

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA: NEED FOR COMMUNITY ORIENTED SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICE

By

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Introduction

The dwindling fortune of education in Nigeria is not due to the inability of protagonists to assign fitting nomenclature to educational programmes in Nigeria, or failure/lack of interest on the part of the target(s), but essentially due to a combination of factors. These factors range from improper articulation or planning of such programmes to faulty implementation.

Most times, it is even the government of the day that unwittingly works against the success of most of its policies that *ab initio* appear to have wider appeal, due to political and other considerations. For instance, cases abound where appointment or the constitution of Board charged with the planning and implementation of people-oriented programmes are done solely on political considerations rather than ability, competence and commitment to policies or programmes. The result has always been a resounding failure and waste of scarce resources. This attitude of finding jobs for incompetent political lackeys or allies especially in very sensitive area as education has been the bane of educational development in Nigeria.

Educational programmes and policies need proper articulation by qualified, experienced and committed persons, who should also over-see or direct the implementation of such policies, and ensuring that at all stages, results are in line with set objectives.

The UBE (2000) programme conceived by the present administration, processes many fine points, appears to have certain aspects which previous programmes lacked. That it emphasizes "basis education" which of course includes primary foundation and not restricted to the primary, as was the case with the defunct UPE experiment, distinguishes it from previous experiments.

That it is compulsory, gives a stronger impetus and enjoins parents to ensure that their wards are enrolled into the programme and encourages even non literate parents to avail themselves of the opportunity. Equally, the national out look involving all tiers of government, irrespective of party affiliations, and the fanfare attending the launching all over the country seems to me, an indication of its general appeal, and rates the chances of success very high.

Also, the federal government in its wisdom recently enunciated its economic policy (2000) in which it stated that it intends to achieve its poverty reduction programme objective, using UBE and Mass Adult Literacy

Programmes as tools. Unfortunately, nowhere in the policy statement was anything mentioned about Libraries, which is the bed rock of learning. Care must therefore be taken to avoid the pitfalls that ruined previous programmes.

One of the biggest setbacks when it comes to programmes like this is funds. Funding has always been a major problem in the implementation and sustenance of programmes. Educational programmes like the UBE, is no doubt capital intensive. New structure have to be put in place: existing ones rendered or refurbished, instructional materials and equipment provided and well motivated and remunerated work-force (teachers) engaged. All these, cost money. It is likely that the federal government must have carried out a comprehensive feasibility study and estimation, and is aware of the huge sum needed to implement the UBE programme nation-wide. The federal government must therefore maintain a good cash flow and block all leakages, if this novel programmes is to succeed. It must also begin to implement, as a matter of urgency the portion of the National Policy on Education, which recognizes the significance of libraries, and direct that they should be provided not only in all schools but also in strategic locations so as to serve community.

The school library has often been referred to as the "hub" of the school where intellectual activities are carried out. Lamentably, the ideal is far from true in Nigeria in general, since school libraries have not yet formed an integral part of the overall school programme. Who is to blame for this lapse? Udoh (1986), asserted the state Ministries of Education have consistently and persistently abdicated their responsibility to school libraries. Government altogether has done practically nothing to promote the establishment and development of school libraries. This is despite the fact that the National policy on Education (1981) has stated that: "Government will provide junior libraries for primary school children. Libraries are already being incorporated into new primary schools being put up as a part of the plan for Universal Free Primary Education Scheme (UPE). It will establish a school library service and ensure that teachers are given in-service training in the management and organization of school libraries." (P.12) and : Libraries are one of the most important educational services. Every state ministry needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in our educational institutions and to train librarians and library assistants for this service" (section 10 NPE).

The UBE must therefore have good libraries for it to succeed. The programme may survive without necessarily succeeding. That is, Mass failure in both school and public examinations for lack of both material resources and the skills to utilize them, where they do exist. Education according to the policy, will continue to be rated highly in national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change". As such, the national Philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizen at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal education system. The foregoing glorious pronouncements would indeed fail to be fulfilled if libraries are not integrated into such plans.

Unfortunately, although investment in education has become accepted as a real investment, libraries are still not recognized nor treated as an integral part of educational activities. This is very sad development because since 1968, the Fourth Commonwealth Education Conference (1968) recognized the role of libraries and the use of the audiovisual aids in education by including these on their agenda. A committee on curriculum, libraries, textbooks and bookshop pointed out that books, libraries and bookshops are essential for the success of programmes of functional education.

