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**AN EXAMINATION INTO THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF
UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) PROGRAMME SIMPLE
MENTATIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The 1999 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government is the replacement of the 1975 erstwhile Universal Primary Education (UPE) and part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and also a government approach to ensure free basic education for all, improve the fallen standard of primary education, and tackle the menace of out-of-school children among others. This paper highlights some of the reputable educational programmes in Nigeria, overview the 1976 UPE programme, the 1999 UBE programme, prospects and problems of UBE, the UBE and free education programme implementations etc. As part of its recommendation, the paper proffers that UBEC (Universal Basic Education Commission) shall calls for more researches on UBE programme and implementation for it to identify more new factors and problems affecting the UBE and work towards the holistic possible solutions for improvements as to ensure free basic education for all primary school age children in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, Primary, Basic Education, Free Education, and Sustainable development

Introduction

Education is the key that unlocks the potentials of an individual, nations and all other forms of creativity and powers in the world. Saleh (2022) opines that education is the light, without which the world would be in darkness. Education is also a moral undertaking concerned with the development of human beings and human interaction (Jiboyewa, 2022). Maybe this was the reason the Nigerian Governments has from pre-colonial to post-colonial era strives hard towards the provision of qualitative and affordable education for its citizens through the guiding principle of self-reliance and creativity as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (NPE) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). Evidently, the governments, donor agencies and individuals' persons are disbursing huge amount of money and effort on different education programmes for better. If so, what are these programmes of education, their targets, impacts, achievements, challenges and the possible solutions?

Reputable Educational Programmes in Nigeria

Right to Education Initiative (2022) stated that education as a human right means: the right to education is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination; States have the obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the right to education; and there are ways to hold States accountable for violations of deprivations of the right to education. Also United Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2020) stated that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed that education is a fundamental human right for everyone and this right was further detailed in the Convention against Discrimination in Education. The Right to Education is a human right and indispensable for the exercise of other human rights. This includes: quality education aims to ensure the development of a fully rounded human being. It is one of the most powerful tools in lifting socially excluded children and adults out of poverty and into society. UNESCO data shows that if all adults completed secondary education, globally the number of poor people could be reduced by more than half. It narrows the gender gap for girls and women. A United Nation (UN) study showed that each year of schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5 to 10 per cent. For this human right to work there must be equality of opportunity, universal access, and enforceable and monitored quality standards.

However, the right to education entails the following according to UNESCO (2020): Primary education that is free, compulsory and universal; secondary education, including technical and vocational, that is generally available, accessible to all and progressively free; higher education, accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity and gradually free; fundamental education for individuals who have not completed education; professional training opportunities; equal quality of education through minimum standards; quality teaching and supplies for teachers; adequate fellowship system and material condition for teaching staff and freedom of choice.

Despite all of the above, the current situation postulates that about two hundred and fifty eight million children and youth are out-of-school, according to UIS data for the school year ending in 2018. The total includes fifty nine million children of primary school age, sixty two million of lower secondary school age and one hundred and thirty eight million of upper secondary age. Still, one hundred and fifty five countries legally guarantee nine years or more of compulsory education but only ninety nine countries legally guarantee at least twelve years of free education. Similarly, 8.2 per cent of primary school age children do not go to primary school, only six in ten young people will be finishing secondary school in 2030. The youth literacy rate (15-24) is of 91.73 per cent, meaning one hundred and two million youth lack basic literacy skills.

Education is therefore touted as the most important factor for achieving sustainable development and used as an important means for changing attitude and behaviour. The Hyogo framework for action, which was adopted by 168 nations in January 2005, recognized this and encourages government and civil society organisations to use education to facilitate this and other innovations, in order to build a culture of society and resilience at all level of the nation (Nakileza cited in Yusuf, 2019). As a result, governments have placed enormous resources, both financial and human to enhance education in their respective countries (UNESCO cited in Yusuf, 2019). Individual parents have also placed education as the only good inheritance they can give their children. As put by national policy on educational in Nigeria, that all children of primary school age must have access to education.

Despite the fact that access to education is steady expanding across developing countries with higher enrolments figures, a number of obstacles such as poverty and hunger still keep about 67 million children of primary school age out-of-schools of which 52% of them are in sub-Saharan Africa of which Nigeria is the country with highest number of out-of-schools' youths and children in the world (UNESCO in Muhammad, 2023). Nevertheless, in 2017, the Permanent Secretary for the Federal Ministry of Education announced that Nigeria is the country with the highest number of out-of-school children, being home to more than half of the estimated 20 million out-of-school children worldwide (Federal Ministry of Education in Yusuf, 2023).

