



Universal Basic Education and Achievement of Millennium Development Goals

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ABSTRACT

Illiteracy has been identified as a major factor militating against personal and national development of individuals and nations, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this direction nations have synergized to come up with a lot of initiatives aimed at reducing and completely eliminating illiteracy, where possible. For this reason, targets have been set, and projects, programmes and schemes instituted to achieve zero level of illiteracy. One of such is maximizing access to quality education in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria. This is where the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) stand out significantly. This article presented a review of the UBE and MDGs vis-à-vis their antecedents. The components and objectives of UBE were also highlighted. A discussion on the extent of achievement was opened as well. From the appraisal of the discussion, certain recommendations were made to soothe the identified challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a potent instrument for acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and habits desired by individuals as well as nations that want rapid progress. The reason being that education is a function of expanding human capital development through capacity building and maintenance of society. In this regard therefore, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has institutionalized the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme. The underlying fundamental principle of UBE in Nigeria is that every child of school- age must have access to an uninterrupted 9 year basic education which is qualitative in nature. This implies that UBE is aimed at drastically

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reducing the rate of illiteracy among Nigerians, hence, laying a solid foundation for expansion in human capital development for the country. The term basic education is not completely novel, rather it has been broadened after the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the Framework for Action to meet Basic learning needs. In corroboration, Yoloye (2004) observed that Basic Education as a concept is not a completely new term in Nigeria, rather the usage has assumed a global significance and its meaning has been broadened. Implicit in this, is that Nigeria's UBE has been expanded in terms of scope, components, infrastructure and practice.

Universal Basic Education (UBE)

UBE is a policy reform measure by the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aimed at reforming the basic education sector in the country. On a general note, it is aimed at the eradication of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration in Nigeria. The institutionalization of UBE in Nigeria could be said to be triggered off by certain factors emanating both from within and outside the country. At the home front, government realized that it is the right of every Nigerian, especially those of school- age to receive basic education. This implies quality education that would be instrumental to the realization of a sustainable seven point agenda and the Vision 20:2020 of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In a related development, there was also the dire need to strengthen the foundation level of the entire system of education so as to bring about improved academic achievement among students in Nigerian senior secondary and tertiary institutions.

At the foreign or international scene, Nigeria has signed some conventions and protocols of promoting the achievement of functional basic education. Maduwesi (2005) noted that Nigeria has participated in Addis Ababa Conference of 1961 and the 1990 Jomtien Declaration and Framework of Action on Education for All (EFA). All these aim at initiating and implementing a basic type of education that would lay the foundation required for a purposeful living, development and progress in the country.

By definition, Basic education is

The education offered to children aged between 3 and 14 years. It comprises 3 years of Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE), 6 years of primary and 3 years of Junior Secondary Education. It covers special interventions directed at nomadic and migrant children, mass Literacy as well as the almajiris and other vulnerable and excluded groups (FMOE, 2009).

In the same vein, (FRN 2004:13) remarks that Basic education shall be of 9 year duration comprising 6 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 adult and out-of-school youths. FMOE (1991:1)

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espouses that UBE comprises a wide variety of formal and informal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners to acquire functional literacy.

Just like the Jomtien Declaration and Frame Work of Action on Education for All did not define Basic education in terms of years of schooling, Obanya (2000) described it as that level, type and form of learning needed to build firm roots for literacy and numeracy, to inculcate basic life skills and to consolidate the skills of learning how to learn. This truly means that any Nigerian child that passes through this 14 years of continuous education should be able to acquire an appropriate level of literacy.

Objectives of UBE

The objectives of the UBE programme are as follows:

- ◆ Developing in the entire citizenry a strong commitment for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- ◆ The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age.
- ◆ Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- ◆ Catering for the learning needs for young persons who, for one reason or another, have to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to provision and promotion of basic education; and
- ◆ Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communication and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning (UBE, 2003:5-6).

Scope of UBE

UBE (2003:6) stipulated that the Universal Basic Education programme is all-inclusive and brings within its ambit the following:

- ◆ Programme initiatives for early childhood education and development;
- ◆ The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school;
- ◆ Special programmes for nomadic populations;
- ◆ Programmes and initiatives for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, specially for adults (persons aged 15 and above);
- ◆ Out-of-school children, non-formal education programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning;
- ◆ Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth who have not had the benefit of formal education.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs are UN initiatives. According to the United Nations Millennium Development (UNMD) they are eight (8) international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and about twenty three (23) international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. These goals are as follows:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality rate
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.

