

## **UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) AND LIFE-SKILL EXPERIENCE IN NORTH-WEST NIGERIA: A CASE FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was introduced in Nigeria in 1999 to equip learners with literacy, numeracy, life skills, and moral values essential for lifelong learning and national development. However, despite significant policy efforts, UBE has largely failed to address the issues of poverty, illiteracy, and social instability in North-West Nigeria. This region continues to grapple with alarming levels of school dropouts, out-of-school children, and poverty-related social vices such as banditry and kidnapping. The paper argues that the UBE programme's inability to incorporate robust entrepreneurial education has significantly limited its impact. Entrepreneurial education, if properly integrated, can equip learners with the critical skills, innovative mindset, and values necessary to overcome socio-economic challenges. While the UBE curriculum underwent reform in 2008, entrepreneurial education remains marginalized, often compressed into pre-vocational or business studies. This narrow conceptualization—focused primarily on vocational skills—fails to nurture creativity, critical thinking, and societal values among learners. Drawing lessons from successful educational systems like Sweden's Grundskola and entrepreneurial education standards in the United States, the paper emphasizes the need for a redefined entrepreneurial education framework. Such a framework should integrate social and psychological dimensions, focusing on value creation, innovation, and self-reliance. To reposition UBE as a tool for sustainable development, the study advocates for a bottom-up approach to curriculum development that reflects community-specific needs. Establishing a standardized national entrepreneurial education consortium can ensure consistent implementation and assessment of entrepreneurial skills. Ultimately, embedding comprehensive entrepreneurial education within the UBE curriculum can mitigate poverty, reduce unemployment, and foster societal resilience in North-West Nigeria and beyond.*

### **Keywords:**

Enterprise, Entrepreneurship, Life-skills, Economic development, Education

### **Introduction:**

Nigeria as a has attempted overtime to adapt the education system inherited from the colonial master to suit the needs of the nation in the face of a globalised and constantly changing world, one of such is the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 to facilitate development in various sectors of the country through the instrumentality of education. A core objective of UBE is to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy,

manipulative and communicative skills along with development of the moral and civil values needed for a sound foundation for life-long learning (FRN 2000), the achievement of this objective will no doubt translate to sustainable national development, where children will grow into adults with appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, critical, manipulative, communication and other salient skills required for reduction of poverty and illiteracy, both of

which are needed for sustainable national development,

Economic development is generally defined to include improvements in material welfare especially for persons with lowest incomes, the eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy, disease and early death, changes in the composition of inputs and outputs that generally include shifts in the underlying structure of production away from agricultural towards industrial activities (Kindlerberger & Herrick, 1977). However, the quantity and quality of a country's resources exert perhaps the most important influence on its national development, the quality of the labour force will depend partly on the innate intelligence of the people and partly on the skills acquired through education and training which invariably impacts the ability of the learner to develop the required life-skills for efficient and effective functioning in an ever-changing and demanding world.

The prevalent rate of poverty and insecurity in north-west Nigeria can arguably be attributed to the failure of UBE policy. The objective to reduce poverty and illiteracy through the UBE has eluded a majority of states in north-western Nigeria. The incessant cases of kidnapping, banditry and robbery is evident to the fact that the youth who are the target of UBE policy are misfits, given that the goals are development-oriented and 2015 is the timeline, the present reality in this part of the country implies a failure of the objective of ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative and communicative skills and the development of moral and civil values needed for them to function and contribute meaningfully to the development of their immediate society and the nation as a whole.

Infusing entrepreneurial education into universal education has spurred much enthusiasm over the years; a myriad of effects has been stated to result from this, ranging from economic growth, individual growth, job creation, improved equality to increased societal resilience (Akudolu, 2010; Erkkilä, 2000; FME, 2008; Lackéus, 2015; Nani, 2016; North, 2002; Udu, & Amadi, 2013). Nigeria has made several attempts at this but the results hasn't been flattering going by the persistent high rate of unemployment and poverty, phenomena most prevalent in North-west

Nigeria. The thrust of this article is to expose the failure of the UBE programme in equipping the learners in north-west Nigeria with the required life-skill experiences and values needed for national and self-development.

### **UBE and life-skill experiences:**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was formally launched in Sokoto by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September 1999. It was projected to be a nine-year programme which aimed to achieve among its objectives to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. The implementation guidelines were targeted at six main programmes among are; education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills especially persons aged 15 and above, special programme for nomadic populations, out of school children, non-formal programme for up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basic needed for life-long learning and non-formal skill and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth who have not the benefit of formal education. These four implementation guidelines points out that the programme was well thought out and inclusive, it clearly put into consideration the diverse characteristics of Nigeria. Due to some ethnic and cultural practices north-west Nigeria is huddled with the highest number of out-of-school children, highest rate of school drop-outs and a significant number of nomads, all these is capped by a disturbing statistic of illiteracy and poverty (FGN, 2019).

