

EDUCATION POLICY IN NIGERIA AND THE GENESIS OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE), 1999-2018

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ABSTRACT: *The Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria was introduced in 1999 to improve the educational system in the country. The policy was aimed at primary education and junior secondary schools which are the foundations of education worldwide. The paper discussed the UBE Act, 2004 and the statement of the problem outlined. The methodology applied is qualitative technique while cognitive development theory is considered relevant to the work. The Genesis of Education in Nigeria from primary, secondary school and higher education institutions were also analysed. The importance of primary education in a child's overall development and the relevance of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria were emphasized. The paper suggested the way forward and made some recommendations.*

KEYWORDS: Genesis of Education, Education Policy, Universal Basic Education (UBE), Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria was a nine (9) year basic educational programme launched on the 30th September, 1999 by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. It was also aimed as a stimulant to accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration.

Former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo flagged UBE in Sokoto, Sokoto State as a strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education related Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). The UBE bill was signed into law by the former President Obasanjo after its passage by the National Assembly on 26th May, 2004. The UBEA Act makes provision for basic education comprising Early Child Care Education (ECCE), Primary and Junior Secondary Education.

Primary and Secondary Education

The financing of basic education is the responsibility of the State and Local Governments. In addition, the Federal Government can also decide to intervene in the provision of basic with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund. However, for States to fully benefit from the fund, some criteria were established which the States must comply with. The Act also provided for the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to coordinate the implementation of the programme at the States and Local Governments through the States Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) of each state and the Local Government Education Authority (LGEAs).

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was formally established on the 7th October, 2004 (UBE Act, 2004).

Vision Statement of UBE

To be a world class education intervention and regulatory agency for the promotion of uniform, qualitative and functional basic education in Nigeria.

Mission Statement of UBE

To operate as an intervention, coordinating and monitoring agency to progressively improve the capacity of States, Local government agencies and communities in the provision of unfettered access to high qualitative basic education in Nigeria.

Scope of UBE

Programmes and initiatives for Early Childhood Care and Education, Six-year Primary Education and three (3) years of Junior Secondary Education.

Objectives of UBE

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

Core Values of the UBE Commission

- a) Honestly and accountability;
- b) Integrity and transparency and
- c) Team work and commitment (UBEC, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Primary education is a right to every child of school age from 4 to 11 years. Pupils are taught at this level to acquire the literacy that will prepare them for the next level of education. Those who finish primary school proceed to junior secondary school (JSS) for three (3) years. Students who pass at JSS 3 further their education at senior secondary while those who fail JSSE go for vocational skills. However, there are many problems confronting basic education in Nigeria. Among the problems are lack of experienced and adequate teachers, inadequate infrastructures, improper management of primary and secondary schools, lack of teachers training, lack of proper routine inspection of primary schools by relevant authorities and lack of appropriate implementation of educational policies (Athanassius, 2018).

Furthermore, not all children of school age go to school because of many factors such as poverty, lack of access to school due to distance, irregular payment of salaries to teachers, among others. Therefore, the focus of this research work is to find out how to solve these persistent problems. However, our efforts will be geared on public schools where poor children attend. The rich parents send their children to private schools where school fees are high.

Education should be for all in order to have free, peaceful and egalitarian societies.

Methodology: Qualitative Technique

Methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. It comprises the theoretical analysis of the body of methods and principles associated with a branch of knowledge.

Qualitative method of analysis is applied in this work. Qualitative research is a broad methodological approach that encompasses many research methods. Qualitative methods examine the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, when, or who and have a strong basis in the relevant field to understand government and the social programmes. Qualitative research is popular among political science, social work and special education and education researchers.

Qualitative is relevant in this work because in the conventional view of statisticians, qualitative methods produce information only on the particular cases studied and any more general conclusions are considered propositions.

Theoretical Framework: Cognitive Developmental Theory

Cognitive theory is concerned with the development of a person's thought processes. It also looks at how we understand and interact with the world. Jean Piaget the theorist, proposed an idea that seems obvious now that help revolutionize how we think about child development. "Children think differently than adult".

Piaget cognitive theory seeks to describe and explain the development of thought processes and mental states. It also looks at how these thought processes influence the way we understand and interact with the world.

