

Managing Free Education Programme in a Partially Deregulated Economy: Nigeria in View

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Abstract: This study examines the value attached to free education by the Nigerian government. It is obvious that no country, anywhere is self sufficient in responding adequately to the demands for increased opportunity of free education programme. The study discusses the feasibility of free education programme in the current trend of looming global economy, which is eating deeply into the revenue generation to propel the free education programme. The study also addresses some macroeconomic issues and thus, identified financial and management lapses resulting from the challenges posed by cost differentials between the private individuals and government, which also compounded the effective and efficient management of the free education programme. The study closes by recommending that budgetary allocation to free education by the three tiers of government and even the private sector should be based on transparency, accountability and scrutiny by everyone involved in the implementation of free education programme in Nigeria in this and the coming decades.

Key words: Free education, budgetary allocation, deregulation, private cost, social cost, education tax fund, cost differentials, neo-liberal and inbuilt stabilizer

INTRODUCTION

Education is a potent weapon in the arsenal of any country in pursuit of national development. Most developed societies, over the centuries have invested enormous amount of time, energy and money in providing a qualitative education to their citizen. As a result, premium is placed on the provision of this essential ingredient in national development. The important roles played by education have prompted national leaders to ensure that all citizens have access to education irrespective of the ability to pay for it.

It is instructive to note that the involvement of missionaries in the provision of formal tuition fee education during their initial encounter with people living around the coastal area of Lagos in Nigeria was merely an investment in the Christian religion and a tool of evangelism. By and large, the demand for education in the 21st Century cuts across religions or evangelism. But for the transmission of societal core values and other pieces of information necessary for growth and development, this provides reasonable justification for the huge investment of resources in the provision of education for all citizens by the government. Samuel (2002) posits that government's investment in

education is anchored on the maxim that the end justifies the means and the principle of prime beneficiaries.

The drive towards free education in Nigeria started in the 1950s with the government of the western region led by the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and was later adopted by the government of the eastern region. The purpose was to guarantee equal opportunities for every citizen, though this was politically motivated.

At independence in 1960, free education policy was suspended, despite the fact that the 1961 Addis Ababa conference for African nations called for the adoption of the Universal Primary Education (UPE).

In 1976 after 16 years of political independence, the UPE scheme was envisioned as an expansionist strategy to correct the age long imbalance in the spatial distribution of educational opportunities and provision in the country. The UPE programme is a capital intensive one which requires a large amount of fund for procuring the needed school plant and facilities for its effective implementation.

Apart from the inherited problems of the UPE, it was realized that some of the benefits accruable to the society as a whole include spill over income benefits, increase in occupational mobility, more lawful behaviour of citizens in general, reduction in dropout rate among students,

increase in age at marriage and a host of others. However, the general belief that the output from Universal Primary Education (UPE) does not have required marketable skills capable of steering the ship of human resources needed for economic development in the country. Okebukola (2005) also shared the belief that primary schools have failed in their task to develop literacy skills in the pupils.

The search for a way out of this predicament led the federal government of Nigeria in 1999 to declare the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The basic education policy includes free and compulsory primary, junior secondary and nomadic education. It also includes adult and non-formal education programs. According to Tor-Anyin (1996), a pronouncement of a life long education and functional literacy in the modern society is the basis for human capital development.

Management challenges and the provision of free education in the 21st Century: The unprecedented demographic shifts and reformations of populations all over the world and the recent transitions of world economy from agriculture and manufactured to information and technology, now to bio-genetics have send the right messages to all stake-holders in an effort to bring change in the existing culture of managing the free education programs (Okongwu, 1984).

Effort to include everybody in the process from the beginning and utilization of management of change techniques and principle that will bring about managerial effectiveness should be the worries of an educational manager in the 21st Century (Paschiardia, 2008).

The 1991 national census recorded that there has been a continuous increase in the Nigeria population from 118.8 million in 2001 to 126.2 million in 2003 and 140 million in 2006 (Fig. 1). The Federal Ministry of Education report,

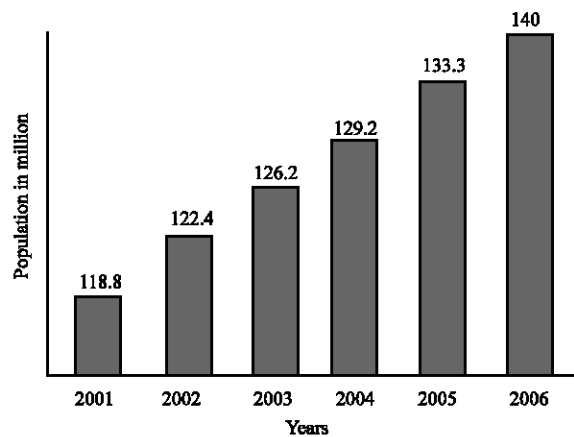


Fig. 1: Graph showing Nigeria population from 2001-2006 (National Population Commission)

