

***HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY
FORMULATION IN NIGERIAN
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FROM THE
COLONIAL ERA TO THE PRESENT
UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION***

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper traced the historical development of policy formulation in Nigerian educational system from the colonial era to the present Universal Basic Education. The meaning and objectives U.B.E were also given. An appraisal of U.B.E was made focusing attention on the inadequacy of language of instruction, supply of teachers, fund and equipment. It also looked at the target groups like Almajiris (street beggars) and boys dropout to trade. Conclusion and recommendations like improved pedagogical development in term of teacher training, curriculum review, proper monitoring and evaluation of existing U.B.E practices e.t.c were made in order to ensure strategic implementation, of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the early period of western education in Nigeria was characterised with complete Christian Missionary activities. That was the period between 1571 when the Catholics visited the country for the first time and 1881/82. During that period, there was no official educational policy uniformly formulated for all the missions until 1882 when what could be called the first educational policy was promulgated by the colonial masters. The policy was known as "colonial government general education ordinance" (Taiwo, 2003) because it was to be effective and binding on all the West African British territories of Lagos (Nigeria), the Gold Coast, Sierra-Leone and Gambia.

This policy failed to achieve its purpose, and another one was promulgated in 1887, this was known as "the first purely Nigerian education ordinance". This was because in 1886, a year before the policy came into being, the colony and protectorate of Lagos was administratively separated from other British West African colonies.

Other colonial educational policies followed between that time and 1960. Nine years after political independence in Nigeria, a curriculum conference was held in Lagos. To re examine the curriculum of various levels of Nigeria education with a view to re examining the old national goals for Nigeria education and identifying new ones taking the young adults in schools into consideration. This conference was followed in 1973 by a National Seminar on National Policy on Nigerian education. The seminar led to the National Policy on Education with its white paper in 1977 which underwent through series of processes and reviewed in 1981, 1998 and 2004

After the review in 1998, the federal government in Nigeria discovered inadequacy in Nigerian educational system and the paucity of its products became a matter of great concern to present civilian administration. The available record shows that transition rate from primary school to junior secondary school is 43.7%, meaning that 56.3% of those in the primary school are not likely to move to junior secondary school. This, according to Adeniran (2000) would further compound the problems of an estimated 43% adults who have missed their opportunities of a formal education. Generally, the Nations literacy was estimated to be 52% and education statistics for 1996 shows that 14.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 21 million children of school going age. It is in response to this situation that the universal basic education (U.B.E) programme was launched in 1999, September 30

Section three of the National Policy on Education (4th edition) has stipulated that Basic Education shall be of 9-year duration comprising 10 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory, it shall also include adult and non formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adult and out of school youths.

What is Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) Programme

Being a signatory to Jemtiem declaration of Education for all be the year 2000 and also a member of the group of E-9 nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy, the nation wants all her children to pass through the U.B.E Programme and acquire appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communication, manipulative and life skills and be employable, useful to himself and the society at large by possessing relevant ethical, moral and civic values.

The Jemtiem declaration of 1990 viewed education as a combination of the formal and non-formal approaches to all round development of human potentials, and not just limited to formal schooling. It is in line with this that U.B.E becomes an integrated scheme beginning from childhood braining and culminating in skillful functional adults. The programme is equally for nomadic education and adult literacy for young adults who were unable to have formal education during their childhood days. The Jemtiem declaration has therefore succinctly given the meaning of U.B.E as:

Programmes for early childhood care and socialization, for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life-skills especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above). For nomadic population, out of school and non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic education needed for lifelong learning, apprenticeship training for adolescents and youths who have 'not had the benefits of formal education, the formal school system form the beginning of primary education, to the end of junior secondary school (F.G.N. 1999, P.2).

The above declaration shows that there are three major components of U.B.E. The first is the spending of nine years in primary and junior secondary levels of education for all children of school going age. The second is the nomadic education for the children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen throughout the nation while the third component is the adult literacy and non-formal education for out of school adults in Nigeria.

Objectives of U.B.E

In line with Jemtiem declaration and to engender a conductive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time, the U.B.E has the following goals and objectives as spelt out in the proposed implementation blue pint for U.B.E

- i. to develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. to provide free, compulsory universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;

- iii. to reduce drastically drop-out rate from the formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency;
- iv. to cater for drop-outs and out-of school children/adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- v. to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative and life skills (as well as the ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying the foundation for life-long learning.

U.B.E appraised

In giving cognizance to the aims and objectives of primary and junior secondary school levels of education in Nigeria and in catering for nomadic education and adult literacy programme, U.B.E has laudable objectives as seen above.

The foregoing shows that the U.B.E presents an ambitious educational programme aimed at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. It is a programme for national integration, political consciousness and national development. These objectives were to be achieved through the provisions of free and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age, out of school children, adolescents, adults (age 15 and above), provision of education to nomads, migrants and fishermen. The management structure of this educational policy is a model in consultative federalism involving both the federal, state and local governments.

As promising as the educational policy is, and as laudable as its objectives are, the number of teachers and their qualifications are still low. Teacher development therefore becomes a necessity as no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (F.G.N, 1981).