These goals according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Co-operation Directorate derive from earlier international targets and were officially established at the Millennium Summit in 2006 in New York where all world leaders present adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The aim of MDGs is to encourage development by improving social and economic conditions of people living in the poorest countries of the world.

From the above discourse, it could be seen that UBE is in tandem with the achievement of MDG 2 which has its target to ensure that all children, boys and girls, complete a full course of primary education by 2015. This will mean that all female and male children must enroll and complete primary education. This implies that literacy of 15-24 year olds, both female and male, must be ensured.

However, despite progress made by some countries to show that MDGs are achievable, Nigeria, as in most Sub-Saharan African Countries is yet to mobilize resources, and garner both political and financial support so that these global challenges, especially in the achievement of Universal Primary Education, are met. This is not unconnected with the challenges of implementing the Universal Basic Education, which corresponds with MDG 2. These challenges are as follows:

Lack of Basic Infrastructural Facilities

Many schools in Nigeria lack the basic infrastructural facilities that are central to the operation of safe, efficient and effective schools. Okujagu and Adox-Okujagu (2010) listed these facilities as classroom blocks, classroom furniture, library/laboratory facilities, toilet/water facilities, health facilities and safe play grounds/fields. The aforesaid are of very critical importance in a school system to the effect that any shortfall in providing them could frustrate successful, meaningful and effective teaching and learning. Lack of basic infrastructural facilities in the basic education system has resulted to

discomfort on the part of both learners and teachers. Just like learners cannot concentrate during the learning process, due to lack of adequate school infrastructural facilities, so are teachers not able to manage and control their classrooms for maximum and effective teaching.

Enrolment and Equity

There is a disparity in the enrolment of pupils in the basic education sector. This could be found in the expected and actual figures in Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE), Primary and Junior Secondary Schools' enrolments

Table 1: Disparity in Basic Education Sector Pupils Enrolment .

S/N	UBE Component	Enrolment		
		Expected	Actual	Shortfall
1.	ECCDE	22 million	2.02m	19.98m
2.	Primary Education	34.92 million	24.42m	10.5m
3.	Junior Secondary Education	9.27 million	3.27m	6million

Source: Roadmap for Nigerian Education sector (2009).

The above scenario is not different in the nomadic and migrant children school enrolment. The document further states that out of 3.5 million expected school aged children, only 450, 000 are enrolled, leaving 3.1 million unenrolled. It is indeed a very big challenge to provide equal educational opportunities to all children of school age irrespective of gender, location and physical attributes (FMOE, 2009). Other factors responsible for exclusion are urban / rural dichotomy, access to school from home and aversion to western education by some communities. This situation seriously impedes the MDG target of ensuring that all children, boys and girls, complete a full course of primary education by 2015, and attaining the literacy of 15-24 year olds.

Teachers

The issue of teacher quality and quantity in the basic education sector is a worrisome one. This comes against the backdrop of the fact that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, therefore teacher education shall be accorded great priority (FRN, 2004). Unfortunately, the quality and quantity of teachers dispensing education at the basic education level are not much to be desired when looked at from the perspective of what is available and the ideal requirement.

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Table 2: Disparity in the Quality of Professionally Qualified Teachers in Basic Education Sector .

S/N	UBE Component	Teachers		
		Ideal Requirement	Available	Shortfall
1.	ECCDE	1,050,000	80,922	969,078
2.	Primary Education	872,971	534,824	338,149
3.	JSS	93,337	92,756	581

Source: UBEC Personnel Audit (2006)

The data further explained that 255,889 teachers out of the 534, 824 in the primary school system are not qualified professionally. In order to address this issue of unqualified teachers, the Federal Government introduced the Federal Teachers Scheme (FTS). On completion of this scheme, most state governments are yet to approve the employment of the FTS participants, hence, they are not able to come to the mainstream to teach and supervise learning. Closely related to the above, are the issues of development, motivation and retention of teachers. Teachers are poorly remunerated, not well motivated and have very low financial support. The effects of these are that they have little or no resources to develop and update themselves. Due to low support for teachers, society, including their pupils see them as ‘never-do-wells’ and ‘poor’ people. This perception, to a large extent, brings down the morale of teachers, and consequently, they opt for other menial jobs. All these frustrations account for shortage of qualified teachers in the basic education system.

