

Universal Basic Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects.

Adunola Adepoju

Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education
Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria.
e-mail: adunadep@yahoo.com

and

Anne Fabiyi

Department of Educational Administration and Planning
Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria.
e-mail: anneolorungbon@yahoo.com

Abstract

The fundamental principle of UBE in Nigeria is that everybody must have access to equivalent education comprehensively and co-educationally. The concept of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) introduced in 1976. (6 years education) was to change into Basic education (9 years education) twenty three years later. Basic education is not completely new but its meaning has been broadened after the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), and the Framework for Action to meet Basic learning needs. The policy provisions of these documents surpass what was on ground then. Three demographic studies on the existing national situation in the primary education sector revealed that, 12% of primary school pupils sit on the floor, 38% classrooms have no ceilings, 87% classrooms overcrowded, while 77% pupils lack textbooks. Almost all sampled teachers are poorly motivated coupled with lack of community interest and participation in the management of the schools.

That was the prelude to the launching of the UBE introduced in line with Millennium Development Goals (MDGS). Consequently this paper examines the unique features of the UBE and the extent that, the Nigerian school age population can benefit from the policy. This research therefore, aims to assess the on-the-field performance of the UBE policy.

Introduction

Education has remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society for decades. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world. Invariably, the major problem identified in the Nigerian UBE system lies in the automatic promotion, that is, 100% promotion and transition for 9 years. This indeed is a mockery of any form of evaluation done at this level and is bound to reflect on the standard of education in no distant future. In

particular the provision for the out of school population has remained obscure since eight years of its introduction and inception.

Yoloye (2004) observed that, the concept of Basic Education is not a completely new term to the Nigerian society and that within the last decade, it has assumed a global significance and its meanings has been broadened. The expanded vision of UBE comprises the universalising of access and promotion of equity, focusing on learning and enhancing the environment of learning and strengthening partnerships.

Goals of UBE

The objectives of the programme as specified in the implementation guideline by government in 1999 are as follows:

- Developing in the entire citizenry, a strong conscientiousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion
- 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
- Catering for young persons, their schooling as well as other out of school children or adolescent through appropriate form of complementary approaches to the provision of UBE
- 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 the life long living.

Theoretical Framework

In every organization, there is an input process output system. The quality of the input in this case, the entry behavior of the pupils, and both physical and material resources available and in use will essentially predict the quality of the act.

A system theory explains the existence of different parts which perform different functions in such a way that each part interacts and is interdependent on the other parts. The educational system has similar characteristics with other systems.

A typical system is characterized by an input that is a component which enters from the outside, conversion process and an output component which leaves the system for the outside/environment. This study is hinged on the systems theory. The input in this case are educational resources, the process involves management strategy employed to transform the output which describes skills acquired and quality of the output or graduate. Nwankwo (1984) Zelvys (2004) describe a system as series of interrelated and interdependent parts such that the interaction of any part affects the whole system.

Review of Literature

Basic education, according to the Jomtien Declaration and Framework of Action on Education for All is not defined in terms of years of schooling. It is

not limited to formal schooling and Jegede (2000) advocated for the non formal and informal media to work together complementarily to ensure that all categories of Nigerians have access to basic education. Obayan (2000) describes basic education as that level, type and form of learning needed to build firm roots for literacy and numeracy, to inculcate basic life skills and more importantly, to consolidate the skills of learning how to learn.

The UBE Mission Statement observed that at the end of the nine years of continuous education every child that passes through the system should acquire appropriate levels of literacy. Other skills include numeracy, communication, manipulation of life skills and be employable, useful to himself and society at large by possessing relevant ethical, moral and civic values. The mission statement states in part --- working in concert with all stakeholders by mobilizing the nation's energies to ensure that education for all becomes the responsibilities of all. The scope includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development, the six year primary education and the three year junior secondary school.

The Federal Government guidelines on implementation for the Universal Basic Education Programme (1999) proffer some strategies which are to serve as guidelines for implementation. These include the fact that provision of the educational programme should be universal, free and compulsory and efforts are to be made to counter the factors which have been impediments to global realization of previous education programmes e.g. Universal Primary Education (UPE).

Summary of the act for UBE

As contained in the official Reference of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Gazette (2004), the act provides for compulsory universal basic education and stipulates penalties for parents who fail to comply with the provision. On the issue of relevance of the school curriculum to the society Ehindero (2000) Adesina (2000) have raised doubts as it has been observed that there is a growing rate of poverty which is an indicator of problems in the system. It was therefore suggested that it should be so structured that each individual will be equipped to perform some six life roles e.g. role as an individual, as a producer, citizen, national consumer and as a family member. As far as the provision of human and material resources are concerned, Adebimpe (2001) opined that for the UBE to succeed, adequate provision should be made to produce sufficient qualified teachers and make them relevant within the limit of their area of specialization. Salaries need to be paid as at when due because it serves as a motivation factor towards productivity.

