Enhancing School Effectiveness in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in Nigeria: Issues and Implications

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Abstract

This paper examined the need for enhancing school effectiveness in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria. In the Nigerian context, the basic education covers primary, junior secondary and non-formal education and literacy aim at equipping recipients with appropriate attitudes, skills and knowledge. The paper highlighted some crucial issues that could affect school effectiveness in the UBE programme in Nigeria. The issues among others raised include funding gap, data gap, quality assurance and HIV/AIDS pandemic. The paper revealed implications for theory and practice in form of funding, curricular and policy implication. As a way forward, some of the recommendation stated that; the three tiers of government of the federation should workout appropriate cost-sharing arrangements, also the federal government should recognize the United Nation recommendation of 26% annual budget allocation to education. Quality Assurance should be built into the UBE design and implementation process. Also the ministries of education should create Education Data Bank to generate, analyze and bank the data.

Keywords: School effectiveness, Basic education, Issues, Implications, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The realization of education as a vital tool in fulfilling development dream of any nation, compels every nation to give it required attention, Nigerians have steadfastly held believe that education is the fortification against poverty and social unrest. Schools have a central role in equipping our young people with the skills and attitudes they need to sustain our future economic and social development. This includes fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and Information Communication Technology (ICT). Ali (2002) dreams of a situation which a functional education which produces food for the people, create job, provides services and leads to democracy will become a reality. Basic education worldwide is the foundation for sustainable development and life-long learning. Basic education intends to provide the essentials skills in the three RS (3Rs), reading, writing and arithmetic. To achieve this, both formal and non-formal education activities should be provided so that the receivers will acquire functional literacy. In the Nigerian context, the basic education covers primary, junior secondary and non-formal education and literacy aim at equipping recipients with appropriate attitudes, skills and knowledge (Adu, 2004).

Studies (Gidado, 2003; Ezenwafor, 2006) have established declining quality in the Nigeria education and this includes rampant examination malpractice, poor reading and writing skills among students at all levels and low performance in the national survey of achievement. A recent UNESCO survey estimates that about 21million Nigerian children are out of school, which only 47 percent of Nigerian children of school age are in school and that Nigeria is the nineth most illiterate country in the World (Adediran, 2002). In an attempt to promote effectiveness, Onyekake(2005) establishment that UBE needs more classroom, more teachers and more teaching aids. However, there are some important challenges to its success which neither policy makers nor managers adequately grasped. Prominent among them is the issue of funding gap, data gap, accountability, quality assurance, HIV/AIDS pandemic and Information/Knowledge Learning Management (IKLM). Based on the need to rise up to the challenges of modern or post modern world, there is need to make the UBE programme work optimally.

The purpose of this paper is to device ways of enhancing school effectiveness in the UBE programme in Nigeria. The paper will therefore unfold some crucial issues and problems that serve as threat to school effectiveness in the UBE scheme with a view to generate some useful recommendations as a way forward.

CONCEPTUALIZING SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS IN THE UBE

The determinants and parameters of the school effectiveness are manifold and complex in nature, thus the concepts is very broad. According to UNESCO
School effectiveness at the Universal Basic Education (UBE) level could be achieved when the education at the UBE level is capable of achieving the specific goals as enunciated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) and quoted here:

“[Include permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate; Lay sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society; Mould the character and develop sound attitude and moral in the child; Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child’s changing environment; Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capability; Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality” (P. 9).

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In conformity with all nation-state wide adoption of Education for All (EFA) by the year 2000, Nigeria introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) on the 30th September, 1999. The UBE is a newly package national programme of education; meant to conform with the UNESCO’s transformative inclusion agenda, that all school aged children should be enrolled in school and given sound and appropriate education. Basic Education should be of 9-year duration. Basic education is supposed to provide reading, writing and numeracy skills to the recipients. In Nigeria it includes both formal and non-formal education. Within the formal sub-sector, basic education embraces all forms of education given to the individuals from the six year primary school up to the end of three year Junior Secondary School (Fabunmi, 2004; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004)

Realizing the importance of the EFA, Nigerian government in her own frameworks declare the ‘UBE’, which has among its objectives: to develop the entire citizenry a strong sensiveness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion; provide free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age; reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency; cater for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2000)

However, the operation of UBE, which had been embarked upon to cater for educational needs and upliftment of all categories of Nigerian children, youths and adults, can only achieve much, if properly managed.