Piaget then proposed a theory of cognitive development to account for steps and sequence of children's intellectual development:

- 1) The sensor motor stage: a period of time between birth and age of two during which infant's knowledge of the world is limited to his or her sensory perceptions and motor activities. Behaviours are limited to simple motor responses caused by sensory stimuli;
- 2) The preoperational stage: a period between the ages of 2 and 6 during which a child learns to use language. During this stage, children do not yet understand concrete logic, cannot mentally manipulate information and are unable to take the point of view of other people;
- 3) The concrete operational stage: a period between the ages of 7 and 11 during which children gain a better understanding of mental operations. Children begin thinking logically about concrete events, but have difficulty understanding abstract or hypothetical concepts and

- 4) The formal operational stage: a period between the ages of 12 to adulthood when people develop the ability to think about abstract concepts. Skills such as logical thought, deductive reasoning and systematic planning also emerge during this stage (Kendra Cherry and Steven Gans, 2017).

Piaget (1936) theory of cognitive development explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world is relevant to this research work on education in Nigeria. He disagreed with the idea that intelligence was a fixed trait and regarded cognitive development as a process which occurs due to biological maturation and interaction with the environment. According to Piaget, children are born with a very basic mental structure (genetically inherited and evolved) on which all subsequent learning and knowledge are based (Wadsworth, 2004).

To Piaget, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes as a result of biological maturation and environmental experience. Children construct an understanding of the world around them, then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment through education (McLeod, 2015).

History of Education in Nigeria

Formal (or Western) education started in Nigeria in 1842 at the primary level. The Christian missionaries managed the educational system according to their respective philosophies. The missionary organizations available then were the Church Missionary Society, the Wesleyan Methodist, and the Catholic.

The First Primary School Education in Nigeria

The first education system of Nigeria as a British Colony started in Badagry where the first primary school was established by the Wesleyan Mission (Methodist Church) in 1843. The nursery of infant church later became St. Thomas Anglican Nursery and primary in 1845. The school was housed in the first storey building in Badagry before moving to its location in Topo, Badagry where the relic of the building is still seen today (Kolawole, 2014). And in 1899, the colonial government had to establish a government primary school in Lagos for the Muslim Students as a result of their unwillingness to attend the missionary schools. That was the first government school in Nigeria (Kolawole, 2014).

In 1865, Bishop Crowther Local Government Area primary school was the first in Northern Nigeria established in Lokoja, Kogi State by the Anglican missionary. Kogi state capital, Lokoja was at the time headquarters of the North during the colonial era (Bello, 2014).

The tables attached give details of public primary schools, enrolment, teachers, males and females (2013-2014).

Table 1: Number of Public Primary Schools State by State in Nigeria, 2013-2014

STATE	2013	2014
ABIA	862	854
ADAMAWA	1,893	1,872
AKWA-IBOM	1,153	1,160
ANAMBRA	1,043	1,045
BAUCHI	2,356	2,450
BAYELSA	539	488
BENUE	2,731	2,741
BORNO	1,362	1,362
CROSS RIVER	1,026	1,031
DELTA	1,292	1,129
EBONYI	1,060	1,060
EDO	1,061	1,075
EKITI	838	1,076
ENUGU	1,222	1,223
GOMBE	1,235	1,230
IMO	1,272	1,271
JIGAWA	1,918	1,998
KADUNA	4,026	4,225
KANO	5,335	5,732
KATSINA	2,207	2,217
KEBBI	1,671	1,729
KOGI	2,133	2,082
KWARA	1,466	1,502
LAGOS	1,001	1,007
NASARAWA	1,154	1,310
NIGER	2,855	2,815
OGUN	1,492	1,493
ONDO	1,341	1,343
OSUN	1,391	1,39
OYO	2,260	2,371
PLATEAU	2,379	2,241
RIVERS	931	941
SOKOTO	1,997	1,990
TARABA	1,795	1,796
YOBE	1,041	1,067
ZAMFARA	1,442	1,545
NATIONAL	61,305	62,406

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

Table 2: Public Primary School Enrolments State by State, Year and Sex, 2013-2014