The Problem

Universal access to education has been prime target for Nigeria in the last four decades and Nigeria is a signatory of World Declarations on Education for All. Igwe (2006) reported that the United Nations Organization (UNO), article 26 on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in part that everyone has the right to education, and this shall be free in elementary and primary stages. So, both at the national and international levels, Nigeria is committed to the provision of basic education to all its citizens. Many attempts have been made in this direction but no appreciable positive results have been recorded. The problem of implementation continues to be a perennial problem to the fulfilment of a constitutional and social obligation to make access possible to all.

This research is therefore set to assess the on the field experiences of the programme by stakeholders e.g. the school principals, teachers, students and parents.

The following research questions have been highlighted to guide this assessment.

1. How do Junior secondary school principals assess the implementation of the Universal Basic Education.
2. What is the on the ground assessment of teachers of the UBE programme.
3. How do some beneficiaries of the programme ie, students perceive the UBE programme.
4. What is the role of parents in complementing effective management?

Research Methodology

The Research design adopted for this study was a cross sectional survey which being both descriptive and exploratory entails a once and for all observation of some of the different stakeholders of the Universal Basic Education.

The target population

Lagos State is made up of six local education Districts and one of them, Surulere Local Education District IV was randomly selected for the research. There are thirty (30) Junior secondary schools in this District with a population of 21,961 students and the total number of 540 teachers.

Surulere Local District IV was mapped into nine geographical areas as follows: Coker, Sanya, Ijesha, Lawanson, Ojuelegba, Randle Avenue, Eric Moore and Ikate Aguda. A school was randomly select from each of the geographical areas.

All principals and vice principals of the 30 Junior Schools (60) were included in the sample. Ten teachers from each of the geographical areas numbering 90 in all were sampled. 10 pupils, of JSS III there randomly were randomly selected from each of the 9 geographical areas numbering 90 pupils. A total of 270 of some stakeholders of UBE participated in this research.

Instrument: The Principals and Vice Principals Questionnaire were designed to solicit relevant information on how they assessed level of the implementation strategies. In the teachers' questionnaire, information on the availability and use of resources were measured. Students, who also were the beneficiaries, responded to some questions on the relevance and gains of their training/education at that level and on the level of participation of parents.

A set of three questionnaires were given to colleagues for purpose of scrutiny and to ensure face validity. They were later administered to five principals, then Junior secondary school teachers and then students as the case may be. A re-administration was conducted a week after and correlation statistical test – the Pearson Product Moment was applied. The correlation coefficient of 0.69, 0.66 and 0.61 for principals and vice principals, teachers and students respectively was obtained.

Principals, Vice Principals and teachers were asked to assess the implementation strategies as follows:

5 Very High Assessment (VHA)

4 High Assessment (HA)

3 Low Assessment (LA)

2 Very Low (VL)

1 NA Negative Assessment because it is extremely low.

The correctness of the statement is rated very high (VHA) if respondent is in no doubt that the statement is exactly true. The lowest and the least true as perceived by the respondent is rated Negative Assessment (NA). The students on the other hand were requested to answer either No or in the affirmative depending on their assessment of the statement. Data collected was analysed using simple descriptive statistics such as means and percentages.

Result

From Table 1, it is observed that principals' assessment on the level of involvement of the local counties in the provision of infrastructure was quite low as 53 out of 60 sampled principals reported that majority of local communities were not involved in the provisions of infrastructure. Although,

more communities were observed to be involved in construction and maintenance of infrastructure the mean value was still assessed as low (2.1)

Table 1 : Principals and Vice Principals Level of Assessment of the Implementation of the Universal Basic Education UBE

		5 VHA	4 HA	3 LA	2 VL	1 NA	Mean	Decision
1	Local communities are mobilized for the : provision of infrastructure for education construction and maintenance of education infrastructure							
(a)	Teachers are being mobilized to write books that are based on specific curricula.	1	1	2	3	53	1.2	Very Low
(b)	Non text materials are being supplied by National Education Technical Centre.	1	1	16	29	11	2.1	Low
2	The school curriculum emphasises team work and spirit of enquiry	2	1	26	21	10	2.4	Low
3	Teaching - learning materials depend on the curriculum.	52	4	1	2	1	4.7	Very high
4	UBE is career oriented	2	5	36	12	5	2.8	Low
5	A large number of out of school children registered enrolled in my school for the UBE scheme.	8	11	59	1	1	3.9	High
6	Available funds are targeted at areas which will really make a difference e.g. building, equipment, textbooks etc.	1	1	2	55	1	2.1	Low
7	Funds are grossly not adequate	7	4	1	47	1	2.48	Low
8	The UBE programme implementation is being politicized	11	8	37	3	1	3.4	High
9	Teachers are available:	51	3	2	2	2	4.65	Very high
10	(a) in the right numbers	44	8	3	2	3	4.46	Very high
11	(b) in the right quality	20	17	12	10	1	3.75	High
	The infrastructure of the Junior secondary school is distinctively separate from the senior school	13	10	19	7	11	3.11	High
12	Nigeria will be among countries that would achieve education for all school age by 2015	25	18	9	6	2	3.96	High
13	Computer education is introduced for	5	2	3	49	1	2.35	Low
14	(a) computer awareness	39	12	6	1	2	4.4	High
	(b) literacy and	33	11	9	5	2	4,1	High
	(c) Application	10	17		10	16	2.9	Low

The principals expressed the fact that the implementation of UBE programme was being politicized. On whether or not Nigeria will be among countries that would achieve education for all school age by year 2015, it was not certain as their assessment is also low (2.35).

