

**EDUCATION IN NIGERIA
IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
FOCUS & IMPERATIVES**

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CHAPTER 20

FOR THE UBE TO ANSWER THE QUESTION IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL COMMENT

By

Brown, Aniekan S.

Abstract

This chapter consents to education as a very necessary ingredient for a guaranteed future – the key to unlock the locked potentials, imaginations, thoughts and dreams in people's minds and hearts. It aims at positioning the UBE on a sound enough pedestal to enable it attain the earlier-mentioned ambitions of education. Inspired by the negative tag on Nigeria as a country where nothing seems to work, the study which was carried out with much reliance on secondary sources of data and observation was pivoted by the Robert Merton's version of the functional theory. We assert that the ideals of the UBE are lofty but could go the same (failing) ways of previous lofty programmes. To stem the tide, we recommends proper funding, play down on certification, stiff punitive measures against destructive elements, and assurance of quality among others. It concludes that the problems of education are artificial and in man lies the solutions.

Introduction

Sociology, in very simple terms, is the scientific study of the human society (Horton and Hunt, 1984). Whether defined as the study of social interaction or as the study of the forms of association or of social entities, Sociology is concerned with the structural-functional as well as conflictual and dysfunctional aspects of human relationships in the society (Heberle, 1991; and Merleau-

Ponty, 1962). One of such aspects of human relationship is education – a philosophical as well as sociological concept, which denotes ideologies, curricular, and pedagogical techniques of the inculcation and management of knowledge and the social production of personalities and cultures (Marshall, 1998).

In practice, education has to do with the acquisition of talents and skills by an individual through the process of apprenticeship (Anyebe, 2001) the outcome of which is a fortune not only to the individual but also to the society which he belongs. More contemporaneously, the concern is on schooling and especially mass schooling systems of modern industrial societies, including the expansion of higher, further, adult, nomadic, and continuing education (Marshall, 1988). To this end, education should be seen as the key to unlock the locked potentials, imaginations, thoughts, and dreams in peoples minds and hearts (Brown, 2004). It is therefore an idea capable of governing the Nigerian world or throwing same into chaos (Anyim, 2000).

But the Nigerian situation is somewhat negatively peculiar. It has, over the years, embarked on several educational development programmes including the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the 1970s and the States Primary Education Boards approach of the 1990s. The ideas behind those programmes had been lofty but the realization of the dream usually a mirage. The glaring instrumentality to the successive failure of such programmes has been the inability and unpreparedness of the establishment to manage and cope with the inherent latent consequences of such programmes. Added to this is the problem of certification – a process which emphasizes ownership of certificates without a corresponding emphasis on expertise and ability to perform. This has lured people (both bright and dull) to go all out for the gathering of certificates with the adoption of fair and foul means. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) has taken the stage to pivot

the advancement of the educational system in Nigeria, but the successive failure of previous educational programmes calls for alertness in managing the system to meet the challenges of a sustainable and successful Universal Basic Education (UBE). These inspired the present paper.

The UBE Intention

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000), the UBE was conceived by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to accomplish the desires of the constitution in respect of the provision of equal and adequate educational opportunities as well as the eradication of illiteracy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000) provides the following as the intentions of the UBE:

- the development in the entire citizenry of a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- the drastic reduction of the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency);
- the provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- the catering 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; and
- the ensuring of 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.

Primarily, the UBE programme intends to be universal, free, and compulsory. While the universal status suggests: inclusiveness,

special attention to special groups, and encouragement for the provision of facilities for early childhood care and socialization; the free aspect implies governments investment; and the compulsory aspect indicates the need to use force (physical, persuasive, mental, or punitive).