S/NO	STATE	2013		2014	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
1	ABIA	120,546	118,030	100,879	97,600
2	ADAMAWA	290,686	266,935	303,566	278,762
3	AKWA-IBOM	448,762	479,528	448,032	479,062
4	ANAMBRA	419,117	473,992	369,088	386,164
5	BAUCHI	431,772	339,771	390,007	317,866
6	BAYELSA	240,326	243,452	61,647	61,739
7	BENUE	341,035	302,156	281,992	252,652
8	BORNO	539,787	419,598	566,776	440,579
9	CROSS RIVER	115,243	109,670	101,402	95,538
10	DELTA	176,765	173,774	187,825	183,049
11	EBONYI	184,290	186,020	209,921	214,739
12	EDO	161,707	155,777	170,998	451,984
13	EKITI	64,861	63,294	65,807	66,121
14	ENUGU	98,919	95,693	95,378	92,438
15	GOMBE	277,840	211,633	267,514	212,232
16	IMO	796,840	719,989	718,141	672,039
17	JIGAWA	312,025	228,174	315,683	235,271
18	KADUNA	637,844	543,041	619,366	532,510
19	KANO	1,141,637	1,100,419	1,255,430	1,219,492
20	KATSINA	903,277	617,419	897,337	664,383
21	KEBBI	287,428	167,873	281,061	163,568
22	KOGI	177,420	184,622	180,758	196,896
23	KWARA	100,810	91,728	103,774	94,474
24	LAGOS	246,297	256,050	195,999	204,278
25	NASARAWA	170,130	141,271	174,688	145,506
26	NIGER	410,239	298,034	410,239	298,034
27	OGUN	215,251	211,195	204,790	200,234
28	ONDO	643,159	643,671	629,257	630,543
29	OSUN	167,944	169,045	180,109	179,783
30	OYO	473,426	509,240	477,851	516,600
31	PLATEAU	535,932	500,381	259,236	259,999
32	RIVERS	195,037	195,537	128,438	130,845
33	SOKOTO	410,979	228,093	427,348	246,612
34	TARABA	318,137	255,900	285,012	230,973
35	YOBE	486,686	319,257	411,947	284,948
36	ZAMFARA	271,273	143,809	264,360	139,996
37	FCT-ABUJA	102,988	102,770	104,312	106,449
	TOTAL	12,916,185	11,268,842	12,145,968	10,983,959

