

**ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (U. B. E) PROGRAMME**

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ABSTRACT

The ever-designed instrument of development which is equally capable of changing the behaviour, values and expectations of individuals within the society is education. It reduces illiteracy and paves the way for environmental integration, growth and development. This justifies the need for everybody to be educated within the society, as education has been seen as Nigeria's biggest industry which gets to every nook and cranny of individual's human endeavour (Baikie, 1998). Hence, the need to make education Universally Compulsory in Nigeria. This paper therefore examines the role of teachers in successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) Scheme in Nigeria. It will also touch some parts of the antecedents to U.B.E. scheme. Conclusion and recommendations were made on how teachers can perform their roles toward successful implementation of U.B.E. Scheme in Nigeria.

Introduction

It is globally established that development cannot take place in any nation where the majority of the population is illiterate. Literacy therefore becomes the first stage in the development process of a nation and the only way that a citizen can assume his responsibility fully. This shows how important the intellectual power of man is. It is in realization of this that the federal government of Nigeria deemed it fit to formally launch the universal basic education (U.B.E) scheme in 1999. The scheme was aimed at developing in every individual, the needed consciousness for education as well as providing the basic education for all Nigerian children that are of school going age in order to eradicate illiteracy in the society.

For democracy to achieve success in Nigerian society, the universalisation of basic education becomes a must, as the citizens need to be educated. Hence the government has decided to give a free compulsory and universal primary education to every child. It is in line with this that Wilkins (1975) postulated that only literate electorate can choose good government in a democracy while illiterate electorate is prone to the manipulative powers of bad politicians. Little or no wonder then that the international consensus at the Jomtien conference in 1990 agreed that education is the only weapon for combating poverty and for enhancing human right and proper democracy. The importance of education to national development and democracy can therefore not be over emphasized, hence the Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) as an education scheme meant to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria becomes a welcomed development.

The Nigeria's illiteracy rate is estimated to be 52% as the 1996 statistics showed that only 14.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 21 million children of school-going age (F.G.N 1999). The U.B.E. becomes necessary in order to reduce Nigeria's illiteracy rate and lay the foundation for sustainable life-long learning. In Nigerian context, basic education includes primary, junior secondary, nomadic and adult literacy education (F.G.N 1999). The Jomtien declaration of 1990 saw 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. The same declaration stated that, basic education should be considered as a process to be determined by every nation in accordance to its evolutionary development needs and not to be considered as a static term. The U.B.E which is intended to be Universal, free and compulsory, comprises the following according to the declaration:

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 up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic education needed for life-long learning; apprenticeship training for adolescents and youths who have not had the benefit of formal education; the formal school system from the beginning of primary education, to the end of the junior secondary school (F.G.N, 2000 P.2).

Antecedents to Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) in Nigeria.

The educational system in any society has to change as the society changes since education is meant to solve the societal problems. The Nigerian educational system before the advent of missionaries was purely based on informal and indigenous system. The advent of missionaries marked the beginning of formal education which was initially intended to meet the need of the missionaries and the colonial government. Between 1996 (the independence year) and this time, several educational programmes have been put into practice. One of them was the popular Universal Primary Educational (U.P.E). The introduction of this educational programme could be traced back to 1955 when the programme was introduced in the then Western region when pupils enrolment in primary schools increased tremendously because it was free (Adesina, 1983). This initial success in Western region made the eastern regional government to follow the step taken by western regional government and introduced U.P.E. in 1957. The programme later failed in eastern region with little success in the west. Despite this, the then Federal Government re-introduced it in 1976 with the aim of making primary education to be free for all primary school age children in Nigeria. Initially, the Federal Government spear headed its full funding, but later in 1981, the federal government decided to transfer its management to the states and local government councils (Inikori, 2000). The scheme later collapsed due to inadequate number of teachers, over population in schools and poor management strategies among other reasons.

The Federal Government has again decided to introduce another Universal Basic Education, which was aimed at providing free and compulsory education for all children of school age from primary to junior secondary School level. Hence, the old U.P.E. and new U.B.E have a lot of things in common. If this is a truism, the question now is, will what happened to U.P.E. not happen to U.B.E? For history not to repeat itself, every hand must be on deck to make the implementation strategies of U.B.E. workable. What roles can teachers play in the implementation of U.B.E. programme.

Teachers' role in the implementation strategy of U.B.E programme.

Teachers constitute very important component in any educational programme. The national policy on education (1981) has emphasized the importance of teachers in any educational system when it unequivocally stated that "no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers". The influence of teachers in an educational scheme cannot be over emphasized, as they are responsible for the overall development of the scheme. No matter the extent of availability of physical and material resources, if teachers are not available, they remain unproductive until they are utilized by teachers. The above remains a pointer to the significance of teachers in the effective implementation of such laudable scheme as U.B.E. in Nigerians.

Starting from the planning state, the government has to prepare adequately for sourcing for teachers. Projections have to be made to foresee problems that may arise through student enrolment and make necessary preparations to meet reasonable student-teacher ratio. To this end, teachers training and re-training programmes become necessary. The training programmes have to be updated in order to meet the demand of the current scheme. No matter how promising the curriculum is, the ideas therein can only be brought to

lime light through teachers. Therefore, the type of training that teachers should be engaged in should be in line with the modern time of science, technology and computer literacy. Although the National Policy on Education (1981) has prescribed the Nigeria certificate in Education (N.C.E) as the minimum qualification for teachers in the school system, it is noteworthy too that for successful implementation of U.B.E., the Federal Government has further charged the National Teachers Institute (N.T.I) to design, develop and run a special training programme for the production of U.B.E. teachers. The programme which is known as Pivotal Teacher Training Programme (P.T.T.P) is designed to meet the nations urgent need for the large number of qualified teachers and to prepare them for the specific teaching assignment in the U.B.E Scheme (N.T.I 2000). As good as this training programme is, the duration is rather too short for proper training of teachers. Also applicants for this training programme should be properly screened to be sure that interested candidates are selected for the programme, and not those who applied because of other motives. Opadokun (2000) noted that majority of those who enrolled for the training programme did so because they were told they'll be given monthly stipend throughout the course work duration and they also stand to gain automatic employment after the course.

As part of teacher's role in the successful implementation of the UB.E scheme, teachers should teach conscientiously in the classroom, they should always endeavour to improvise for teaching aids and instructional materials. Teachers should also be allowed to participate fully in the curriculum development of the scheme.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As Basic Education becomes the foundation for sustainable life-long learning which provides the citizens with the opportunity of gaining reading, writing and numeracy skills, it then becomes an instrument for promoting socioeconomic development in Nigeria. There should be unity of purpose in the implementation strategies of U.B.E. Scheme in Nigeria despite Nigeria's cultural, political and economic diversity. And for teachers to perform their task properly toward a successful implementation of U.B.E. programme, the following recommendations should be adhered to:

Government should remunerate teachers properly, their fringe benefits should be paid to them as at when due;

N.C.E should remain the minimum teaching qualification with a little extension on the effective date of implementation, this is to take care of P.T.T.P;

N.C.E. Primary Education Studies (PES) graduates should be increased tremendously throughout Nigerian colleges of education in order to take come of primary school pupils;

fund and facilities should be made available for teachers training and retraining programmes.

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