Yet, various Governments in Nigeria at different times, introduced several inclusive policies and programmes aimed at providing education as a fundamental right of every child wherever he/she is in Nigeria for example: the 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE); the 1986 Nomadic Education Programme; the 1990 Education for All (EFA); the 1994 Family Support Basic Education Programme; the 1999 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) / Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) / Universal Basic Education (UBE); the 2002 Education For All-Fast Track Initiative; the 2003 Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria; the 2012 Almajiri Integrated Model School (AIMS); the 2021 Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA); the 2022 UBE/Almajiri Integration Programme; the 2009 Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) among others.

Overview of UBE Programmes Implementation in Nigeria

It is understandable that every government that comes to power has its own political agenda which shapes social programmes, governance structure and public institutions. These are accompanied with changes invariably seen as policy change which sometimes are changes made in order to alter the political balance of power or even exercise political coercion to maneuver opponent. It is worthy to note every level of education in Nigeria has its own fair share of these political intrigues (Aja et al, 2018).

The 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme

UPE is Nigerian educational system that was started in the mid-1950s following the Macpherson constitution of 1951 which granted democratic rights to the citizens to elect members to the regional House of Assemblies of the three Nigerian regions. The assemblymen had powers to raise and appropriate money and also to pass legislation concerning health, education, agriculture and local government. The elected governments in Western region and later in East selected an ambitious literacy and educational programme to see through the most primary school age students attend primary schools. Further, the Federal Government which had in 1972 assumed more responsibility for education took on the challenge of seeing all primary age pupils attended school (Nigerianwiki, 2008).

Traditionally primary or basic education means the type of education, in quality and concept is given in the first level of education (United Nation Children's Education Funds (UNICEF) in Osokoya cited in Nigerian wiki, 2008). The concept of first level of education varies from country to country, region to region and state to state. In Western Nigeria for example, the first level of education was 8 years' duration prior to 1955 when it was reduced to 6 years. In Eastern region of Nigeria, it remained 8 years until 1976, while the Northern Regional Government maintained a 7-year primary education until 1976.

Encyclopedia Nigeriana (2016) stated that the Federal Government Nigeria led by General Obasanjo adopted the southern Nigeria's UPE programme and launched it nationwide in September 1976, simply to provide free and compulsory primary education to all children throughout the federation. It also launched the scheme to correct regional, rural-urban and sex imbalances in the educational system and invest in human capital. The 1970s were characterized by a flurry of development activities in Nigeria, motivated by increased in revenue and the demands of post-war reconstruction after the termination of the 1970's civil war.

One of the most significant developments in the education sector was the promulgation of a new NPE (National Policy of Education) in 1977, following the recommendations of a National Curriculum Conference held in 1969. The NPE had been preceded in 1976 by the launch of an ambitious programme of mass education, the UPE programme aimed at providing free and universal access to primary education to all school-aged children (Taiwo cited in Baba, 2011). The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), according to Taiwo, introduced UPE, convinced that

only a programme of such a scale could address the problem of educational imbalance between the North and the Southern parts of the country.

Part of the Obasanjo's federal plan as according to Nigerianwiki (2008) was making education free and available to pupils aged six. The launch followed careful analysis of the plan starting in 1969 when a committee headed by Mr. Somade was charged to enquire into the educational system of the country and the feasibility of launching a free primary education programme. A proposal from the education ministry followed in 1972 as the federal government assumed more roles in the educational system of the country. Some stakeholders raised caution about the proposed level of investment in education, the sharing financial responsibilities, and lack of preparatory time. But in 1974, UPE was decided to be introduced on a voluntary basis. Unlike in the past where the primary goal were to educate citizens and increase the enrollment of primary school age pupils, this new policy of 1976 was partly created to address educational imbalances between the Nigerian regions (Nigerianwiki, 2008).

In addition to the foregoing Nigerianwiki (2008) stated that at launch of the UPE programme, primary school pupils in class 1 were about 3 million but a shortage of properly trained teachers hampered the objectives of the scheme. The government which had spent about 1 billion dollars on primary schools and teacher education succeeded with school enrolment that was far out pacing the availability of trained teachers. UPE is considered a pre-cursor of the UBE as both based on the ideal of equal access to primary education for all.

The plan later suffered in the 1980s constrained by inadequate financing from the chief sponsor, the Federal Government Nigeria, when oil prices fell. Inadequate enthusiasm from the major beneficiaries and the Nigerian Government's policy instability also contributed to the lack of full realization of the project's objectives. Conversely, the UPE has been criticized by many for the lack of proper planning leading to inadequate educational facilities in classrooms, insufficient trained teachers and erosion in the provision of quality education.