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

TABLE 3: Public Primary School Teachers State By State 2014

S/ NO	STATE	Graduate with Teacher Qualification		NCE		Total Qualified Teachers		Other Qualifications		TOTAL	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1	Abia	256	1,656	716	5,033	972	6,689	56	230	1,028	6,919
2	Adamawa	382	224	6,042	4,292	6,424	4,516	7,218	3,102	13,642	7,618
3	Akwa- Ibom	703	1,341	2,597	7,204	3,300	8,545	165	233	3,465	8,778
4	Anambra	159	3,713	360	4,161	519	7,874	518	291	1,037	8,165
5	Bauchi	138	60	5,927	2,591	6,065	2,651	3,909	1,069	9,974	3,720
6	Bayelsa	1,039	1,139	430	481	1,469	1,620	4,718	5,043	6,187	6,663
7	Benue	579	717	8,590	5,863	9,169	6,580	482	333	9,651	6,913
8	Borno	315	165	5,758	4,298	6,073	4,463	7,111	3,268	13,184	7,731
9	Cross River	930	1,172	3,585	4,788	4,515	5,960	695	417	5,210	6,377
10	Delta	1,106	2,689	2,485	7,539	3,591	10,228	935	1,168	4,526	11,396
11	Ebonyi	420	694	2,687	3,707	3,107	4,401	1,094	957	4,201	5,358
12	Edo	325	837	2,301	7,243	2,626	8,080	427	300	3,053	8,380
13	Ekiti	368	759	1,348	4,838	1,716	5,597	91	97	1,807	5,694
14	Enugu	895	1,654	4897	1,970	1,392	3,624	165	466	1,557	4,090
15	Gombe	229	76	3,688	2,445	3,917	2,521	5,234	2,992	9,151	5,513
16	Imo	381	2,728	700	4,400	1,081	7,128	1,102	1,130	2,183	8,258
17	Jigawa	106	31	4,730	872	4,836	903	6,538	825	11,374	1,728
18	Kaduna	482	483	10,459	9,392	10,941	9,875	8,636	6,152	19,577	16,027
19	Kano	3,405	799	15,403	4,978	18,808	5,777	21,901	4,557	40,709	10,334
20	Katsina	569	81	7,533	3,022	8,102	3,103	6,602	1,491	14,704	4,594
21	Kebbi	182	28	3,801	1,905	3,983	1,933	6,423	1,425	10,406	3,358
22	Kogi	1,526	1,701	4,515	6,554	6,041	8,255	2,488	2,497	8,529	10,752
23	Kwara	1,005	1,691	3,150	5,242	4,155	6,933	1,864	1,185	6,019	8,118
24	Lagos	437	3,057	1,498	7,319	1,935	10,376	189	302	2,124	10,678
25	Nasarawa	469	296	5,173	2,779	5,642	3,075	3,214	2,054	8,856	5,129
26	Niger	545	333	6,569	5,604	7,114	5,937	8,761	3,405	15,875	9,342
27	Ogun	1,910	103	8,012	7	9,922	110	227	8,184	10,149	8,294
28	Ondo	806	892	2,653	6,888	3,459	7,780	986	1,078	4,445	8,858
29	Osun	654	658	2,924	6,723	3,578	7,381	853	430	4,431	7,811
30	Oyo	1,951	3,161	4,888	11,905	6,849	15,065	533	257	7,381	15,323
31	Plateau	659	842	7,576	5,436	8,245	6,278	3,252	1,517	11,497	7,795
32	Rivers	1,033	2,026	1,655	2,805	2,688	4,831	1,302	1,199	3,990	6,030
33	Sokoto	269	122	8,776	1,030	9,045	1,152	7,453	1,238	16,498	2,390
34	Taraba	426	164	5,689	3,119	6,115	3,283	2,469	997	8,584	4,280
35	Yobe	103	27	2,222	1,430	2,325	1,457	2,580	1,030	4,905	2,487
36	Zamfara	813	103	3,613	826	4,426	929	5,556	624	9,982	1,553
37	FCT	555	990	3,166	3,203	3,721	4,192	223	95	3,944	4,288
	TOTAL	26,150	37,212	161,716	161,892	187,865	199,104	125,970	61,639	313,836	260,743

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

Table 4 National Summaries of Public Schools Statistics, 2013-2014

YEAR	2013	2014
Total Schools	61,305	62,406
Total Enrolment	24,185,027	23,129,927
Total Male Enrolment	12,916,185	12,145,968
Total Female Enrolment	11,268,842	10,983,959
Total Teachers	577,303	574,579
Total Male Teachers	500,589	313,836
Total Female Teachers	276,714	260,743
Total Classrooms	576,592	342,503
Teacher/Pupil Ratio	42	40

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

As at 2014, there were 62,405 primary schools in Nigeria as follows: North East- 9,777, South South- 5,824, North West- 19,436, South East- 5,453, South West- 8,681 and North Central- 13,235. The total for Southern Nigeria was 19,958 and Northern Nigeria had 42,448 (NBS, 2014).

Secondary Education

Secondary education was established in 1859 and the first secondary school was CMS Grammar School, Lagos. Although the reason behind the delay of establishing secondary school was not known, it was probably the insinuations by the colonial masters that secondary education could induce some critical thinking in people that would be helpful for their policies.

During the period under discussion, the British colonial government could not interfere in the education system due to some political and financial factors. However, in 1872, they started to intervene in the education system by giving donations to the missionary societies to support education. Furthermore, in 1882, the colonial government brought a document- "Education Ordinance" with the aim of having total control on education. That was their first formal pronouncement in education in Nigeria. Schools were classified then into government and private schools. The government schools were financed entirely through the public funds but the private only received little aid from public fund.

In 1887, another ordinance was provided because the 1882 education ordinance was cumbersome to implement in Nigeria due to the curriculum, the method and the medium of communication was too foreign for a Nigeria child. Therefore, the new ordinance was the first effective effort made by the colonial government to aid education. However, only some metropolises in Lagos were covered then.