Obasanjo in 2002, stated that the Universal Education (UBE) programme is founded not only on Nigeria's adherence to universal declaration on human rights in 1948 which takes universal access to basic education as given but also as a fundamental right as stated in section 18 of the 1999 Nigeria constitution. To this end the eradication of poverty and illiteracy becomes an issue of national policy. As Amadioha, (2008) put it, the major objective of impacting knowledge, skill and attitude through the UBE programme is to enable the individual develop to his/her fullest capacity, derive maximum social, economic and cultural

benefits as a member of the Nigeria large society and fulfil his/her full civic duties. Similarly, Orgi, (2012) explained that the philosophy of the basic education curriculum was that learners should have acquired the appropriate literacy, numeracy, manipulative and life skills as well as developed the right ethical, moral and civic values needed for personal and community development. To posit that the UBE programme was majorly aimed at human and national development via the inculcation of required life skills experiences needed will not be an overstatement, the question here however is has this objective been achieved especially in north-west Nigeria?

### **Brief appraisal of the UBE programme in north-west Nigeria:**

Commenting on the success of the programme Amadioha (2018) stated that the UBE has not failed yet but if the short falls of the programme are not checked a successful implementation may run into problems, however, he further explained that this conclusion was based on appraising the programme as a nine-year programme starting from the primary school level to the junior secondary level. This assessment can be accepted for north-west Nigeria if it is agreed that the primary aim is to keep as many children as possible within the walls of a school for the nine years' period, certainly the total number of school enrolment has increased significantly in north-west Nigeria, the gross enrolment into primary schools in north-west Nigeria stood at 70.3 percent for male and 71.1 percent for female being the highest figures in Nigeria as at 2018 (FRN, 2019). Research have also pointed to a positive and significant correlation between increased school enrolment and human capital development (Ogunleye, et al, 2017; Sule, 2020). The Establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) geared at integrating nomadic pastoralists into national life through mobile basic education and skill acquisition and the establishment of the *Almajiri* both aimed at enrolling out-of-school children into a formal school system. With these laudable initiatives and investments, it is of great concern the persistently high level of poverty and illiteracy in north-west Nigeria, however, Ayodele, et al (2013) had argued that only the right education translates to

development similarly not all investments in education yields the desired results.

### **Entrepreneurial Education an instrument for robust life skill experiences:**

Entrepreneurial education has been viewed from significantly different perspectives, some from the narrow definition of entrepreneurship as starting a business and hence the students should be educated and trained to start up their own company while others viewed it from a wider definition of entrepreneurship as being relevant to all walks in life meaning that it is not at all only about starting new organization or operating one, but rather more about making students more creative, opportunity oriented, proactive and innovative (Lackéus, 2015). The first view of the definition of entrepreneurship is from purely an economic (commercial) point while the second is not only from an economic point but social and psychological points as well. It can be argued that the Nigeria educational policy alludes to the first definition of entrepreneurship education which renders compatibility to higher education level, but will be problematic when infusing into primary and secondary levels because these lower levels of students are generally not expected to start their own businesses or ventures.

Lackéus, 2015 further argued that the two most inference to the infusion of entrepreneurship into education are enterprise education and entrepreneurship education, the first, primarily used in United Kingdom has been defined as focusing more broadly on personal development, mind-set, skills and abilities, whereas the second, used in the United States has been defined to focus more on the specific context of setting up a venture and becoming self-employed. However, Erkkilä (2000) proposed the unifying of both as entrepreneurial education to encompass enterprise and entrepreneurship education, this article alludes to the same opinion. In this light, Entrepreneurial education is defined as that education geared towards inculcating in the recipient the mind-set, skills and values needed for personal development and positive contributions in the society. This does not mean that it is the only suitable definition, merely that it is most suited in light of present argument as it exposes the salient aspects of entrepreneurial education in line with the ideals of the National policy of Education (NPE, 1997) that

educational activities shall be centred on the learners for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment with efforts to relate education to overall community needs. In this context entrepreneurial education is most relevant to impact appropriate learning and life-skills experiences and values that would benefit the recipient and afford meaningful contribution to the development of the society. According to Udofia (2021) the curriculum of education in any society is to assist the society to produce citizens that will facilitate the growth, development and sustainability of that society in the light of local and global competitiveness by translating the activities and experiences at school to the values and meet the challenges of the immediate and distant society. In other words, the curriculum of any society's education system is to develop in the recipient a mind-set, skills and values needed for personal development and positive contributions to the society.