Ruth Davies (1969) has emphasized that today's school library is a force and source for educational excellence. The direct support of the school library is fundamental to the basic design and optimum implementation of an educational program of excellence. Deny the program this integral support and the program is weakened irreparably. Every school library has the primary objective of contributing to the achievement of the objectives formulated by the school, of which it should be an integral part. The library should be a place where students can read, think and relax. Libraries in schools should:

- Relieve poor parents/guardian of the painful obligation of buying all books for their children or wards;
- Encourage students to use books independently to seek information and to read for pleasure;
- Teach students vital library skills such as, how to make notes and originate reports, and essays etc;
- Improve their reading skills whereby students learn to read critically.
- Help them develop a love for books as appetite for reading.

Although government has given due recognition to libraries only on paper, the policy document stressed that need for LIFE-LONG-LEARNING to form the basic for the nations educational policies. This means that the educational system is structured to develop the practice of SELF-LEARNING, which makes the library the centre for life-long-learning at all levels and especially after formal education. Thereafter, the library becomes a centre for continuing education, hence entrenching the habit of self-learning. Public libraries take over from school libraries at this stage as the central agent for Mass Education which is a part of the UBE programmes and activities in form of extension services that would benefit both students, teachers and ex-students.

Needs for community oriented school library service

The basic tools for learning are books and instructional materials, without which no educational policy will succeed. The dearth of books and instructional materials, and the high cost of some, has placed a heavy burden on most parents who are presently barely surviving. This category of parents who are in the majority, and the poor or unemployed adults who wish to take advantage of this programme to improve their social or economic status will surely find it difficult if not impossible to sponsor their wards or participate in

the programme. The massive failure recorded annually in examinations all over the country, could to a greater extent be blamed on the unavailability of books and other instructional materials. Those who managed to pass their examinations have not been impressive as they lack the necessary skills expected of them at their various levels. What we have on the streets today, in the schools and various working places are mostly half-baked individuals who can hardly express themselves or defend the certificates they have acquired.

To reverse this ugly trend therefore, and make UBE programme achieve its objectives, government must as a matter of urgency provide community oriented school libraries to serve pupils, students and adults who treasure reading within their localities. This will help in reducing the burden on parents and inculcate reading culture in the students and entire populace as they would be encouraged to study. The dividend from this would be populace as they would be encouraged to study. The dividend deriving from this would be

- Better performance in public and private examinations;
- Skilled graduates from various institutions
- Enlightened and productive populace, and
- Well-cultured society.

The concept of community oriented school library service and role

Community oriented school library service simply means library services targeted at a particular locality or community to serve the educational or learning needs of pupils, students, teachers and adult population within that locality and its environs.

Daniel (1984) captured the essence by stating in her presentation that Library service to the community by all intent and purpose is the broadest base of all the agencies that can serve any community. The library, she continued, is open to all and sundry irrespective of race, creed, colour, religion or social status. Its knowledge base is all-encompassing, and all-embracing. The Library through its operation can provide adequately the basis for the interface with the grassroots.

The expected role of community oriented school library service therefore is as follows:

- i. To provide necessary educational and reference materials for all within the locality, especially those materials outside the reach of many.
- ii. To store, retrieve and disseminate information of varying nature for the benefits of the community and to create awareness
- iii. To serve as a meeting place for people of different ethnic extraction, religion and culture. And to foster unity among the various people with the community.
- iv. To encourage reading and facilitate the acquisition of skills so as to enhance productivity within the locality.

- x. To serve as a clearinghouse and important organ of government in its bid to achieve its grassroots objectives.

Non-government organizations' participation

The provision of community based school library services should not be left to government alone. Every individual and Non-Government organizations should have a stake in it, since it will in one way or the other benefit such individuals and Non-Government Organizations. Organizations like Board of Governors, PTA, and Old Students Associations are better placed to raise funds for building and equipping of school libraries.

The Nigerian Schoc. Library Association and the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) have roles to play in creating awareness and drawing government's attention to the need for special grant in their annual budgets for the development of existing libraries all over the federation and the provision of new ones which should be community oriented in nature.

The National Library and the Nigeria Library Association should work closely and identify wealthy individuals and companies, and create a forum where all parties will meet to rub minds on how they could participate or contribute to the provision of libraries across the nation.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the UBE programme cannot achieve the desired objectives without the support of community oriented library services across the nation. The programme will remain a limping child until libraries and library services are given the attention and prominence they deserve.

We have also seen how community oriented library services could improve quality of education and productivity, and promote unity, create awareness and assist government in reaching out to the grassroots and ensuring that government policies are well received.

I have also recommended that the NLA should work towards influencing governments policies in favour of the provision of community based library services in Nigeria, and the need to involve Non-Government Organizations in the provision and funding of libraries.

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