

Review Article

Re-Crafting the Nigerian Universal Basic Education Sector for a Competitive Advancement in the 21st Century

Dr. Orlunga Bartholomew Godstime^{1*}, Dr. Alikor Oroma¹

¹Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education (History and Policy of Education Option) Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract: The universal basic education programme was designed and launched in Nigeria in September 1999 by the civilian administration of Olushegun Obasanjo, with the aim of eradicating totally, illiteracy and equipping its recipients with the requisite skills, attitudes, norms, as well as providing an all-round educational opportunity for all, as this will not only assist the individual to be useful to himself, but also contribute meaningfully to the sustainability of social, political, economic and educational development of the Nigerian society. Thus, this paper is predicated on the need to re-crafting the Universal Basic Educational programme (UBE), so as to avert it from failing as that of Universal Primary Education of 1976 did, which was evident on poor funding, inadequate facilities, inadequate staffs or lack of manpower, as well as poor personnel motivation. Etc. hence, the paper seeks to proffer strategies on how to re-craft the UBE programme for a more advanced and competitiveness amongst comity of nation. Thus, the paper examined the background/origin of the UBE programme, objectives of the universal education programme, problems confronting the UBE programme as well as its implications. The paper concluded by admonishing the federal government with the strategies needed for a successful implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria while also recommending that the Nigerian society should do away with both the British and American system of education, to adopt that of a practical and technologically inclined system of education like China, Japan and other industrialized nations of the world.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education, Re-crafting, Programme, Implications, Implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

Overtime, the educational system in Nigeria has experienced a lot of different changes in policy articulation, formation and implementation which stretches back from the missionary era to the post-colonial periods. The above statement is where the concept of re-crafting comes into play. The Oxford advanced dictionary stated that, to re-craft means to make a new, to redesign, to reset, to regenerate or reconstruct etc. to re-craft a project or brand, entails that the project managers would have to change the way a particular thing looks as regards to its entire system so as to meet the taste or requirements of the final consumers.

The Universal Basic Educational programme (UBE) was introduced by the federal government of Nigeria as one of its numerous changes in policies, with the aim of re-crafting the educational system to meet the

need of all those that comes across it, as well as contribute to both the political, economic and social development of the country. Anikpo (2005) affirms that to re-craft means putting any programme in a better position to achieve its aims and objective. Hence, the need for re-crafting the Universal Basic Education programme for a more advanced learner friendliness and all-encompassing and inclusive educational system.

To actualize the above statement, there is need for Nigeria as a developing nation to establish a renewed scheme in the UBE programme and a total revamp on the curriculum so as to meet with the fast pace of technology and the challenges of globalization, this is because the current educational system in Nigeria today is still wallowing in the cocoon of theories while other nations of the world have seriously embraced science and technologically driven education.

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Orlunga Bartholomew Godstime

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education (History and Policy of Education Option) Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Education is seen as a fundamental instrument for the transformation of human and economic development in any nation of the world owing to the fact that it forms the basis for literacy, skills acquisition, technological advancement as well as the ability to harness the natural resources of the environment for maximum growth and development. This fact therefore, is one of the reasons why developing nations of the world continually take steps to improve their investment in education to bring about higher future earnings, and qualitative lifestyles in the people. It is on this regards that Osokoya (1987) cited in Omiebi (2010) stated that education is the leading out of inborn powers and potentialities of the individual and the acquisition of skills, competences necessary for self-actualization. Therefore, relating the above statement to the Nigerian UBE scheme, it simply means that our educational system is expected not only to produce individuals who are literates but those who can actively contribute towards the development of the entire nation as well as reduce illiteracy to its barest minimum. However, it is now becoming so worrisome that UBE program which expected was expected to reintroduce a better educational atmosphere in the Nigerian society is at this point in time beginning to face those major challenges that led to the collapse the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme of 1976, in spite of the numerous resources that were put in place or budgeted for the successful implementation of the programme. The UBE Annual Report (2002) highlighted that huge sum of money and other resources of the UBE have been invested in the programme but yet, there are obvious signs that the scheme is facing a lot of problems ranging from, inadequate personnel (teacher and other staff), lack of adequate supervision, infrastructural problems, corruption and a host of many other issues, all of which have bedeviled the success of the programme.