Table 2: Teachers Assessment of the UBE Programme

		5 VHA	4 HA	3 LA	2 VL	1 NA	Mean	Decision
1	Teachers in Junior secondary schools are being trained and retained as the need arises.	5	5	5	64	11	2.2	Low
2	Teachers are highly motivated.	4	6	71	6	3	3	Low
3	The Junior school classrooms are over crowded	79	9	4	1	1	4.7	Very high
4	Teachers do not have time for every child	62	11	9	6	2	4.3	Very high
5	The school buildings are dilapidated and rarely refurbished	67	13	6	3	1	4.5	Very high
6	Teachers in my school teach only subjects of their specialty	19	22	37	1	11	3.4	High
7	I have a lot of enthusiasm teaching in the UBE scheme	15	4	24	21	16	2.3	Low
8	Government supplies adequate number of textbooks	11	19	20	33	7	2.9	Low
9	Classroom not comfortable for pupils interaction and class work	71	12	1	3	3	4.6	Very high
10	Students from socio-economic background can hardly afford a lunch	81	4	1	3	1	4.8	Very high
11	Continuous Assessment as method of teaching and learning not continuous testing is what operates in our classroom today	9	15	27	31	8	2.8	Low
12	Salaries and incentives are well planned and paid on time	50	24	7	3	6	4.2	Very high
13	Performance achievement of pupils generally can be rated	5	4	6	61	14	2.2	Low

Table 2 is report of assessment of Junior secondary school teachers for the implementation of the UBE programmes. Teachers agreed that their classrooms were overcrowded (4.7) and are not comfortable or conducive for teaching and learning. In addition, their salaries and other incentives are not well planned neither were they paid at the right time.

Students reported that although some assistance is received from government, in the area of supply of books (20%) it is ridiculously low to equip them for classroom work. They claim that there was no force to compel their parents to send them to school.

Table 3: Perception of Students – Beneficiaries of the Level of Success of UBE Programme

	Yes	No
1 My parents did not have to pay my fees, because Government was taking care of all my school needs.	16 (17.8%)	74 (82.2%)
2 The Junior secondary school is preparing me for a trade I learnt in school.	9 (10%)	81 (90%)
3 My parents were forced by Government to send me to school.	3 (3.3%)	87 (96.7%)
4 Government gave me many books in Mathematics and English.	18 (20%)	72 (80%)
5 We have a school farm and we maintain the school farm.	57 (63.3%)	33 (36.7%)
6 There is a lot of play fields for games and sports in my school.	61 (67.8%)	29 (32.2%)

Discussion and Conclusion

The cost of education has been reported to be on the increase yearly and in spite of increase in budgetary allocation for implementation of educational policies, the funds are still not adequate. In order to support government the new policy advocated for sharing the burden of funding with other stakeholders. The local community is expected to be mobilized to provide for needed infrastructure. In this research, principals/managers of schools assessed the community's level of involvement to be very low. The lack of commitment and general apathy towards the course of a successful implementation of the UBE has been a problem. A survey research conducted by Ker and Okwori revealed that the participation of individuals, private and the three tiers of government was found to be the best option for funding and managing UBE schools.

Massive provision of teaching and learning facilities and improvement of existing ones will enhance programme implementation. The use of other facilities that enhance communication and productivity is also a mark of good performance. Falayajo, Makoju, Gladys, Okebukola, Onugha and Olubade (1997) had assessed the learning achievement of primary four pupils in Nigeria and discovered that this has not improved. Almost ten years after their research, this research also reveals that teachers, performance is rated as low, as their students achievements.

The principals observed that the use of computers is only limited to computer awareness and literacy to a large extent. Computer use for

application was not emphasized. The use of computers should not be limited to teaching and learning but for school administration. Askar et al (2006) noted that computers in Turkish primary schools have become widely used in administrative work and that in fact, information technology has entered the life of teachers. Government policy on enforcing attendance at the UBE programme has not been implemented as majority of parents are still involved in keeping their children and wards behind.

This research reveals that only a small group (17.8%) of respondents agreed that government was taking care of all their school needs whereas majority (82.2%) claim that their parents were largely involved in funding their school expenses. Adesina (2004) noted that private establishments, communities and individual parents must be called upon to fund UBE. He cautioned that it was wrong and misleading propaganda that education can be obtained absolutely free as the actual experience on the field has shown that such propaganda is more of a political gimmick than a statement of good intention. It was observed that the greater the stake in any venture, the greater the interest and commitment of the stake holders in that venture. An enabling law to compel parents to leave no child behind should be enforced. Other practical steps that could be taken to move UBE forward in Nigeria is to give national recognition to individual private organization and local communities who have contributed by way of commitment and financial backing to the ideals of the programme.

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