After the amalgamation, Lord Fredrick Lugard, the then Governor-General of Nigeria, set up some new ideas which formed major part of 1916 ordinance. The ordinance came into existence on 21st December, 1916 which was able to take care of the country as a whole.

However, the Northerners had resisted the intrusion of western education for long either from the colonial government or the missionaries. Lugard then met with leaders from the north to convince them, that the education would not affect the Islamic traditions which were more paramount to the northerners.

First Higher Education Institution and the University College, Ibadan in Nigeria

The first higher education in Nigeria was the Yaba Higher College established in 1932 but commenced studies in 1934, after 73 years from the establishment of the first secondary school.

In 1948, the University College, Ibadan was created, which started with only 104 students. However, the number of Universities rose from one to five in 1962. And in 1970s and 1980s, an appreciable number of higher institutions were established. Statistics had shown that in 1980, the number of students that gained admission into primary school was 12 million, 1.2 million for secondary school and 240,000 at the University level (Nigerian Findercom, 2017).

As at March 7, 2018, list of Universities in Nigeria approved by National Universities Commission (NUC) has the following breakdown:

- 1) Federal Universities -40
- 2) State Universities- 44
- 3) Private Universities- 74

Total = 158

National Universities Commission (NUC) is the Agency tasked by the Nigerian Federal Government to regulate and act as a catalyst for positive change and innovation for the delivery of quality university education in Nigeria.

The attached tables show the numbers of Public Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria, Students enrolment and Teachers, Males and Females.

Table 5: Numbers of Public Junior Secondary Schools State by States in Nigeria, 2013 – 2014

STATE	2013	2014
ABIA	241	239
ADAMAWA	570	570
AKWA-IBOM	233	228
ANAMBRA	254	256
BAUCHI	589	531
BAYELSA	182	172
BENUE	446	421
BORNO	265	264
CROSS RIVER	249	245
DELTA	452	161
EBONYI	221	220
EDO	307	313
EKITI	183	181
ENUGU	300	313
GOMBE	258	267
IMO	270	269
JIGAWA	355	424
KADUNA	251	411
KANO	793	875
KATSINA	226	146
KEBBI	222	267
KOGI	521	470
KWARA	386	423
LAGOS	328	348
NASARAWA	138	138
NIGER	380	373
OGUN	306	303
ONDO	299	303
OSUN	443	443
OYO	769	564
PLATEAU	284	283
RIVERS	267	268
SOKOTO	177	177
TARABA	237	235
YOBE	158	142
ZAMFARA	187	181
FCT-ABUJA	127	127
NATIONAL	11,561	11,874

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

Table 6: Public Junior Secondary Schools Enrolment State by State, Year and Sex, 2013 – 2014

S/NO	STATE	2013		2014	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
1	Abia	21,856	29,252	19,932	24,786
2	Adamawa	64,346	49,006	64,346	49,006
3	Akwa-Ibom	79,827	86,985	120,451	136,967
4	Anambra	54,475	58,401	56,888	64,199
5	Bauchi	89,919	51,599	81,419	52,245
6	Bayelsa	25,031	23,456	17,431	16,818
7	Benue	44,165	37,332	31,801	27,817
8	Borno	49,180	36,877	51,644	38,722
9	Cross River	35,440	34,457	32,940	32,716
10	Delta	67,533	64,510	27,588	27,617
11	Ebonyi	33,571	35,679	37,409	38,447
12	Edo	60,240	59,887	54,294	48,956
13	Ekiti	26,622	26,052	19,196	26,910
14	Enugu	42,732	50,650	44,744	47,192
15	Gombe	52,326	42,253	52,944	41,404
16	Imo	42,856	44,988	76,215	77,174
17	Jigawa	63,466	41,534	68,158	40,873
18	Kaduna	93,772	74,109	87,587	70,687
19	Kano	44,701	49,256	173,722	118,951
20	Katsina	116,926	78,958	119,897	89,095
21	Kebbi	96,481	47,175	100,749	46,855
22	Kogi	46,845	42,353	31,222	29,449
23	Kwara	51,564	46,038	54,553	49,223
24	Lagos	159,772	169,623	156,280	161,332
25	Nasarawa	13,370	10,672	13,370	10,672
26	Niger	121,813	69,846	121,813	69,846
27	Ogun	108,974	106,900	106,168	102,414
28	Ondo	65,355	62,650	67,490	66,564
29	Osun	68,122	64,974	65,184	65,249
30	Oyo	119,586	118,040	124,070	128,179
31	Plateau	32,502	27,409	31,360	26,997
32	Rivers	66,222	74,424	59,751	66,504
33	Sokoto	53,845	20,282	54,300	22,724
34	Taraba	25,642	19,161	22,804	16,656
35	Yobe	39,746	27,792	40,320	29,229
36	Zamfara	66,243	29,396	54,309	28,857
37	FCT-Abuja	50,401	50,857	50,401	50,857
	TOTAL	2,290,478	1,962,892	2,392,750	2,042,229