Therefore, to cope well in the twenty first century, and to ensure the attainment of these laudable objectives, the child needs at least three basic skills (knowledge/information, permanent literacy and numeracy). The view of Digumart (2008) was corroborative. The basic learning needs toward benefiting from world declaration on Education for All (EFA), comprises both literacy and numeracy.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ENHANCING SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS IN THE UBE PROGRAMME

The issues and problems in enhancing school effectiveness in the UBE programme are enormous. Some of the crucial ones are as discussed below:

Funding Gap: Scholars of economics of education and educational planning continues to link investments in education to national development (Fabunmi, 2004). The issue of funding in Nigeria education system becomes problematic, simply because Nigeria has failed to take advantage of the UNESCO recommendation of 26% annual budget to education sector. The federal expenditure on education seems to be below 10% of its overall expenditure (Yusuf, 2010; Ekundayo, 2008) have shown that funding is critical to the survival of the educational system. The chronic underfunding crisis equally results in poor teaching-learning process, increase in personal cost, coupled with the escalating demand that outstripped capacity, frequent strikes and disruption of academic calendars. The issue equally challenges the competency of a school administrator in adopting potent strategies for economic resilience and sustainability of UBE schools.

Accountability in UBE: Increase demand in educational institutions for accountability becomes a formidable challenge and makes it imperative for our schools to fulfill their obligations to the clients by improving and sustaining quality education (Unachukwu, 2007). Summarily, accountability is here defined as a state of accepting and demonstrating responsibility for any action taken or not taken in connection with one’s designated position. The important philosophical concern (question) is that who should be held accountable for the low quality of education in the UBE programme. Specifically, for the low level of literacy and numeracy in the primary school and junior secondary schools
(teachers, head teachers, government, parents, education managers or pupils). The issue is that, at present the question cannot be answered.

Accountability should be accepted as quality control measure. The public and the tax payers deserve to know through reports the state of public education, because education for all is the responsibility of all. Central to accountability are tests, reward, sanctions and report. The issue of educational accountability has not been addressed in Nigeria for obvious reasons. In the United States of America, for instance, Principals have been dismissed or “re-assigned” due to low student achievement (Reaves, 2001). In Nigeria, such school heads stay put. Education is much funded in U. S. A. while Nigerian teachers work under difficult and unstable conditions, such as inadequate teaching facilities, inadequate remuneration and under funding of education.

**Quality Assurance Issue:** Quality control is concerned with product testing, responsibility lies with supervisors, limited quality criteria and paper based system. Quality control activities focus on finding defects in specific deliverables. Effective school quality reform that can stand the test of time must go beyond quality control practices.

Quality assurance deals with the proactive or preventive means of ensuring quality inputs, teaching-learning process, the outcome and the academic achievements of students. Quality assurance aimed at getting things done right at the first time and every time. Prevention therefore is the basis of Quality Assurance. The difference is that quality assurance is process oriented and quality control is product oriented. Testing for quality isn’t assuring quality its only controlling it. (Jacqueline,2002; Babalola, 2004). The need to enhance school effectiveness and minimize wastage necessitates a shift from the traditional view of quality control to quality assurance which constitutes a significant challenge in the UBE system of education in Nigeria.

**Information/Knowledge Management Issue:** Global economic activities have shifted from agricultural/industrial to Information/Knowledge management (Akinboye, 2003). Organizations lived and did business in the first era. The increasing focus in knowledge reflected in phrases such as “knowledge society” and “knowledge economy”. (Alfredo, Ana and Maite, 2011). Knowledge innovation thus, describes the creation; development, exchange and application of new ideas, new concepts, new percepts and new designs to generate marketable goods and services for the success of an enterprise, for the vitality of a nation’s economy and for the advancement of society (Maja, 2002; Mullins, 2007). Knowledge Management becomes a challenge in the UBE educational system, due to the changing context in our society that necessitates a new paradigm shift. The agenda of the day for a growing number of countries is how to become a knowledge economy.

Undoubtedly, there is need for change and innovation in the UBE education scheme in the way children learn and the ways they are assessed. Indiresan (2003) submitted that the future is going to be an information age where every nation’s prosperity will depend on its ability to process information. To be factual, Nigeria educational system, specifically the UBE programme is not rising to these modern or post modern challenges.