The 1999 Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme

The 1990 Jomtien declaration for Education For All (EFA) by the year 2003 brought about the enforcement of the UBE programme. A lot of local, national and international conferences created awareness and brought attention to EFA in African countries and most of them by 2015 embraced the phenomenon as a strategy to get rid of poverty. It was on furtherance of this, Nigeria launched UBE nationwide, as her part of the compulsory free basic education for all primary school age children.

Ogunsanmi and Ibumuluyi (2014) stated that the UBE introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1999 to reduce the level of illiteracy, accelerate national development and improve the fallen standard of education as against the crisis that besiege by the erstwhile 1975 UPE scheme. The UBE is a major strategy of government to achieve EFA by the year 2015 as part of the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The launching was against the stride militating against

improving educational developments in Nigeria; it aims at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, as well as stimulating and accelerating national developments, political consciousness and national integrations.

Furthermore, the 30th September 1999 implementation of the programme by President Obasanjo was hampered initially by lacks of enabling laws. The UBE was signed into law in 2004 while the programme itself commenced in 2020/2021 school year (Okugbe cited in Ogunsanmi and Ibumuluyi, 2014). The UBE was presided by a very similar UPE programmes with the major aims similar at providing basic education skills for children and all citizens to be useful citizens in their communities, country and the world at large. Every child from the age of 6 was encouraged to attend school for the next 6 years. The UBE objectives as contains in the UBE Act 2004 is presented as follows:

- i. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age;
- iii. Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- iv. Cater for the learning needs of young persons, who for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- v. Ensure the acquisition of appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for the laying of solid foundation for life-long learning (Aja et al., 2018).

Muhammad (2021) revealed that the 1999 Nigerian constitution and the 2004 UBE Act both gave legal and policy backing of the programme. Section 18 (1) (3) of the 1999 constitution stated that "Government shall direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels." On its part, the UBE act 2004, section 2 (1) stated that "Every government in Nigeria shall provide free compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age." Section 15 defined basic education as: "Early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programs and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl-child and women, Almajiri, street children and disabled groups."

UBE is also free and compulsory education programme and is in line with the NPE 2004 which stipulated that a child should receive a primary education at the age of six and eleven to gain the fundamental skills, knowledge, feelings, thought and actions. Primary education according to NPE is geared towards development of the Nigerian children regardless of the educational system (Federal Government Nigeria, 2004).

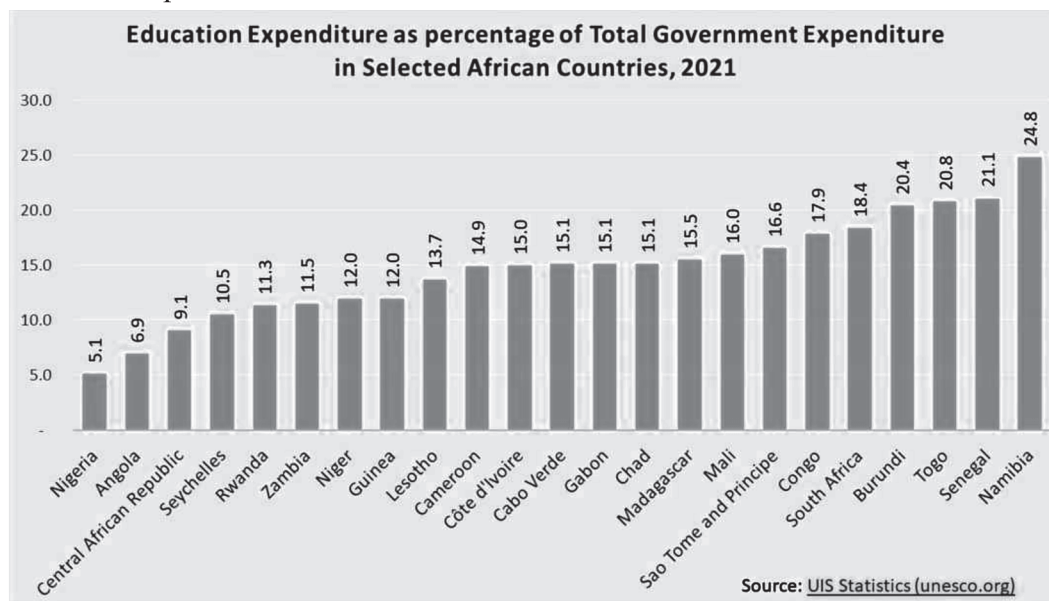
The actors in the implementation of UBE in Nigeria as stated by Odewale (2019) that over the years, Local and State Governments have constituted the real actors in Nigerian primary education sector through the instrumentality of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). Constitutionally and financially, local governments remain major actors in primary education, but practically, it is the SUBEB who manage schools through LGEA with little or no consultation to Local Government Council, regardless of their huge contributions.