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

Table 7: National Summary of Public Junior Secondary Schools Statistics (2013 – 2014)

YEAR	2013	2014
Total Schools	11,561	11,874
Total Enrolment	4,253,370	4,434,979
Total Male Enrolment	2,290,478	2,392,750
Total Female Enrolment	1,962,892	2,042,229
Total Teachers	169,860	170,628
Total Male Teachers	86,866	83,125
Total Classrooms	66,172	84,342
Teacher/Pupil Ratio	25	26

Source: National Bureau for Statistics, 2016

The Importance of Primary Education in a Child's Overall Development

Education can be defined as permanent change in behavior as a result of learning, consists of all efforts (conscious or incidental) made by a society to accomplish set objectives which are considered to be desirable in term of the individual as well as the societal needs (Labo - Popoola, 2015).

Primary education is the most often referred to as elementary education, which is usually composed of grades one through six. The main purpose of primary education is to give children a strong foundation in the basics of a general curriculum, with an emphasis on reading and mathematics. The role of primary education is therefore, to ensure the broad-based development of pupils. This means ensuring that all pupils are able to develop their cognitive, social, emotional, cultural and physical skills to the best of their abilities, preparing them for their further school career.

The importance of primary education in a child's overall development is that attending a good pre-school and primary school has more impact on children's academic progress than their family background or their gender. A higher quality of pre-school education followed by an academically effectual primary school gives children's growth a significant boost, researchers found. A study by the Institute of Education in Nigeria found that the quality of teaching children receive is more important than their family income, gender or parents' education. However, they said that children also need an inspiring early year home-learning environment to build upon (Jennifer O'Neill, 2016).

To stress more on the importance of primary education for example, the right of children to free and compulsory primary education Act was introduced in Nigeria in 1976 through the Universal Primary Education (UPE). It was upgraded to Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999. The difference is that the later makes education compulsory to Junior Secondary School (JSS3). After that, those who cannot pass to senior secondary school can go for vocational skills training school.

The Primary Education helps as follows:

- a) Ability to reading, writing and arithmetic is trained, inculcated and developed in the child in primary education. This is considered as the foundation for all of the intellectual development in future;
- b) Humanities subjects are introduced in the curriculum in or to make the acquainted with the human world;
- c) Study of the natural environment, its biological and physical world are taught in primary education in order to whet and satisfy natural curiosity of the child;
- d) Handwork or/ and craftwork usually find a place in curriculum with a view to help develop manual deftness and effectual use of one's hands. Artful or cultural activities like music and dance, drawing and painting are introduced to give creative shape to their imagination;
- e) Elementary knowledge of health and hygiene is treated as an essential pre-requisite in primary education for keeping the child's physical health in the utmost condition;
- f) Group play activities make up a large percentage of play time and are encouraged with a view to develop social adjustment skills and social participation skills of the child; and
- g) Moral education is introduced as a vital part of the curriculum in order to help mold and develop moral sentiment and positive outlook in the early personality of the primary school-going child (Sapphire International School, 2017).

Children who attend a more academically effectual primary school show better achievement and growth than children with comparable characteristics who attend a less effective school. Therefore, going to academically effectual primary school gives a meticulous boost to children.

The Relevance of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

In 1999, the Nigerian government introduced Universal Basic Education, a programme to provide free primary and secondary education for all.