From the objectives of the Universal Basic Education scheme, one could conclude that it is aimed at providing basic and all round inclusive education to every Nigerian child without exception or hindrance, but the reverse is the case as many Nigerian children are still roaming the streets on daily. Fabunmi (2005) stated that the World Bank affirms that “over 7.3 million primary school age children in Nigeria are out of school while only 35% of secondary school age are inadequately enrolled into schooling”. The implication is that no nation with this kind of educational background would develop, be it in economic, social and political aspects’ the system would continue to produce unemployable graduates who cannot lawfully manipulate their environment to make ends meet. To this end, the UBE scheme should be re-crafted more on the areas of science, technical and vocational education, the educational system should be made practical in content and theory, and it should be re-crafted in such a way that it will emulate the content of a business and technologically driven economy of the Asian China.

Conceptual Review

The Universal Basic Education scheme was designed and launched in Nigeria under the civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, on the 30th day of September 1999. The UBE scheme in conformity to the UNESCO transformation agenda, affirms that every Nigerian school aged children should be enrolled into schooling and be should be accorded a sound and appropriated education would contribute to not only individual self-actualization but also to the development of the society. The Universal Basic Education scheme in Nigeria should be one that would inculcate into the learners basic reading, writing, and numeric skills on a compulsory bases, in a formal and non-formal educational setting, while that of the formal encompasses a 6 years basic 1 to 6 primary education, and a 3 years junior secondary basic education, making it a 9 year’s compulsory free basic education, while that of the non-formal education would be carried out in form of seminars, workshops and other adult basic literacy education programme.(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2002).

Thus, to achieve the above statement the Nigerian government outlined the following objectives for the smooth realization of the UBE programme and to achieve an all-inclusive education in Nigeria.

1. To provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.
2. To ensure an uninterrupted access to 9 years formal education by providing free and compulsory basic education for everyone under schooling age: six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education as well as providing early childhood care development and education (ECCDE).
3. To develop in the citizenry, a strong consciousness for education and commitment towards nation building.
4. To reduce wholesomely the incidents of dropout from formal school system through improved reliance, quality education.
5. To ensure appropriate acquisition of literacy, numeracy, effective communication and life skills and other ethical and moral values, needed for a proper lifelong learning.
6. Emphasis on curriculum diversification that is relevant to effective and adequate care of individual and communal needs. (UBEC Report 2002).

Corroborating from the above, it means that the objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme if properly managed would have contributed immensely very well on individual and societal development as it would have also served as takeoff point for the actualization of educational opportunity for all and for the Nigerian educational system to produce individuals who can compete favorably amongst comity of nation in the 21st century.

Nature and Origin of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

The UBE programme is an offshoot of the universal primary education programme which failed as a result of the different issues that emanated as at when the program was launched in Nigeria. However, when discussing the origin of universal primary education in Nigeria, we must put into consideration the tenets of Author Richards constitution of 1946 and that of Macpherson in 1952, educational system at this level was placed on the residual list in the above mentioned constitutions, with this, regions therefore were empowered to develop education at their own pace, this marked the beginning of what Jerome (2010) saw as the era of self-determination in education whereby each region, North, East and West were constitutionally empowered through the following provisions to develop on their own:

1. That education should be put on the residual legislative list to be legislated by the regions in line with the federal government policy on education.
2. The creation of separate educational department, one for the federal government and one, each for the regions.
3. Appointment of regional educational officers.
4. The appointment of an inspector general of education to co-ordinate and regulate the activities of education practitioners in Nigeria.

These provisions according to Jerome (2010) provoked tremendous positive changes in the regions which led to a sharp consciousness and undoubtable injected regional sentiments and nationalism as the different regional leaders strive to develop their populace politically and educationally. In the light of the above, by 1952 when the Action Group which was one of the political parties in the first republic contested and won the first general election in Nigeria. The then leader of the party Chief Obafemi Awolowo stated that his administration would give special considerations to education and health in the Western Region. In conformity with the above, in July 1952, the minister of education in western region Hon. Awokoya, presented a comprehensive programme for the official takeoff of a compulsory primary education in the Western Region and in 1955. This to Jerome (2010) introduced formally, the free universal primary education in Western Region and in Nigeria.