The existing curriculum of the primary and junior secondary school education has not taken into consideration, the target group under non-formal education i.e the migrant families and nomads. Curriculum reforms geared towards the achievement of U.B.E objectives should receive some attention.

Like what exists in curriculum, the implementation of the non-formal section of U.B.E suffers more on infrastructural inadequacies than other sections. If the policy talks about basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age, a question needs to be asked here, i.e are the street beggars (not handicap) part of migrant families? Especially the "Almagir is" i.e Quranic pupils who go about begging for food. They are mostly boys between the age of 4 and 20. They stay away from their parents for between 2-10 years. They are therefore seen to be professionalised in begging. Mahmood (2000) asserted that some of them turn out to be deviants who have dubious character unacceptable to society and also negate the principle of progress development and fundamental rights as we march in to 21st century. The question is what provision has U.B.E programme made for this set of children.

Another area of focus is that of boys drop-out of school because of their crave for money. They are seen as scavengers, bus conductors, area boys, street traders, head loaders and apprentices because they want to contribute to the family income and be financially independent early enough before the age of 25. Nwangwu (2000) opined that boys drop out of school for these other reasons: inability of education to bring riches, poverty depriving parents from paying school fees and trading more satisfying than schooling. As much as this is cherished by every community in Nigeria, there is every need to find a way of making the drop out boys (and girls) to learn compulsorily and discourage the parents from withdrawing their wards from school in order to go and look for money.

For the pre-school children, it is often said that learning experiences gained in the pre-school years form the foundation for effective learning in later life. If the pre-primary education and early childhood care should be a component of the U.B.E, adequate provision needs be supplied.

Ironically, the existing primary and junior secondary school levels are lacking the essential equipment facilities needed for proper learning and successful implementation of U.B.E. When the world bank team visited the action research sites in Ondo, Osun, Kano and Plateau states in 2004, they discovered in the sampled schools that infrastructure was generally in bad condition. They reported that available classrooms were manifestly unsafe for the children as their roofs had caved in and ready to fall off at any little pressure. The available classrooms were congested and the teachers were reading from the only available copy of the book in use. The children did not have copies of the book. For successful implementation of the U.B.E programme therefore, there is need for adequate provision of enough buildings and learning materials at all levels of U.B.E programme.

The existing situation in Nigerian schools is that of little or no practical utility ending up in alienating the students from their immediate environment. The educational system favours the acquisition of theoretical knowledge with little knowledge of practical work, such that when students leave school, they hardly solve any practical problems relating to their immediate environment. The reason for this could probably be as a result of alienating the students and pupils from their indigenous languages and culture. Despite the fact that the N.P.E, 1981 revised, has provided that the child's mother tongue be used as medium of instruction in lower primary classes, with transition to English in the upper primary classes, most schools in the country use English Language right from primary one. The worst situation happens in private Nursery/Primary and Secondary Schools where speaking in their mother tongue attracts special penalty. The parents too like this situation. The implementation of the provision of N.P.E 1981 revised edition on the use of mother tongue for instruction will be of great advantage for U.B.E in general and for non-formal section of U.B.E in particular.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The historical analysis of Nigerian educational policies has shown that promulgation of educational policies is as old the coming of the missionaries to Nigeria. The one of top priority of the federal government today is that of U.B.E. The U.B.E has very laudable objectives leading to national development. The aspect of teacher, curriculum reforms, infrastructural and language inadequacies need more attention.

Based on the foregoing therefore, the presenter will like to make the following recommendations.

- i. there should be pedagogical development in term of teacher training and re-training of teachers through open and distance learning and mobile trainings. The teachers so trained will be able to take charge of non-formal aspect of U.B.E.
- ii. The curriculum of non-formal education of U.B.E should be reviewed to make it more function, appropriate and relevant for the target group.
- iii. Enough fund should be made available for both procurement of infrastructures and payment of staff salaries and fringe benefits.
- iv. Pupils' mother tongue, or at worst, bilingual education should be encouraged in Nigerian schools to promote and protect indigenous languages. Although, there should be a good appreciation of the need for English Language in Nigeria, but this should not be at the expense of indigenous languages. Parents too have a role to play here in order for indigenous languages and culture not to become extinct in the society.
- v. There should be proper monitoring and evaluation of existing U.B.E practices among target groups.
- vi. There should be decentralization of participation. This will give room for N.G.O, individuals, business organizations, P.T.As etc to be involved in funding, sponsoring, planning, management and evaluation of U.B.E in Nigeria.
- vii. Vocational/technical as well as pure science and technology should be promoted among children, both males and females under U.B.E.
- viii. State governments should play major roles in building classrooms, training teachers and provision of leaning materials.
- ix. The U.B.E coordinating body should find ways, of relating with the state Universal Basic Education Board in order to see to the proper domestication of U.B.E in each state of the federation.
- x. Adequate planning should start for the smooth transition of the first set of U.B.E pupils to J.S.S level.
- xi. Each state government should enact laws to guide on the successful implementation of U.B.E.
- xii. The federal government intervention fund should be judiciously used for the purpose of successful U.B.E implementation.

If these recommendations are adhered to, it is hoped that universal basic education programme will be successfully implemented in Nigeria and its laudable objectives will be achieved for accelerating political consciousness, national integration and national development.

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