Table 1: Number of students in secondary schools by State in Nigeria

State	1994	1995	1996	2004	2005
Abuja	38,932	42,948	41,242	68,673	67,731
Abia	60,308	141,806	125,089	124,176	124,268
Adamawa	124,247	58,275	59,383	99,221	104,978
Akwa/Ibom	97,273	162,722	156,209	222,479	197,401
Anambra	83,585	155,293	114,690	132,171	142,424
Bauchi	131,191	97,933	100,374	127,492	137,695
Bayelsa	-	-	-	50,895	52,687
Benue	73,721	153,326	161,496	199,707	194,409
Borno	76,494	74,895	72,684	105,106	109,512
C/river	285,338	91,202	88,959	116,887	115,992
Delta	192,620	244,376	244,376	272,384	260,318
Ebonyi	-	-	-	172,260	171,651
Ekiti	-	-	-	79,527	74,389
Edo	122,757	212,016	134,322	173,361	176,172
Enugu	202,571	131,667	104,112	171,920	162,027
Gombe	-	-	-	98,941	139,141
Imo	26,559	186,026	204,562	194,037	177,237
Jigawa	143,106	24,033	24,033	84,953	81,004
Kaduna	116,881	136,055	136,140	170,240	178,323
Kano	56,071	104,971	110,652	237,775	257,299
Kastina	25,890	59,167	59,605	133,297	142,494
Kebbi	106,830	26,934	28,718	107,933	113,946
Kogi	119,368	110,900	114,252	179,303	180,511
Kwara	631,955	116,697	116,683	143,036	139,952
Lagos	100,023	588,154	519,629	624,699	693,571
Nassarawa	-	-	55,628	169,620	192,368
Niger	203,004	117,397	124,369	146,567	157,436
Ogun	265,611	194,361	191,569	158,587	239,797
Ondo	225,621	174,088	202,744	213,604	204,818
Osun	310,152	210,767	191,904	239,423	235,963
Oyo	165,028	324,727	297,151	389,857	391,303
Plateau	174,154	166,581	114,864	187,944	193,042
Rivers	55,944	213,842	179,978	142,597	227,049
Sokoto	41,735	65,466	31,460	76,719	81,180
Taraba	23,732	49,641	49,641	99,136	102,224
Yobe	23,732	12,726	21,981	87,413	96,274
Zamfara	-	-	23,100	77,621	80,995
Total	4,451,329	4,448,991	4,201,331	6,279,562	6,397,581

Annual abstract of federal office of statistics (2001)

2001 shows that enrolment in primary and secondary schools increased by 6.2 and 3.9% representing 22.5 and 5.8 million, respectively. The campaign for increased female education also yielded some results as the percentage of female increased from 43.5 and 41.9% to 45.2 and 46.2% in 1998.

Universal access to education has been the major catalyst of enrolment growth since 1976 to date. This has increased the enrolment of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. From Table 1, Lagos State recorded the highest students enrolment of 467,772, 488,949, 624699 and 693571 in 1992, 1993, 2004 and 2005, respectively. While Yobe State had the least enrolment of 21,105 in 1992 and 23,143 in 1993. In 1992, Lagos State enrolment rose from 467,777-488,949 and reduces from 588,154-519,629 in 1996. This could be attributed to the high population drift to the state, which is the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria. Despite the fact that the 2006 population census crowned Kano State as the most populated in Nigeria, the state recorded a low enrolment of 86,692, 104,577, 56,071,

Table 2: Private unit cost and social unit cost of Lagos State Secondary Schools (1999-2006)

Periods	Private	PUC (%)	Social unit	SUC (%)	Total unit
1999	12,274.00	82.43	2,616.200	17.57	14,890.20
2000	13,487.00	84.62	2,452.010	15.38	15,939.08
2001	15,126.40	84.88	2,693.580	15.12	17,819.98
2002	16,995.00	61.91	10,454.57	38.09	27,449.57
2003	17,046.00	69.53	7,469.200	30.47	24,515.20
2004	18,386.50	48.60	19,446.78	51.40	37,838.28
2005	19,938.50	42.30	27,192.79	57.70	47,131.29
2006	22,014.90	40.63	32,175.09	59.37	54,189.99

104,971, 110,652, 237,775 and 257,299 in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2004 and 2005, respectively. This negates opinions of Education Demographers that population is a determinant of enrolment growth.

In current decade, a constant change in the policy and thinking regarding provision of free education in a populated nation amidst macroeconomic policy challenges were dominated by the neo-liberal perspective of partial deregulation of education in Nigeria.