Consequently, the universal primary education scheme was also introduced in the Eastern region by Mr Uzoma who presented a proposal for the introduction of the UPE scheme to the Eastern house of assembly and by 1957 the programme was officially launched but was a total failure due to certain constrains like:

1. Lack of consultations
2. The period of planning was too short

3. Lack of finance
4. Lack of infrastructures etc.

The universal education programme at this point was never a success in the North as a result of different constrains ranging from political, religious, economic, social and geographical factors. Looking at the educational disparity between the North, and South, the federal government led by the military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, on the 6th of September 1976 launched the Universal Primary Education scheme at Oke Suna Municipal primary school Lagos State, which was targeted at fixing the gap that exist amongst the various Regions in education. However, the UPE programme failed perhaps because the federal government did not investigate the factors that led its failure in some regions, especially in the East and the Northern part of the country in order to set out modalities on how to remedy the situation before possible embarking on such a programme that will cut across ever area of the nation. More so, a major point to be considered when discussing the issue of the UPE scheme is anchored on the fact that the country Nigeria had just ended a thirty months civil war and hard embarked on the policy of restoration, reconstruction and rehabilitation of her citizenry and even though education was seen as one of the tools for achieving the aforementioned agenda, it was rather tool early and needed proper planning, funding in terms of the programme and in infrastructure, as well as a re-evaluation of the programme before the actual kickoff.

Challenges of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

Obviously, the implementation process for effective implementation of the UBE programme is married with lots of inadequacies which has continue to be the challenges facing the scheme so long as they remain unattended to and settled. Thus they includes the following:

Funding

For any educational programme to be worthwhile, funding must be all embracing, the government, NGOs and parents must contribute immensely in their own regards so that the aim of the programme is achieved. The UBE scheme is described as a free educational system and if all the financial burden is envisaged on the government alone it may be too much to handle. However, the government on its own part have not been friendly as regards to educational financing and development in the country, this is evident on the fact the it has never allocated up 15% of its total revenue to education from 1999 when the UBE scheme was introduced up till this day, but rather there is a sharp reduction on a steady basis on its allocation to education as indicated in the table below.

Year	Allocation (billion)	Percentage
1999	22,047	11.20
2000	44,225	8.30
2001	39,885	7.00
2003	100,200	5.09
2004	64,760	11.83
2005	72,220	7.80
2006	92,590	8.30
2007	165,600	8.70
2008	137,480	6.07
2009	210,000	13.20
2010	249.09	4.83
2011	306.30	6.16
2012	400.15	8.43
2013	426.53	8.55
2014	493.00	9.94
2015	369.6	7.12
2016	369.60	6.10
2017	550.00	7.38
2018	605.80	7.03
2019	600.5	7.05
2020	671.07	6.7
2021	742.52	5.6
2022	923.79	5.39
2023	1.08 trillion	8.1

Source: Ameh & Aluko (2023) punch Newspaper

From the table above, It is crystal clear the amount allocated to education has never been enough to cater for the entire need of the educational sector, which off course is a major constrain to the successful implementation of the UBE programe, not minding the fact that the amount allocated to the educational sector is below the threshold of UNESCO which stands at 20 to 25 percent at least of the total budget should be allocated to the educational system. Thus, even when it is obvious that the amount allocated to the educational sector is small compared to what it is expected to be, the corrupt officers and personnel who are supposed to serve at the implementation stage would embezzle more than half the amount meant for the projects.

Poor Planning

The issue of poor planning is evidently showing all over the UBE programme in terms of school buildings and other educational infrastructures, most state government have conceded into building same school structures mostly at the urban area and negating the rural villages, without investigating the total number of students within this communities that the structure intend to accommodate Eheazu (2005) affirmed that the UBE took off on a shaky foundation and the nature of promoting the specific objective of establishing the scheme was lacking or inadequate in the implementation guideline. Thus a major constrain to be considered in discussing the nature of planning as regards to the UBE scheme is the issue of Nigerian census exercises carried out before and after independence which is marked by serious irregularities as in the case of the 1962 census

that was counseled but was later embarked upon by the federal government in 1963. The above and many other census in Nigeria have been marked by irregularities and corruption which have made the planning and implementation of the UBE scheme to be very difficult as it would be very impossible to project the exact number of the populace under school age who the programme will cater for.

Teachers Morale and Incentives

The process of teaching and transmitting knowledge to the learners in other to bring about a desirable change in the learners behavior is the sole responsibility of the teacher. These duties would be very effective when the teachers' emotions are stable and their moral boosted with proper motivation coming from their employers in form of incentives. The issue of teacher promotion and incentives have become a serious issue in Nigeria especially at the government public school system, even when teachers have threatened to embark on a strike action, the government do not consider to amend their policy framework to suite the demands of the teachers but rather result to a no work no pay policy which is an infringement on the teachers fundamental human right.