The introduction of UBE in Nigeria that replaced the UPE with a 9 year programme has the objectives of providing free and compulsory UBE for every Nigerian child of school going age. Alabi (2022) submitted that the UBE act includes compulsory and free for all school-aged children to complete nine years of basic education, six years of primary schooling and automatic transition into three years junior secondary schools, which supposedly makes provision for Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE). The Act provides that parents must take responsibility for enrolling their children into public primary and junior secondary schools. Still, according to the act, the sole responsibility of basic education in the State and Local Government, the Federal Government intervenes by providing the consolidated revenue fund, which is the main bank of the Federal Government. All government income and revenue are paid into this account, meaning that, this is where all government expenditure comes from, and 2% of that revenue is directed towards supporting state education. More so, the Act also provides for the establishment of the UBEC to coordinate the implementation of the programme at states and local government through SUBEB and LGEAs.

Problems of UBE and Free Education Implementation

The political terrain in Nigeria has not been conducive enough to give room for steady implementation of educational policies because every successive government wanted to be identified with new policies thereby abandoning the existing ones. Most of the times policies are changed and funds meant for them wasted. Some of these policies are formulated hastily without proper planning simply to favor political interest and sustain ability dashed to the wind. Worst still formulations of these policies are bestowed on political office holders who are not experience, thus making it difficult for them to monitor the implementation of these policies. Here, the career civil servants who were not involved at the formulation stage stifle their implementation through unnecessary bureaucracies (Boboyi in Universal Basic Education, 2010). Others are overcrowd classes, inadequate qualified staffs and facilities, insufficient funds, dilapidated schools structures, unqualified teaching staffs, culture and tradition attachment that affects some policies, societal non-challant attitudes, lack of specificity in policy directives and frequent changes in policy as a result of change in government, poor inclusion of Junior Secondary Schools into UBE programme in some states of the federation etc. However, despite the least spending and good programme initiatives in Nigerian

education sector that posh by with corruption and indecisions, Nigeria is a country that recklessly spends the least it afford to offer for education as compared to other African countries. The total expenditure for Nigeria's education is 5.1% which is very scanty and as against the agitation of spending 30% of the total budgets expenditure to education. The following figure presents some African countries education expenditure.



Prospects of UBE and Free Education Implementation

The possibilities of free and compulsory education for all Nigerian children through UBE depend largely on the proper implementation and the strong decisive and political will from the government. The success of UBE depends to a large extent on the proper and holistic educational approach, where policy shall be formulated to end out-of-schools-children syndrome by according every child the rightful place. Ruth (2013) stated that successive governments in Nigeria have at various times, introduced inclusive policies aimed at providing education as a fundamental right of every child. Since the operation of the present UBE program, it has recorded visible levels of enrolments. In 2010, the country recorded an 83.3% gross enrolment rate at the primary school level with male enrolment hitting 87.1% and female 79.3% (World Bank. 2013). In 2009, in-country statistics by Department of Foreign and International Development (DFID) also showed a gross primary school enrolment (though lower than the EFA targets) of 95% for males and 84% for females in 2012.

Conclusion

UBE programme is one of the initiatives of the Federal Government to address the problems of out-of-school children with the objectives to provide access and equity to Basic Education for all. Also, Aja et al., (2018) stated that, although

education is generally supposed to be separated from politics but it is impossible to separate politics from education because it is understandable that every government has its own political agenda which shapes social programmes, governance structure and public institutions. These are accompanied with changes invariably seen as policy change which sometimes are changes made in order to alter the political balance of power or even exercise political coercion to maneuver opponent. It is worthy to note every level of education in Nigeria has its own fair share of these political intrigues.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered:

1. Federal Government should strive to consolidate the existing UBE policies to ensure proper implementation across the country through SUBEBs and LGEAs;
2. Federal Government through UBEC must to ensure all the funds meant for sustainable implementation of UBE are carefully and adequately utilized;
3. The planning, research and statistics units of SUBEBs and LGEAs should be strengthened through capacity building for effective operation;
4. UBE policies at all levels of education must be effectively implemented to sealed the gap that often exists between policy formulation and implementation
5. UBEC shall calls for more researches on UBE implementation to identify factors that constrain the effective implementation and provide the immediate solutions to the identified problems;
6. UBEC shall from time to time organize seminars and workshops for capacity building for all its stakeholders in additions to nationwide media enlightenment programmes.

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