**Data Gap:** In Nigeria, the problem of education statistics is compounded by a number of factors. First national population census have always been over-politicized and so it has not been possible to extrapolate school age population figures from published census data. Second, the technical capacity for data collection and analysis (in terms of appropriate types of equipment and appropriate forms and levels of know-how) still leaves much to be desired. All these factors make planning hazardous. Even “guestimates” become impossible, as the statistical basis for reasoned guessing is shaky, (Obanya, 2003; Durosaro, 2004) lack of accurate and timely data has long been the bane of policy formulation and management of our primary education system in Nigeria.

**HIV/AIDS Pandemic:** Another similar issue which could also impact seriously on UBE programme is that of HIV/AIDS pandemic. This could have impact on both teachers and students. According to Durosaro (2004) the prevalence rate was 5.8% of teachers nationally. The disease was found to be prevalent in the age-group 20-24 years which forms the core age group from which primary school teachers are recruited in Nigeria.

**IMPLICATION FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**Financial Implications:** Provision of quality education for pupils require money, more so that the nation’s overall development is in inextricably tied to its education system and every nation now aspires to become “knowledge economy”. The implication is that in order to work towards enhancing school effectiveness in the UBE, the following need to be catered for financially: training, development of appropriate infrastructure, hardware, software, source of electrical power and so on.

**Policy Implications:** A national literacy assessment policy for primary schools is long overdue in Nigeria. By the end of Primary six, every child should be able to read simple text and demonstrate comprehension. Literacy will aid numeracy. This implies that there is need to reform educational policies in order to change from quality control practices, which is product oriented to quality assurance which is a process oriented and wastage prevention activities. There is urgent need to reform economic policies. Make knowledge number one capital asset in all human developmental programmes.

**Curricular Implications:** Pursuing the objectives of UBE calls for enriched curricular in several dimensions. These have implications for what should be taught in schools, and the way and manner in which they are taught. This also applies to all forms and conditions of out of school activities, which should be part and parcel of the UBE programme. This also implies that existing curriculum initiatives in the country will in the light of the
above, have to be drastically reviewed. Curriculum has to become more responsive to the demands of UBE and the needs of the twenty-first century, particularly now that there is globalization of all aspects of human life. The Nigerian child cannot be left behind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding for UBE can certainly not come from a single source. As a Federal initiative, the programme would require considerable financial boosting from the Federal Government. A good deal of political consensus building will however be necessary, to enable the three tiers of government of the Federation to work out appropriate cost-sharing arrangements. The Federal Government should recognize the United Nation’s recommendation of 26% annual budget allocation to education sector. The State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) can request for assistance and foreign aids in form of text/story books and ICT facilities from World Bank, United Nation International Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and Common Wealth of Learning (COL). These bodies are very generous, especially on educational matters.

Quality Assurance should be built into the UBE design and implementation process. Monitoring and evaluation should therefore be normal practice of Ministries of Education and should be carried out in a highly professional manner. Quality Assurance Directorate ‘QAD’ must intervene in the area of capacity building and capacity strengthening (reskilling and retooling). The directorate will enforce quality teaching and learning in the UBE.

To be able to take sound and reliable decision on the management of UBE programme in Nigeria, there is need to ensure availability of accurate data on the system. The Ministry of Education should liaise with the Federal Government to create viable Education Data Bank (EDB), and should give the data bank all enabling environment required to generate, analyse and bank the data. Education managers should be trained in the modern data management techniques.

The government and private bodies must embark on aggressive public enlightenment on the HIV/AIDS disease control. Ministries of Education must ensure that both teachers and pupils are properly educated about HIV/AIDS pandemic. This would minimize to a great extent both pupil and teacher loss that this disease could cause. Various tiers of government should formulate clear policies on enrolment of pupils, funding, and provision of facilities as well as quality assurance.

CONCLUSION

The organizational challenge of education in the twenty-first century is to make education an exercise in quality, to make education a fast-response which can provide the full range of skills a modern economy needs. The UBE programme will be a failure if it does not prepare pupils to face the challenges of the modern or post-modern world. Literacy which is the pillar of educational development is already endangered in our schools and for UBE to succeed; Literacy and numeracy must take a firm root in the primary schools.

It therefore becomes mandatory for our young people to be equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude needed to sustain our future economic and eco-social development. These include fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy, and Information Communication Technology (ICT). Enhancing school effectiveness at the UBE level is achievable with the cooperative efforts of all the stakeholders; parents, community members, teachers, head-teachers and government inclusive. Education for all is the responsibility of all.

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