Corroborating from the above, Okorosaye-Orubite (2008) affirmed that teachers in Nigeria are poorly motivated, when he noted that the enhanced teacher's salary is one area of motivation that is been ignored in Nigeria especially as the policy on the 27.5 % pay increase for teachers within the entire 36 states of the

federation and the federal capital territory was never a reality. And also, with recent hick in the cost of living, the federal government in 2021 launched an increase in the new minimum wage which most state governments in Nigeria are yet to implement it up till this day. Hence, the implication would be that the teachers would not put in their best in the teaching and learning process and this would in turn affect the implementation process of the entire educational programme in the country. A very clear example is the current incident that occurred on Thursday, January 25th, 2024, a former Dean of Engineering at the University of Lagos and president of the African African Engineering Education Association (AEEA), Professor Funso Falade, delivered his inaugural lecture preparatory to his retirement titled “ the beginning and the end of project”. The lecture was tagged most memorable due to a point made by the retired professor that stirred the conscience of the conscionable Nigerians. According to professor Falade, “I reached the bar of the professorial salary scale in 2011. My salary was #420,167.43. The exchange rate then was #155.71 to \$1 Dollar in November 2011, meaning that my salary \$2,689.40. As I was finalizing this inaugural lecture on the 22nd January 2024, my salary (take home) stood at #395,500.00. and the exchange rate was #1,355.00 to a Dollar showing that my salary In Dollars was \$291.88 having spent more than twenty (20) years as a professor,” (Adedimeji 2024). From the above, the point is that lots of university lecturers and school teachers in Nigeria today are faced with lots of uncertainties as their salaries can no longer cater for their needs, the salaries which have remained same in most states in Nigeria have in turn reduced teachers perception towards service delivery in quality and quantity due to the role motivation and numeration plays in and individual. Again from the submission above, it means that there is need to re-craft the Nigerian educational sector entirely through an urgent review of the reward system and affirmative actions to prevent teachers and lecturers from “hustling” to make ends meet as it is now obvious that teachers’ salaries can no longer take care of their basic needs, and this would become vulnerable to being distracted from their daily task of teaching. UNESCO (2011), reported in their 2011 UNESCO study, “the situation of teachers in Africa. Their findings is still true that “the worth of teachers is very low, due to poor recognition given to the teaching profession as explained by various de-motivating factors. Teachers in many African countries are working in challenging conditions that are aggravated by poor remuneration, delay in payment of salaries, allowances, promotion, lack of promotion or promotion without arrears, disrespect from government, parents and the community at large.

Lack of Manpower and Poor Maintenance Culture

Every institution requires certain individuals who will act as administrators or the workforce with the sole aim of achieving certain outlined goals. Hence, the same is applicable to the educational sector, manpower in education refers to persons who are employed by the

educational institution to carry out the teaching process, and it is concerned with persons who are saddled with the responsibility of transmitting skills, knowledge, societal norms, to the learners.

However, the educational system in Nigeria has overtime faced the problem of poor manpower or shortage of staff, which have been attributed to inadequacies in government policies, lack of qualified personnel for the teaching job, gross unemployment etc. Amaele (2010) affirm that 75% of public schools under the Universal Basic Education scheme in Nigeria are faced with the problem of lack or shortage of staff, this in turn affect the educational system so much especially on areas of productivity as teachers are forced to teach more than the required subject or class they ought to teach. The implication is that the teachers will not be able to carry out the teaching and learning activity very effectively and the return effect will be the learners, hence the need for re-crafting the Universal Basic Education.

Prerogatives for R-Crafting the Universal Basic Education in Nigerian

Colonial education in Africa and Nigeria in particular was not practically designed to prepare Nigerians for independence and self-reliance” the objectives were not clearly stated, as education at this period was centered on developing individuals who can either act as evangelist, interpreters and auxiliary attendants. It was an education that was centered basically on boosting colonial economy. Secondly, it was to indoctrinate Nigerians through missionary evangelism for the purpose of living virtuous lives devoid of evil. However education in Nigeria after independence in 1960, faced a lot challenges ranging from lack or poor planning, inadequate teachers or manpower, lack of funding, poor curriculum planning and implementation etc. it is disheartening to noted that inspite of the numerous reviews in global educational trends as well as the phase of development that nations of the world is currently adopting to, Nigeria as a country is still faced with a lot of challenges which are more like the ones faced during the precolonial and colonial era.

The inadequacies inherent in the colonial educational system in Nigeria culminated into the various curriculum conferences in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the introduction of the 6.3.3.4 system of education. The Curriculum Conference held in Lagos from 12th - 18th of September, 1969 was a huge success. It was the beginning of a national programme to revitalize and renew education in Nigeria. The conference spelt out details of what it considered as national philosophy, goals, purpose and objectives of Nigeria education and made recommendations for a national reform (Dike and Oriji 2020). The second national curriculum conference took place in June, 1973, whose aim was to fashion out a national policy on

education from the recommendations of the 1969 conference.