Nigeria gained independence from British rule on 1st October, 1960. However, it took time to develop its own educational system. Prior to 1977, Nigeria operated an educational policy inherited from Britain at independence. But the inability of the policy to satisfy the national aspirations of the country rendered it unpopular. During the 1970s, the foundations were laid for a new policy and in 1976, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme was launched but it was widely considered to be unsuccessful.

In 1973, a national seminar was organized by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) which gave rise to the National Policy on Education in 1977. The policy was then revised in 1981 and 1990 to try to ensure that the education sector was supportive of government development goals.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria was launched in 1999, with the goal of providing free, universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigeria child aged 6-15 years. The programme was however not able to take off immediately after its launch because it did not have legal backing. Initially, the UBE related activities were carried out only in areas of social mobilization, infrastructural development, provision of instructional

materials, among others. The UBE programme eventually took off effectively with the signing of the UBE Act in April, 2004 (UBE, 2017).

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy Objectives

The programme was expected to be a continuation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme, which was abandoned in 1976. UBE shared with UPE many of the similar elements.

The objectives of the UBE initiative were stated at the outset, with some measurable targets and some less well- defined objectives:

- a) Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- b) Provide free, universal education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- c) Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- d) 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 of promotion of basic education; and
- e) Ensure 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 lifelong learning (UBE Act, 2004).

The Main Beneficiaries of the Programme are:

- a) Children aged 3-5 years, for Early Child Care and Development (ECCDE);
- b) Children aged 6-11 plus years for primary school education; and
- c) Children aged 12-14 plus years for Junior Secondary School Education.

The Scope of UBE includes the following:

- a) Programmes and initiatives for ECCDE;
- b) Programmes and initiatives for acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above);
- c) Out- of school, non-formal programmes for the updating of knowledge and skills for persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for lifelong learning;
- d) Special programmes of encouragement to all marginalized groups: girls and women, nomadic populations out of school youth and the almajiris (Qur'anic Students); and
- e) Non-formal skills and apprentice training for adolescents and youths, who have not had the benefit of formal education (UNESCO, 2015).

The Public Impact

Although there has been some improvement to education in Nigeria since the beginning of the programme, it has been marginal considering its span of almost two decades.

- 1) As at 2015, Nigeria was ranked 103 out of 118 countries in UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) Development index which takes into account universal primary education and gender parity;
- 2) UNESCO 2015 review of education in Nigeria found that enrolment at primary and junior secondary levels had greatly increased since 2000. However, transition and completion rates remained below 70%:
- 3) Enrolment rates increased by 130% for secondary education in the period from 2000 to 2013 (based on the latest available statistics from the World Bank but decreased by 4% for primary level;
- 4) The quantity of the national school curriculum is undermined by the generally low quality of teachers who implement it which translates into low levels of learning achievement;
- 5) Infrastructure, toilets and furniture are inadequate and in a dilapidated state;
- 6) The system of collecting comprehensive, relevant data for planning is weak;
- 7) There are social and cultural barrier that are hindering female participation and
- 8) There is a lack of enforcement of the UBE Act 2004 on enrolment and retention (UNESCO, 2015).

The way forward for Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

All over the world, primary education has been regarded as the most important as well as the most patronized by people because it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit. In recognizing the importance of primary education, all governments in Nigeria (past and present) have placed premium on it by making primary education the centre piece of their educational policies. Therefore, since the colonial period, both colonial and independent governments in Nigeria had instituted one form of educational reform or the other. That indicated that there was a link between the past and present in the educational development of Nigeria.

Nigeria, having been colonized by Britain adopted the British form of education which consisted of primary, secondary and higher education. However, the Islamic education had been in the Northern Protectorate before the amalgamation in 1914, thus the Christian missionaries that came into the country through the Western Region were restricted from spreading both Christianity and Western education to the Northern region.

The colonial administration, before independence, administered education through the use of education ordinances and education laws which included the 1882, 1887, 1916, 1926, 1948 and 1954 educational ordinances and Regional laws of 1954. In 1954, the three regions (Eastern, Western and Northern) and the Federal Territory of Lagos had the power of making laws for their territories and citizens as a result of the adoption of 1954 constitution. Consequently, the following regional laws on education emerged: Education law of 1954 in the Western region,

Education law of 1956 in the Northern region and the Lagos Education Ordinance of 1957. That was the beginning of the introduction of universal education in Nigeria (Fabunmi, 2005 cited in Labo - Popoola, 2009).