In the challenge to achieve the cardinal desires of the programme, it is envisaged that the programme, which emanates from the strong desire of government to reinforce participatory democracy in Nigeria by raising the level of awareness and general education of the citizenry will meet the demands of education for all (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The guidelines for UBE implementation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000 p. 4) recommends that more appropriate approaches be developed for improving the state of the following:

- Public enlightenment and social mobilization for full community involvement;
- Data collection and analysis;
- Planning, monitoring, and evaluation;
- Recruitment, training, retraining, and motivation of teachers;
- Infrastructural facilities;
- Enriched curricula;
- Textbooks and instructional materials;
- Improved funding; and
- Management of the entire process

To achieve the above, the programme intends to consider various forms of inherent disparities; fight undue data falsity; ensure quality; mainstream teachers' professionalism and improve their pay packages; ensure adequate assessment methods; fight examination irregularities; and follow the provision of the Act which established its commission. This paper contends that attempts

at attaining all the above, however, are bound to raise new issues that are capable of derailing the virtue of the programme.

Inherent Problems in the UBE

Arguably the UBE is a subsystem of the social system (society) which is set up to enhance the survival of the educational system of Nigeria. Here Talcott Parsons' taxonomic device of functional prerequisites with the acronym A.G.I.L. 12. (Parsons, 1957) become famous. As expatiated by Hess, et al (1992) and Haralambos and Heald (1999), each system is faced with the challenges of meeting the requirements for survival which are identified as the functional prerequisites of A.G.I.L. where: "A" stands for adaptation and should be met by the economic institution; "G" stands for goal attainment which is usually met by the polity; "I" for integration and "L" for Latent pattern maintenance which are met by the persuasive institutions of the religion, morality, education, and law.

But Merton (1968) while observing the functional prerequisites offers that the bodies created to meet identified needs do not always remain functional. In which case, they may be functional, non functional, and dysfunctional (Ritzer, 1996 and 2000). He further argues that even in the wake of performing the desired role and recording the manifest (intended) functions, it may also record some latent (unintended) functions. These unintended functions breed unintended consequences that run the risk of becoming dysfunctional to the system and thus infringe on its survival strategies.

By implication, the UBE programme is a creation of government for the purpose of enhancing education for all over time. However, as the programme strives to achieve its set goal, certain intentions possess some latency. Such problems are summarized below:

First, the socio-psychological and developmental realities of our society constitute some problems that may inhibit the success level of the UBE programme. For instance, the communication difficulties as evident in languages, communication and instruction situations or conditions are capable of militating against the programme. Added to this is the psychological challenge of determining the school-going age. This age varies from one family and cultural setting to another. This variation is a factor to the problem of imbalance in the enrolment rates in the various zones of the country. This imbalance is also seen in the gender disparity. These frustrate the enlightenment and mobilization process (Joel, 2001).

Furthermore, emphasis on certificates acquired has induced the process of certification. This is evident in the rush for acquisition of certificates without the corresponding ability to defend the quality of certificates. As a result, a lot of people are merely certificated not certified. This is a dangerous and destructive trend. There is also a case of lack of quality and quantity of personnel to manage the programme as cumbersome as the UBE.

Moral and legal realities also add to the problem. For instance, the issue of fraud is a foremost problem. It comes in the executive, petty, operational, and management or supervisory forms (Akpan 2002). It could also be manifested in examination mismanagement where cases of leaked examination question papers and wrongful assessments of examination scripts are rampant. There is also the problem of the attitude of some pupils between their homes and schools, which is characterized by waywardness and truancy. Peer and parent pressure presents another moral problem. For instance, cases of resistance to enriched curricula and the ambitions and future of wards forcefully determined by parents are commonplace. On the part of staff,

glaring by poor motivation (Ikpe, 2005). Also, there is an impending vacuum to be created in families and their estates as a result of compelling wards to attend schools. This is aggravated by the lack of absorptive capacity of the larger society as to the human products of the UBE. This occurs when pupils complete their basic education but neither access secondary education nor secure economic viability.

Finally there is also the problem of detailing what the UBE views as complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.

The Way Forward

The above-listed problems inherent in the UBE programme could be summarized into the financial, sociological, legal, administrative, infrastructural, and human perspectives. These are otherwise presented as national attitudes to new policies and programmes, poor statistical database, dearth of requisite resources, and manpower problem (Udofot, 2002). To this end, the following are proffered as recommendations for the way forward.

