

Achieving Universal Basic Education [UBE] in Nigeria: Strategies for Improved Funding and Cost Effectiveness

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Abstract: The role of education in the development of a nation cannot be over-emphasised. Some of the problems impeding the development of many nations of the world include illiteracy, poverty, HIV/AIDS and low productivity. As part of measures to solve these problems, the United Nations sets Universal Primary Education by 2015 as one of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In line with this global objective, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme on the 30th September 1999. A similar programme such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) launched in 1976 failed as a result of various problems such as inadequate funding, irregular payment of salaries, poor infrastructures, lack of regular supervision and inspection among others. Some of these problems, which are largely connected with finance, still remain unresolved in the implementation of UBE programme. These have serious implications for the attainment of education for all in 2015. The study examined the evolution, objectives and problems of implementation of UBE and suggested strategies for improved funding and cost effectiveness of the programme.

Key words: UBE, illitracy, HIV/AIDS, UPE, MGDs

THE EVOLUTION OF UBE

The desire to achieve universal access to education in Nigeria could be traced to 1955 when the government of Western Nigeria started Universal Free Primary Education. The scheme was also launched in Eastern Nigeria in 1957. The Universal Free Primary Education recorded a considerable success in Western region, but a total failure in Eastern region as a result of various problems. In September 1976, the Universal Primary Education was launched by the then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, which increased children access to education, but could not achieve some of its objectives as a result of problems, such as, lack of reliable statistics, financial constraints, lack of political will among others (Ajayi *et al.*, 2002).

On 30th September 1999, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The launching of the programme was a strong evidence of Nigeria's commitment to different international conventions to the promotion of basic education. These include the Jomtien Declaration of 1990, on the promotion of basic education for all and the New Delhi Declaration of 1991 requiring stringent efforts by the E-9 countries (nine nations of the world with the largest concentration of illiterate adults) to reduce drastically illiteracy within the shortest possible time

frame. Others include the Durban Statement of 1998 and the OAU Decade of Education in Africa 1997-2006, requiring African States to generalise access to quality basic education as the bedrock for the sustainable and viable development on the continent and the world in general.

The UBE programme is intended to be universal, free and compulsory. These terms according to Obanya (2000) imply that appropriate types of opportunities will be provided for the basic education of every Nigerian child of school going-age; that parents have an obligation to ensure that children in their care avail themselves of such opportunities; and that sanctions will be imposed on persons, societies, or institutions that prevent children, adolescents and youth from benefiting from UBE.

Objectives of the UBE: The objectives of the UBE as stated in the implementation guidelines are as follows:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age.
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).

- Catering for the learning needs of young persons, their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- 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.

SCOPE OF THE UBE

The UBE scheme covers three areas of education namely, the formal basic education, nomadic education and literacy non-formal education. The formal basic education covers the first nine years of schooling (primary and junior secondary education of 6 and 3 years respectively for all children). The nomadic education is for school-age children of pastoral farmers and migrant fishermen. The literacy and non-formal education is meant for out-of-school children and illiterate adults.

THE PROBLEMS OF UBE

It is important to note that some of the problems that led to the failure of Universal Primary Education (UPE) which was launched in 1976 still manifest in the implementation of UBE programme. Such problems which largely bother on finance are examined as follows:

Poor infrastructures: Infrastructures such as laboratories, libraries, classrooms, furniture and fittings are still inadequate in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. Six years after the commencement of UBE programme. Where the infrastructures are available, in several studies they are in a very bad state. In many schools, inadequate classroom building has resulted in overcrowded classrooms, a situation which is not conducive for effective teaching and learning. There are many schools with libraries, laboratories and workshops without the required facilities for effective teaching and learning. Although, the government is renovating schools and putting in place new infrastructures particularly in primary schools through the Education Tax Fund (ETF), World Bank assistance and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), more still need to be done, particularly in the secondary schools in terms of these projects. This calls for injection of more funds to the UBE programme.

Inadequate supervision and monitoring: Regular monitoring of what goes on in Basic Education Centres are necessary for quality assurance in the UBE programme. Shortage of qualified school supervisors and vehicles for effective school supervision has been identified as one of the major constraints of UBE Programme (UBEP, 2002). The problem still persists in the system. This implies that the Inspectorate division of Ministries of Education and other education policy implementation agencies have not been empowered enough in terms of finance and personnel to adequately supervise and monitor the UBE programme. High quality of basic education may not be guaranteed in the country as a result of inadequate supervision and monitoring of the UBE programme.

Shortage of teachers: Effective instructional delivery under the UBE programme will, to a large extent, depend on availability of qualified and motivated teachers. No educational system can rise above the level of its teachers. UBEP (2002), Igwe (2004) and Obanya (2006) have identified inadequate number of qualified teachers, irregular payment of teachers' salaries and teacher's dissatisfaction with their conditions of service as obstacles to effective implementation of UBE programme in Nigeria. All these problems are anchored on inadequate funding of the programme.

Shortage of textbooks and instructional materials: The importance of textbook and instructional materials in teaching-learning process cannot be over-emphasised. For learning to take place, there is the need for the teacher to sensitise pupils' senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. In order to do this, the teacher must use instructional materials (Ajayi, 2004). Without the provision of adequate textbooks and instructional materials, it will be difficult to implement the school curriculum. As part of measure to achieve the objectives of UBE programme, Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) stated that action in the area of textbooks and instructional materials will be closely linked to the work to be done on enriching school curricula.