### **Entrepreneurial education in the Universal Basic Education:**

The introduction of UBE in 2000 brought about massive infrastructural and structural changes in various schools, this demanded an urgent review of the curriculum but this was not possible because the policy was continually being reformed, not until 2008 before the curriculum was eventually reviewed (Udofia, 2020). The review was a welcome departure from the curriculum used in 1882 which comprised of reading and writing of the English language, Arithmetic, needlework for the female, English history and Geography. It was then designed to emphasis technological and vocational development in line with the requirement of the 6 3 3 4 system of education derived from the National Policy on Education. It was however observed that those leaving schools were ill-prepared to face the challenges of the world of work because they lacked basic life- long skills, functional literacy and numeracy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). Not to mention that they did not possess the skills demanded in the labour market. This lead to the resolve by policy makers to introduce the 9-year UBE resulting to realign the primary and JSS curriculum contents into a content that will fit into the new programme, based on National Council on Education (NCE) directives, the Nigerian Educational Research and

Development Council (NERDC) successfully re-structured and re-aligned the Primary and Secondary Education Curriculum for the achievement of the national and global development goals (Orji, 2012). The JSS leaver is expected to have acquired functional skills to overcome poverty, be self-employed and create jobs and wealth and also demonstrate positive values in consonance with the ideals of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008).

The new curriculum is divided into the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) and the Senior Secondary School Curriculum (SSSC). This BEC did not only update the old content standards, but also introduced new subject matter and associated skill requirements for pedagogy. The 9 years BEC was anchored on the ideal that it should provide the recipient with appropriate levels of literacy, manipulative, communicative and lifelong skills; as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning; as a basic for scientific and reflective thinking. (NERDC. 2009) the central objective here is that any learner that received this 9 years of education should not only have acquired basic numeracy, literacy, skills in science, technology, mathematics and ICT but should have also developed ability for critical thinking, high moral and ethical values as well establish fully a positive disposition towards peace, justice, equity anti-corruptive tendencies and good governance and lastly a spirit and yearning for entrepreneurship.

However, Entrepreneurial education was not properly infused into this new curriculum despite it being an emerging issue (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). It compressed together with agriculture and home economics under the theme Pre-vocational studies for the first 6 years (lower basic education primary 1-3 and middle basic education primary 4-6) in the curriculum and then compressed into business studies, an elective subject, in the next 3 years (upper basic education, JSS1-3) where basic concepts and their explanations in regards business enterprise are vaguely taught to the pupils (Udofia, 2021). The subjects for the upper basic education are divided into core compulsory and elective subjects, the electives include Arabic, Agriculture, Home Economics and Business

Studies (Orji, 2012). This implied that entrepreneurial education is not considered a vital development ingredient.

**A case for entrepreneurial education as a prominent component of UBE: A lesson from other countries:**

Theories of economic development and scholars converge on entrepreneurship as a vital ingredient for sustained development. Schumpeter (1934) views entrepreneurship as a major catalyst of rapid economic development hence theorize that a nation is only able to develop to the extent and quality of entrepreneurs therein. Udu and Amadi (2013) assert that, in most countries of the world entrepreneurial education is taught at primary level in order to lay a good foundation for learners to acquire knowledge and life-skills that will help them face life challenges. However, Lack  us, (2015) argued that in some countries, explicit entrepreneurial activities at primary education levels are rare while the secondary and tertiary levels initiatives are mostly business start-up focused, lacking root into other teaching subjects. He further argued that entrepreneurial activities are treated in terms of value creation for other people, but they are seldom connected to the entrepreneurship domain and its tools, methods and processes for creating value. Entrepreneurial skills are clearly part of a lifelong learning journey and it wouldn't be ambitious to assert that they must be repeatedly applied and practiced to develop expertise. These skills can be applied in nearly any context, subject or career.

There seems to be an emerging consensus that Entrepreneurial education should start at an early age (Lack  us, 2015; Udu & Amadi, 2013; North, 2002; Bruner, 1977; Nani, 2016) despite the lack of a universally accepted conceptualization which has led to variations in pedagogical approaches (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). Entrepreneurship education is noted to be a vital tool that provides students in the basic education level the knowledge, skills and motivation needed to make them self-employed after school by Ugwuoke, et al (2015). It also focuses on developing student's understanding and capacity for pursuit of entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attitudes in widely different contexts (Akpomi, 2009). In this context Udu and Amadi (2013) conducted a study on the possibility of integrating basic

Entrepreneurship studies into primary education curriculum in Nigeria and the findings revealed that it was a welcome idea by both educators and entrepreneurs, because they believe it would help lay a solid foundation for future entrepreneurial development. Another research by Akhuemonkhan, et al (2013) also revealed a positive relationship between entrepreneurship and universal basic education with an estimated coefficient of 2.691 implying that a unit change in entrepreneurship studies influences more than one unit increase in the coefficient of universal basic education.

