schools about 44% of these are not usable while out of 4,167 classrooms in the secondary schools 43% are not usable. The pupil – classroom ratio in primary school is 66 and that of secondary school is 75. This tale of woe continues as 80 percent of these classrooms do not have enough seats. 68.1 percent have no good black board, 22 percent of the classes are held outside and 74.8 percent have no good health facility or first aid. This lamentable story is likely to be same throughout the federation.

Poor infrastructural facilities, lack of space and overcrowding according to Humphreys and Crawford (2014) are some of the in – school factors contributing to non-enrollment. Parents are asked to provide seats for their children / wards before they can be admitted since the government has failed to provide seats. In some instances children seat on the bare floor to receive classes.

In the UBE Act, government promised to provide textbooks free and even midday lunch. Textbooks have been provided but the number is grossly inadequate, as at least five pupils share one textbook. Majority of the textbooks provided are not the recommended texts used in schools.

Inadequate Teachers

Teachers who are the direct implementers of this programme are not enough or in short supply. According to UNICEF (2005) in Alumode (2010) the pupil – teacher ratio is 1:37 in the primary school UNESCO (2011) is of the opinion that the programme needs more teachers to take care of the pupils. The federal government in an effort to ameliorate the problem of lack of teaching personnel introduced the Federal Teachers Scheme (FTS). Sadly many states are not cooperating as teachers sent to various states suffer untold hardships – delays in salary payments no accommodation. Moreover after completion of their mandatory two years service, they are not absorbed into the teaching service as envisaged. FTS was established in 2006 to address the acute shortage of qualified teachers in public primary and junior secondary schools.

Universal Basic Education Commission acknowledged that there is a shortage of teachers when it stated in UNICEF (2012) Global Initiative, that the “UBE programme is in dire need of 40,000 teachers” given that there were only 590,655 teachers catering for the learning needs of 24.77 million children in primary schools.

Corruption

Corruption is the abuse of bestowed power or position to acquire a personal benefit (Wikipedia). It includes many activities such as bribery and embezzlement. Corruption occurs when an office holder or other governmental employee acts in an official capacity for personal gain.

Nigeria is ranked as the third most corrupt country in the world according to the 2004 perception index of Transparency International.

Corruption is a hydra headed monster damaging so many things in Nigeria. The UBE programme inclusive. Monies meant for the appropriate implementation of the programme either leaks through the system or is outrightly embezzled by some unscrupulous individuals. These corrupt practices by officials have led to so many lapses in the provision of physical facilities for the pupils/students,

textbooks, school uniforms and mid-day lunch. For the implementation of the programme

Conclusion

If the UBE programme is to achieve its objectives of free, compulsory and universal basic education, government, citizens and civil societies must show some serious commitment especially in monitoring. Nick et al in Abdulahi and Abdullah (2014) assert that administrative obstacles and policy disagreements will need to be overcome before the resources can be fully utilized.

Studies on political action and its impact on social policy (Michael 2009) reiterated that desired policy outcomes will be achieved if there is greater political will. The sustained zeal of administrators and politicians to implement policies and programmes of government is very necessary.

Vision 20: 2020 Economic Transformation Blue Print (2009) states that:

“By the year 2020, Nigeria will have a large, strong, diversified sustainable and competitive economy that will effectively harness the talents and energies of its people and responsibly exploit its natural endowments to guarantee a high standard of living and quality life to its citizens (p.9)

To achieve this with the current neglect of the very people who are supposed to be educated to drive this economy is a tall order since education helps to accelerate overall development of any nation.

UNICEF in its state of the World's Children Report for 1999, highlighted that about 4 million Nigerian children are denied access to basic education. The importance of accessibility cannot be underscored, it is important in the effort to end global poverty. Despite the launching of the national campaign on access to basic education across the geo-political zones to reduce the number of out-of-school children, a lot still needs to be done. The essence of any programme is its workability and of course, education is about

functionality. According to Jaiyeoba and Atanda as cited Alcpabio and Sammy (n.d) were identified three main subsystems of education, which are policy formulation, management and implementation. They argued that there is a wide gap between policy formulation and implementation. This seems to be case with the Universal Basic Education Policy.

Recommendations

The UBE programme, is a well thought out policy. A lot needs to be done to achieve the stated goals. Mass enlightenment programmes should be carried out by the government. The schools should be made more child friendly by providing the basic things needed. Most important of all there is need for good and responsive leadership / governance that has the interest of the citizenry as its utmost priority.

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