In view of the anticipated increase in social demand for education as a result of universal, free and compulsory UBE, the quantity of textbooks and instructional materials required in schools and other Basic Education Centres will be enormous with very high financial implications. At this juncture, few questions need to be asked: Are the textbooks and instructional materials adequately provided in the schools? If the UBE is indeed free, are the required

textbooks supplied free to the pupils and adults in schools and literacy centres? UBEP (2002) and Salami (2004) reported that instructional materials such as curriculum modules, textbooks, continuous assessment booklets and introductory technology materials were inadequate in the schools. It is also a common knowledge that instructional materials such as radio, television set and computers are rarely available in the schools.

The problem of the walking distance from home to school: Trekking a long distance by children from home to school is likely to encourage lateness, absenteeism, truancy and drop-out. Experience has shown that most children in rural areas trek for more than 2 Km from home to school. To solve this problem, schools should be established within 1 or at most 1.5 Km walking-distance from home. The implication of this is that more funds will be required to establish more schools in the rural areas, so that the provision of education for all in 2015 will be a reality.

Inadequate funding: The issue of funding of education in Nigeria has been a very contentious one. While it is the feeling of educators that education is grossly underfunded, government usually proclaims that education is given priority attention in its annual budget. If the advice of UNESCO that not less than 26% of the national budget should be devoted to education is anything to go by, education is grossly underfunded in Nigeria.

Between 1999 and 2006, the average budgetary allocation to education by the Federal Government of Nigeria is less than 10%. Considering the enormity of resources required for the effective implementation of UBE, one would say that there is chronic inadequacy of allocation of funds to the programme. Several studies have shown that UBE is underfunded (Maduewesi 2001, UBEP 2002, Ibukun 2004 and Nwagwu 2004).

The problems of UBE earlier discussed in this study such as poor infrastructures; inadequate supervision and monitoring; shortage of teachers; shortage of textbooks and instructional materials and the problem of the walking distance from home to school are indicators of inadequate funding of the UBE programme. It must be emphasised that despite the claim of governments that huge amounts of money are earmarked in the budget for education, not much effect of the money is visible. The reason could be that such funds are not released or when released are misappropriated. To allocate and release funds is one thing and to make the judicious use of it is another. Poor management of fund and lack of accountability further compound the problem of underfunding of the UBE programme.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED FUNDING AND COST EFFECTIVENESS OF THE UBE PROGRAMME

As shown in this study, the various problems, which militate against the effective implementation of the UBE programme are directly linked with inadequate funding. To this end, suggestions are made on how to improve the funding of the programme and ensure its cost effectiveness, as follows:

Increasing budgetary allocation to education: The Federal Government should increase its budgetary allocation to education. Considering the very huge resources required for the effective implementation of UBE programme, allocation of funds to education by the Federal Government should not be less than 20% of the annual budget. The state and local governments should also do the same thing. The budgetary allocation of less than or a little above 10% to education cannot guarantee the success of UBE in Nigeria.

Ensuring timely release of budgetary allocation to education: Governments at all levels, should ensure timely release of the funds allocated to education in their budgets. Budgetary provisions for education could be rendered useless by the prevailing high rate of inflation in the country, if such funds are not released in time.

Judicious utilisation of funds: No matter the quantum of funds allocated and released to the education sector, if such funds are not judiciously utilised, the accomplishment of UBE will be jeopardized. It therefore, becomes necessary for the governments at all levels to ensure that all funds released for the implementation of UBE programme are judiciously utilised.

Prevention of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds: To prevent embezzlement and misappropriation of funds meant for the implementation of UBE programme, the anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) should monitor closely the disbursements of funds on the programme at all levels of government. This will inject transparency, prudence and accountability into the use of such funds.

Strengthening the Education Tax Fund (ETF): The ETF must be strengthened by the Federal Government so that more revenue can be generated for the funding of the UBE programme. The ETF Board must be adequately empowered in terms of human, material and financial

resources to effectively discharge its duties. The Education Tax Fund has been able to impact positively in financing education in Nigeria. According to Olaniyan (2003) the ETF accounted for more than 27 percent of all funds spent on the education sector in 2001. Since the commencement of the UBE programme, the ETF has been very active in supporting the reconstruction of schools in every state and local government of the Federation. More could still be done in this regard if the ETF is further strengthened financially.

Participation of other stakeholders: Since no government can single-handedly solve the financial problem of the education sector, other stakeholders such as the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), communities, philanthropists, private sector and non-governmental agencies should do more in complementing governments' efforts in funding and provision of infrastructures for the UBE programme.

External aids: International Development Partners such as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and USAID should step up their financial commitments to the UBE programme in order to ensure its adequate funding so that education for all in 2015 can be a reality.

Ensuring cost effectiveness: It is necessary to make the UBE programme cost effective through the following approaches:

- Construction of multipurpose buildings in the schools.
- The use of local raw materials and local contractors in construction of school buildings.
- Procurement of locally made furniture and equipment.
- Bulk purchase of instructional materials.
- The use of school buildings for adult education classes and extra-mural programmes during evenings, weekends and holidays.
- The cultivation of maintenance culture by the teachers and students in the use of school infrastructures.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is another landmark in the development of education in Nigeria. However, the laudable objectives of the programme may not be accomplished as a result of various problems, which militate against its implementation. Some of these problems, which are largely connected with inadequate funding, include poor infrastructures, inadequate supervision and monitoring,

shortage of teachers, shortage of textbooks and instructional materials and the problem of walking distance from home to school. In order to ensure the successful implementation of the UBE programme, the study suggested strategies for improved funding and cost effectiveness of the programme.

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