Despite the clamour for self-reliance and job creation in Nigeria which has led to the review of the universal basic education in effort to address the tenacious illiteracy and poverty and associate social vices by equipping the learner with the relevant life-skill experiences through appropriate and encompassing entrepreneurial education, the UBE has erroneously conceptualized it has merely vocational skill acquisition and managing a business, this is reflected in the lower and middle basic education where it was compressed as a component of pre-vocational studies and as a component of business studies in the upper basic education (NERDC, 2008). Entrepreneurship education is not synonymous with vocational education nor does it mean the same thing as business education which it has been erroneously linked with over the years (Akudolu, 2010) asserting that the major goal of entrepreneurship education is to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment among the citizens through the inculcation of entrepreneurial knowledge, competences and attitudes in the learners. However, it is imperative that embedded in this goal should be a psychological or behavioural domain, the present situation in the north-west and other parts of the country calls for a value reorientation of our youth, the incessant banditry, kidnapping, ritual killings, fraudster etc reflects eroded value. Dignity in labour, respect for human life and property, respects for authority, shared societal responsibilities are all part of the values missing among the youths in the present-day Nigeria.

To position entrepreneurial education a panacea to the disheartening rate of illiteracy and poverty as well as a tool for combating the associated social vices in Nigeria in general and north-west specifically, there is an urgent need

to take lessons from the countries that have successfully combated illiteracy and poverty to the barest minimum among its citizens. The first lesson is to borrow from these countries and reconceptualise entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education to clearly reflect the needs of the individual and the society by incorporating the social and psychological domains not only the narrow economic aspect as clearly portrayed in the UBE curriculum. This conceptualization is grossly deficient and this has adversely limited the scope, content and objectives of entrepreneurial education, this is corroborated by Mwasalwiba, (2010) when he stated that the definition and approach used will profoundly affects educational objectives, target audiences, course content design, teaching methods and student assessment procedures, leading to a wide diversity of approaches. Entrepreneurial education should be conceptualised as a reflection of the societal needs and expectations, this can be seen in the definition of the concept used in Sweden, Poland, USA, Northern and Eastern Europe (Lackeus, 2015).

Lesson can also be learnt from America. Recognising the vital role of entrepreneurial education to provide life-skill experiences necessary for sustained development, the State policy makers enacted a the National Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education saddled with the responsibility of developing a national content standards and related toolkit for Entrepreneurial education in the country. The standards are designed to describe the entire field of entrepreneurship as a lifelong learning process with many purposes, inclusive is a framework for many levels of curriculum development (elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and adult education programs, it provides a guide for measuring knowledge and skills gained from entrepreneurial activities. It serves as a vehicle for acquisition and application of core academic skills both as a context for learning and as subject matter for curriculum. A similar initiative can be enacted this body should work in collaboration with other boards and ministries to standardize and harmonize the content and activities of Entrepreneurial education at all levels.

A leaf can further be borrowed from the Swedish Grundskola programme, this programme having strong similarities in scope and principle with the Nigerian UBE is a success

while Nigeria's is still struggling. The success of the Grundskola programme may not be unconnected to the fact that infused in the main objective is development of community consciousness. Education in this context is to impart knowledge and help pupils develop into responsible persons and members of the society, specifically it was aimed at passing on cultural heritage values, traditions and language, knowledge from one generation to the next and providing pupils with opportunities for taking initiative and responsibilities as "we" as well as the ability to work independently and solve problems therefore creating the pre-conditions for developing (Opara, 2011). To achieve this, unlike the UBE, a bottom-up approach was adopted, the underlying values, basic objectives and guidelines of the school system although centrally determined, the content and specific learning activities are developed by the head of each school in consultation with teachers, parents and other staff based on the national objectives, this way learning outcomes are societal specific catering for the divergent peculiarities of different communities.

### **Conclusion:**

The major goal of entrepreneurship education will be to promote creativity and innovation among learners through the inculcation of entrepreneurial knowledge, competences and attitudes leading to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills for efficient and effective living. It is aimed to give the learner more opportunities to exercise creative freedom, higher self-esteem, and a greater sense of control over their own lives while being conscious of the societal needs and values. To this end, universal basic education should be that education that is organized to provide functional education targeted at the entire citizen to enable them becomes entrepreneurial and self-reliant thereby contributing meaningfully to societal and national development.

The focus here on north-west Nigeria does not suggest that the UBE is a success in providing the required life-skill experiences to learners in other regions of the country or that the lessons above are applicable to only north-west Nigeria, but the interest with this region is guided by the believe that if entrepreneurial education had been given prominence the level of literacy and poverty in this part of the country

would have been curtailed and the resultant vices in the forms of banditry, kidnapping and the lies would have been at minimum. In essence the content and method of delivering entrepreneurial education in the UBE is in need of serious reviews.

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