Curriculum and Instructional Materials

Effective implementation of a worthwhile scheme such as the UBE is predicated upon the use of good curriculum and instructional materials. Since the inception of UBE, basic education curriculum has not undergone any major re-engineering process as to accommodate emergent issues in education. Similarly, production, procurement and dissemination of available curriculum document is also a bit problematic. For instance, ECCED, curriculum and minimum standard launched only in 2007 was not well distributed. In the same vein, the new UBE curriculum is just trickling to UBE schools. There are also fears that these materials are not popular among the teachers who would use them because they (the teachers) are yet to be given orientation on how to use them. The book policy stating the minimum ratio of textbooks, play equipment, charts and computers for basic education is also very slow in implementation. When the provision of instructional materials which can enhance the learning achievement of pupils is slow, it is implicit that increased learning gains will be impeded.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

In recognition of the vital role of ICT in acquisition of knowledge and skills, and fostering sustainable national development in the modern world, there is the urgent need to integrate ICT from the Basic Education level. This is because ICT holds out the opportunity to revolutionize pedagogical methods, expand access to quality education and improve the management of education systems (World Bank, 2002). Unfortunately, however, the implementation of this integration has been marred by factors such as low capacity of basic education teachers in ICT, lack of infrastructural facilities and challenges emanating from the power and energy sector. The implication therefrom is that pupils and teachers have no access to information and experiences through global networks and pools of knowledge. Hence, students/pupils rely on content taught them by teachers who themselves rely more or less on outdated information recycled in poorly written textbooks (Etuk, 2007).

Quality Assurance and Standards

Primary education, which is a component of UBE, is described as the key to the success or failure of the whole system of education because all other levels are built upon it (FRN, 2004). The need, therefore, arises to assure quality at this level of education. Quality assurance can be said to be the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, scheme, and service facility in order to maximize the probability that minimum standards of quality are being attained by service providers or the production process. There appears to be no effective and efficient organ entrusted with the responsibility of controlling and assuring quality in basic education. Generally, inspectorate divisions or units of the Ministry of Education at the Federal, State and Local Government levels have not fared well. Where effort is made to carry out some quality control and assurance exercises, it has been poor, irregular and characterized by the use of weak and out-of-date tools. Since there is no effective and efficient means of verifying or determining whether minimum standards quality are being attained by the basic education system, it then means that quality in the system is in doubt, hence may not measure up to the quality of achieving MDG by the year 2015.

CONCLUSION

This presentation has reviewed UBE, its objectives and components as well as MDGs. A discussion on the extent of achievement of MDGs through implementation of UBE was opened. In the discourse, a number of factors

that militate against the implementation of UBE were identified. These factors, to a great extent, constitute a log in the wheel of achievement of MDGs in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In recognition of these impediments, the following recommendations are made as a way forward.

◆ For the basic education system to thrive in Nigeria, concerted efforts should be made to put basic infrastructural facilities in place as well as improving the ones already in existence in basic education schools. This could be achieved by ensuring a minimum standard for infrastructure and other facilities in schools, and then replicating it across the country by states and Local Government Councils using the Federal Government intervention funds.

◆ Enrolment of children of school age should be increased by ensuring that all children of school age are enrolled, retained and encouraged to complete basic education. In this direction parents should be encouraged to present their children/wards for enrolment into primary schools.

◆ All the out-of-school children should be encouraged to return to school through their parents and guardians.

◆ Urgent attention should be given to special groups and non literate population through community- based initiatives and programmes.

◆ All obstacles against the enrolment of girl-child should be removed to ensure equity.

◆ The content of FTS should be expanded and enriched to ensure quality training of participants.

◆ Participants of FTS should be offered full time employment and be made to come into the mainstream to ensure commitment.

◆ Multi-national companies and government at all levels should offer special sponsorship / scholarship programmes to basic education teachers to enable them develop and build their capacities for increased productivity.

◆ Teachers in basic education schools should be adequately remunerated through special allowances. This will boost their morale.

◆ Curriculum and instructional materials should be produced, procured and distributed on time and in adequate quantities.

◆ Periodic review or revision of curriculum and instructional materials should be given priority.

◆ Teachers should also be orientated on the use of the curriculum and instructional materials.

◆ ICT education should be strengthened through capacity building of teachers in the direction of ICT and allied facilities and provision of computers in basic education schools.

- ◆ Urgent and frantic effort should be made to the effect that quality and standards are assured in the basic education system.

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