



TEACHER EDUCATION & U.B.E.

A. Owan Enoh

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OF NIGERIA

✓

**TEACHER
EDUCATION
& U.B.E.**

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Universal Basic Education: Challenges and Consequences

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Introduction

Education is a phenomenon that influences man throughout his stay on this planet. In fact, it provides the backdrop against which development acquires its meaning. It is the most fundamental and vital aspect of social engineering and the harnessing of human resources. For Iwe (1991) "Education seeks to refine man by developing his potentials and equipping him to live a meaningful, productive and responsible life in society". And that is why for a developing country like Nigeria education represents an investment in human capital (students) required not only for economic development and material well-being but also for cultural development, social equality and political emancipation. At the level of the individual, education serves as a means of enriching knowledge, skills and developing full personality.

The UBE scheme launched in 1999 is in consonance with the vision of WCEFA. Its objectives include ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicate and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil

values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning – among others is consistent with the declarations of World Conference of Education For All. Traditional basic education with emphasis on literacy and numeracy or the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) appears to be insufficient in providing access to solid learning to match the rapid pace of technological change going on in this millennium. Citizens in every society and every nation need to be educated to survive in this competitive world, particularly in this age of globalization. Our active and meaningful participation, however, depends very much on our possession of the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies of various types. We depend on basic education to foster in our citizens such knowledge and skills that would make them effective global citizens.

And given the experience that the U.P.E. programme in Nigeria suffered certain unforeseen and unavoidable difficulties which rendered it virtually unsustainable, it is necessary for the government to critically look at the challenges being posed by the introduction Universal Basic Education so as to be able to address them. It is in the light of this background that the problem of this paper was conceived to examine the challenges and consequences of Universal Basic Education Scheme in Nigeria.

CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo on September 30, 1999 is to provide free, compulsory and qualitative education, from primary to junior secondary school, for the Nigerian child, aged between six and fifteen years. In addition, the programme is to offer nomadic and adult education, and to emphasize religious and moral values. No doubt, the UBE programme is in part a fulfillment of the country's education objectives as stated in Section 18 of the 1999 constitution requiring government to ensure that "there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels" and "strive to eradicate illiteracy" through provision of "Free, compulsory and Universal Primary education, free secondary education and free university education; and free adult literacy programme".

If adequately implemented, it will compel many children of school age to go to school and to remain there till the end of their junior secondary education. In this way, it will reduce the country's high level of illiteracy and halt the rising figure of school drop-outs. According to a UNDP Human Development Report on Nigeria (1994) only 22.7 million or 50.4 percent of the eligible children, aged between one and fifteen years receive education. Likewise, a UNICEF survey in 1996 shows that 60 percent of the enrolled primary school boys in Imo, Enugu, Anambra and Abia States for example, dropped out of school and could not complete their education.

However, there is the flipside of the free and compulsory attributes of the UBE. There is bound to be explosion in population of school children and matching demand for more teachers, classrooms, teaching and learning materials as witnessed earlier in the operation of a similar programme, The Universal Primary Education (UPE). When the UPE was launched in 1976, parents coaxed their children to school only for the government to discover that schools were in short supply of teachers and classrooms.

Rather than address the problems identified in the implementation of UPE, the government in 1982, introduced the present 6-3-3-4 education system, again with a nine-year free and compulsory education, with emphasis on science and technology. Again, government has paid lip service to this education policy.

Many children of school age are roaming the streets and hawking goods and being lured into diverse crimes. And many of those who managed to be in school were forced to withdraw prematurely, either by their parents inability to pay school fees or by the uncongenial learning environment, characterized by shortage of qualified teachers, classrooms and workshops and empty science laboratories and libraries.

It is in this condition that the UBE has been launched; that is, without addressing the problems arising from the implementations of both the UPE and 6-3-3-4 policies. Unless these problems are squarely addressed the lofty goals of the UBE are scarcely achievable. For instance, attainment of qualitative education, which the UBE emphasizes, will largely depend on the quality of teachers

and their devotion to duty. Today, only about 30 percent of over four million primary school teachers nationwide are qualified to teach. Furthermore, a good number of them have been crippled with poor conditions of service and irregularity in the payment of their salaries. As a result, they have become disillusioned and less committed to their job (UNESCO, 1997).

More fundamentally, the UBE programme may raise a constitutional question. While it is true that education is on the concurrent list, but there does not appear to be an agreed formula, by the three tiers of government, for the sharing of responsibilities in its implementation. The formula must be worked out and agreed upon by the Federal and State governments, and local councils to avoid possible conflicts in the implementation of the programme.

Similarly, if the programme is to make a real difference, past experiences must be given adequate consideration in order to avoid the kind of mistakes that militated against execution. When it was launched in 1976, there was a military administration with a centralized command. As soon as partisan politics resumed in 1979, some parties chose to abandon the programme. This is why it is pertinent to ask whether the programme is a party initiative or a pet project of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Because if the UBE is seen as the programme of the PDPs (People Democratic Party), Federal government, it may not be constitutionally binding on any of the state governments. Those States controlled by other political parties may not adopt the implementation of the programme. This will be more pronounced if the financial demands of the programme are such that will pose problems for them.

As earlier discussed, the beginning of the programme will no doubt witness an explosion in enrolment figures in some parts of the country. Facilities in most schools are in a decrepit state, while more teachers will have to be trained, and this at a time when enrolment in colleges of education is declining precipitously. Thus, getting qualifies teachers is one of the basic challenges of UBE.

The experience of some States during the Second Republic has encouraged many to think that education is synonymous with low standards. The failure to make adequate provision for the scheme meant that it was neither free nor qualitative. Parents had to

"subsidize" government by purchasing desks, chairs and even books for their wards.

Equipment and books were scarce and laboratories were non-existent. There was automatic promotion for students who failed their examinations and underpaid teachers were saddled with the task of imparting knowledge. The outcome of all these was further devaluation of the educational system. To avoid these pitfalls this time around good planning should have preceded execution. Necessary steps should therefore be taken to clear the gray areas, and to fund the programme adequately, so as to make the programme operated effectively and offer the much-needed education for the survival of our children in the near millennium.

Conclusion

Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is a commendable and laudable effort on the part of the Nigerian government to eradicate illiteracy and make its citizens worthy members of the society and effective global citizens. However, as the programme is an attempt to eradicate illiteracy and to make all Nigerians have access to education, the opportunity of the programme ought to be used to get a lasting solution to the crisis at the Primary school level and education in general especially as it involves getting the right teachers for UBE, funding of the programme, funding of the schools, renovation of the moribund facilities and others that have been highlighted in this paper.

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