The published blueprint in 1977 states as follows:

1. To translate the policy into a workable blueprint and to develop a programme for the implementation of the policy.
2. To coordinate and monitor the implementation of those programmes developed under the policy.
3. To advise the government on and to assist in providing the infrastructural and other requirements for policy implementation.

The first segment of the policy was the Universal Primary Education (UPE) launched in September, 1976. Two years later, the 6.3.3.4 system of education started with the intent to be more functional. Before the 6.3.3.4 system came to be, Nigeria has since independence practiced educational changes from 9.5.2.3 to 9.6.5.2.3 in terms of primary and secondary education structures (Irugebu 2007).

The (6.3.3.4) structure is an attempt to provide opportunities for development of the technical and entrepreneur inclined learners at the end of their junior secondary schooling. The various structural changes are patterns of re-crafting the Universal Primary Education to develop individual with potentials to meet the social and innovative demands. Mkpa (2003) cited in Dike and Oriji (2020) noted that “the programme 6.3.3.4 system which is the Universal Primary Education UPE was initiated with much enthusiasm, but failed at the implementation stage”. This was basically due to issues relating to faulty statistics, inadequate funding and poor planning etc. hence the introduction Universal Basic Education as earlier stated which sought to change the narrative of the Nigerian education. However, over a decade since its introduction it have been discovered that what was lunched as UBE was and old bottleneck, meaning that the UBE programme rather than correcting or capitalizing on the pitfalls of the UPE programme is faced with much problems, as it did not give room for proper technical and entrepreneurship education, hence the need to re-craft the universal basic educational system to meet with the present global pace, of a technical, industrialized and entrepreneurship education. Therefore the following postulations are made if we must strengthen our educational system to stand out amongst committee of nations and compete favourably in the international community.

Suggestions for an Improved Universal Basic Education

1. Rejuvenating Technical Education.

For our educational system to be productive, Nigeria must as a matter of urgent necessity do away from the British or American pattern of education to embrace that of an industrious economy like China, Japan, and other industrious countries, technical,

practical and entrepreneurship education must be reintroduced and made compulsory for every learner, the educational system must also take into cognizance the culture of the African man, Nigeria will have to re-craft its education.

2. Curriculum R-Crafting

The curriculum structure in Nigerian educational system needs a total overhauling, it should be re-crafted to suit the aims and aspirations of the Nigerian society with much emphasis on Africanisms, subjects and courses that are less scientific in nature should not be given too much grounds rather it should be an educational system that will embraced scientific studies with high esteem, this due to the fact that the world today is getting too industrialized with countries like China, Japan, North Korea, etc. taking the lead. Our education planners must seek to re-craft our basic education to suit that of industrialized countries aforementioned.

3. Funding

The educational sector should be seen and considered with high prestige as in other professions like law, Medicine, Accounting etc. government must treat teachers with ought most respect and ensure to pay them very well as it relates to the teaching profession, government must also re-evaluate the funding system, especially the educational sector, this is because, it was discovered that in course of carrying out this research, that for over two decades now the educational system have been poorly funded which have resulted into poor or lack of infrastructure, inadequate teaching facilities, etc. the implication is that there is no way there will be proper productivity in the system when both the teachers and the teaching environment is not properly taken care of.

4. Talent Search and Skills Development

Dike and Oriji (2020) affirmed that every individual is endowed with one particular skill or the other. Hence the need to emphasis on talent search. There is a need therefore to revisit the idea of Junior Engineers, Technologists and Scientist (JETS) club in secondary school that was yielding hope in the past. It should be an avenue to identify talent, such a person should be helped to discover himself more as he is encouraged. Moreso, government must as a matter of urgent necessity take cognizance of young youths who are blessed with productive and technical skill that have on their own created things that are showcased on social media in other to help harness this potentials to its maturity. The Nigerian society needs to be active on the need to search of raw talents among the young ones for the betterment of the society.

CONCLUSION

The philosophy of the Universal Basic Education programme should be utilitarian and should be predicated on the desire to produce an individual with

sound mind and body who is capable of affecting his society in a meaningful and beneficial way, it should be an all-round education capable of awakening the consciousness of learners, as well as help in leading out of the inborn potentialities of the learners and the acquisition of skills necessary for self-actualization, hence, much emphasis should be placed on the learner and the learning environment if the desired aim of education are to be meant.

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