Culturally, there is need to ascertain the school-going age and the total number of those due to benefit from the programme. This should be done periodically to ensure proper planning and sustainability. In addition, the approaches for mobilization and sensitization should be sensitive to gender and the multi-cultural status of Nigeria. This will help stem the imbalances.

There is also need to improve the technological base of the personnel in the area of information technology. This would enhance stronger database for the effective planning and implementation of the programme's ideals. The use of the computer readily comes to mind and such should be linked to every office of the programme in the country. This would change

the work culture and enhance easy detection of fraud (Akpan, 2002).

Furthermore, there is a need to de-emphasize certification. Thus, expertise should supercede certificates. And to guard against distance as a barrier, schools should be strategically located with consideration to geographical realities and transportation facilities. Owners of private schools should be compelled to locate such schools at locations considerably distanced from already existing ones. There is no point congesting an already congested town with schools.

From the moral and legal perspectives, there is need for a comprehensive legal document. More specifically, the legal document should spell out the duties of all stakeholders especially the role of the various tiers of government. There should also be a legislation against waywardness and truancy on the part of the pupils. To guard against administrative injustice and double standards in the administration of discipline, men of high level integrity should constitute disciplinary units. Sacred cows would, thus, not be condoned. And charges against examination malpractice should be enforced. This would help check the problem of certification.

Economically, there is need to ascertain the total cost of training each beneficiary over time. This would enhance adequate planning and the pegging of needed funds. To enhance adaptation, interactive sessions (with community dwellers and their leaders), seminars and workshops (at all levels), and outreach sessions, interviews and jingles (as media activities) should be embarked upon to achieve the mobilization and sensitization desires (Joel, 2001). The details of the programme should be the object of focus. Also, collaboration with individuals and corporate citizens should be encouraged in order to enhance

the funding status of the programme (Soludo, 2004). This would complement the efforts of government(s).

In addition, the supervision and evaluation unit of the UBE should be constituted by professionals of high-level integrity. This would enhance value-for money and in the entire process of contract execution. This should be an on-going process. Some financial schemes should also be created to raise the social value attached to the teaching profession (Obinaju, 2002). This will in turn raise the quality of teachers. The profession therefore would not serve as a last resort to applicants. Furthermore, since the programme is to ensure free basic education, it should be effected as such. Basic education therefore should be free in its totality. Sundry fees should not be charged. And finally, the real sectors of the economy (agricultural and manufacturing) should be developed to the extent of creating sufficient absorptive capacities for the products of the UBE.

And politically, the UBE policy should not be changed too soon. The programme should be allowed to run for a considerable length of time so as to build a positive attitude of Nigerians towards it (Udofot, 2002). Again, since the UBE is aimed at the formative years of pupils, reading and instructional materials should be de-politicized. The issue of forcing sub-standard reading materials on pupils because of political influence should be discouraged. Materials like "key to success" and "Question and Answers" should be out-lawed.

There is also need to create alternatives to child labour particularly in the area of agriculture. This could be achieved through mechanizing the process of agricultural production. By this, creating a vacuum in family estates of pupils would be controlled. And to ensure the quality of teaching, the teachers themselves should be well taught (Gang, 1990). To this end, the National Teachers' Institute should be scrapped (Enang, 2002), and a well planned programme in the mould of the Teacher Training Colleges should be established.

And finally, to enhance healthy competition among the units and components of the programme (within the States, Local Government Areas, and the establishment itself) excellence should be rewarded. This would serve as a score card for good performance.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the realities of education-promoting programmes in Nigeria. It has observed that each education development programme in Nigeria, historically, has proved unsuccessful. The successive failure of such programmes is usually not because of their want of ideas but in the area of implementation. It therefore offers a sociological comment as to the ways of intervening and stemming the tide of failure in the case of the UBE. This comment is made strong in the need to guard against unintended problems by being alert to such.

In this chapter we have acknowledged that the problems that bedevil development programmes in Nigeria – including the UBE programme, all have human connections. Recommendations have therefore been that should be adhered to by the human operators of the programme. Such adherence would provide the sociological solution to the problems.

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