The Nigerian 1979 constitution puts education on the concurrent list which implies that the responsibilities and authority in education would be shared among the three tiers of government, that is, Federal, State and Local governments. However, a major policy made on education by the Federal Government took place in 1977 which was tagged “the National Policy on Education”. The policy was the outcome of a seminar convened in 1973 after the National Curriculum Conference. The 1977 policy had been revised thrice, that is 1981, 1988 and 2004.

The philosophy of education as articulated in National Policy on Education emphasizes the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, the full integration of the individual into the community and the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education both inside and outside the formal school system (Eddy and Akpan, cited in Labo - Popoola, 2009).

In order to carry the Universal Basic Education forward in Nigeria, the objectives in UBE Act 2004 should be strictly followed. Following the enactment of the Act, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was established. The Act provides three (3) sources of funding for the implementation of the UBE which are Federal Government grant of not less than 2% of its consolidated revenue fund; funds or contribution in form of Federal Guaranteed credits and local or international donor grants. Although the Act covers both the State and the Local Governments, the States governments can only benefit from the Federal Government block grant meant for the implementation of the UBE if they contribute at least 50% of the total cost of the project. This is to ensure the States commitment towards the project.

To ensure that the UBE project enjoys a wide coverage, the Act provides sanctions for parents who fail to send their children and wards to school. Also, in order to ensure that poverty is not a hindrance to schooling, the project provides free textbooks in core subjects and abolishes tuition at the primary school and at the junior secondary school levels. The enactment of the UBE Act has legal implication which makes it compulsory for provision of universal, free and compulsory 6 years of primary education and the first 3 years of junior secondary education. Apart from this, the UBE scheme also plans catering for the adults who have been out of school to acquire basic skills needed for lifelong learning in form of non-formal programmes and training for youths who have not had the benefit of formal education (Dare et al, 2008, cited Labo and Popoola, 2009).

The junior secondary schools in the UBE Act shall be an autonomous body, not having much to do with the senior secondary schools. In order to achieve this, all states of the federation have given the junior schools their autonomy. They Junior Secondary Schools operate as separate bodies, having their own Principals, Vice Principals and members of teaching and non teaching staff. Therefore, from the foregoing, UBE programmes in Nigeria have its own unique feature and if properly implemented will improve education system in the country tremendously.

CONCLUSION

Education is an instrument of social reforms, economic growth and political awareness and development of a people. Primary education is therefore the foundation of all education and should be regarded as fundamental to success in life. That was the reason the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education to give every Nigerian child access to education. However, since no one ever attained education without passing through primary education, the importance of primary education cannot be over emphasized.

At the primary school level, children from 6 to 11 years bracket should be enrolled. The policy of universal basic education comprises three major aspects which are firstly, universal, which connotes the universal access to education and then the basic which connotes the very foundation of education, the foundation at which every other levels of education is built upon. It is the heart of education. It was in view of the above factors that the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Universal Basic Education in 1999 which the country still operates till date (2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve Universal Basic Education in Nigeria, some recommendations are made in this paper to support it. They include:

- 1) Adequate funds should be provided by the Federal, State and Local Governments to finance education;
- 2) The problem of corruption, especially in education sector in Nigeria should be seriously tackled in order to implement this education policy to its fullest;
- 3) Both primary and secondary school teachers (Junior and Senior) should be constantly trained after qualified ones have been employed to improve their knowledge. They should be well paid salaries and regularly too;
- 4) Stakeholders in education sector which include the government agencies, parents and the guidance should put their heads together to devise means of moving the system forward and
- 5) Lastly, Federal State and Local Governments should provide incentives to pupils at primary schools, especially giving the free feeding which will encourage them to go to school. At junior and senior secondary schools, descent infrastructures, good toilet system, health clinics and transportation should be provided to enable them study under conducive environment.

If these recommendations are implemented in addition to other available facilities, education system will be better for it in Nigeria.

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