For Nigeria, the question of the appropriate role for government is not a question of ideology but a question of feasibility, priorities and incentives-based on experience. During the oil boom (UPE era), the public sector took a vastly expanded role in all sectors of the economy. Experience shows that government was over extended. However, even within this diminished scope, reform of public sector management is urgently needed. In managing the free education programme in a depressed economy, the priorities would seem to be:

- Greater transparency in public spending
- Greater scrutiny of the projected economic impact of free education
- Greater accountability for education managers at all tiers of the government
- Greater simplicity and consistency of partial deregulation policy in education
- Close look at the allocative mechanisms for raising additional resources for free education programme

Samuel (2002) asserts that cost and financing education has been to gradually deregulate the education sub-sector because of the fantasy of free education. Samuel (2002) also pointed out that household pays more for education than the government going by the average unit cost. This was revealed in a study on cost analysis of free education programme in Lagos State secondary schools in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the unit cost on the student per annum which represents the Social Unit Cost (SUC). Thus, the social unit cost was ₦2, 616.20 in 1999 and ₦2, 452.01 in year 2000; ₦2, 693.58; ₦10, 454.57; ₦7, 469.20; ₦19, 446.78; ₦27, 192.79 and ₦32, 175.09 in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, respectively. While the average

private cost was ₦12, 274; ₦1 3487 and ₦1 5126.49 in 1999, 2000 and 2001, respectively. Also, ₦1 6995 in 2002, ₦1 7046 in 2003; ₦18, 386.50 in 2004; ₦19, 938.50 in 2005 and ₦22, 014.90 in 2006.

The logic behind the above high cost for the parents' in the financing of free education calls for some unanswered questions such as: Who pays more in the free education programme? Is education free in absolute terms?

Mohammed (2008) in his write up on strategies and resource in the implementation of UBE programme posits that the successful implementation of the UBE programme involves every Nigerian in all the nooks and crannies of the country since it is the people's programme and not that of the Government alone. Thus, the three tiers of government, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, civil society groups, parents, teachers, the organized private sector, organized labour, market men and women, etc. have a stake in the free education programme.

Financial management of free education programme: All the factors, which directly affect the workers or staff response in an organization are determined by the management. These factors also constitute the management climate. Looking at people as a resource is not always easy to conceptualize. This is because their abilities are not owned by the organization as the latter own equipment, machines buildings, technology and time. Such abilities of the workers do not appear in the organization's final account books, yet such abilities are resources, they cost money and with proper management they bring returns (Olaniyonu, 2006). Although, a single resource is seldom productive all by itself; people need tools, materials, a place to work and others to work with. The responsibility of doing this according to Aina (2005), usually falls upon people, who are often times referred to as management.

Aina (2005) describes management as a concept which has its own skills and techniques, it entails the use of all the resources of an organization (men and women, money, materials and methods) to attain the aims and objectives of the organization. The UBE Act part III, section II sub-section 1 stipulates that:

- The implementation of the Universal Basic Education shall be financed from; Federal Government block grant of not <2% of its consolidated fund; funds or contributions in form of federal guaranteed credits and local and international donor grants
- For any state to qualify for the Federal Government block grant pursuant to sub-section 1 of this section, such state shall contribute not <50% of the total cost of projects as its commitment in the execution of the project

Financial resources, therefore are sourced from the federal, state and local governments and local and international donor agencies. However, Mohammed (2008) outlined the following as major challenges facing the management and implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria to be, the existence of the gaps in the basic education sub-sector:

Teacher	1,307,836
Classroom	301,190
Pupils' furniture	7,638,291
Head teachers/teachers furniture	445,379
Teachers' toilet	80,978
Libraries	33,727
Workshops	33,727
Laboratories	33,727
Textbooks	96,545,388
Play equipment	130,485,756

- Lack of political will by some states government to implement the UBE programme
- Low draw-down of Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) UBE intervention fund by the states
- Inadequate provision for nomadic and other migrant groups as well as over-aged children included in the out-of-school figures e.g., the almajiri group
- High illiteracy rate of 55.5%
- Lack of synergy among the implementing agencies of basic education
- About 23% girl child drop-out rate and 15% boy child rate for girls and 39.3% for boys in secondary schools
- About 10 million out-of-school children in Nigeria

CONCLUSION

The effect of macroeconomic policy design and management in Nigeria is a crucial management issue in the financing of free education programme. The set of economic measures, policies and strategies adopted and implemented by Nigeria to move it from its current macro economic state to a more desirable one, involves the formulation and implementation of measures and policies to achieve short-run macroeconomic stability and a rapid

diversified and sustainable growth in the long term. Financial constraints resulting from the macroeconomic issues have hampered the implementation of educational plans and programmes in Nigeria (Samuel, 2002; Adesina and Ogunsaju 1984; Yaqub, 2001; Oyetakin, 2007).

RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to the identified constraints of managing the free education programme in a partial deregulated economy, the following recommendations are preferred:

In view of the fact that the budgetary allocation to education has suffered a hick up as a result of the dwindling fortune of the incomes from oil due to the global economic crisis, every hand must be on deck to generate additional sources of revenue to aid educational programmes.

Every state, local government and even the private sector must subscribe to Education Tax Fund, which should be managed and distributed from the centre.

Corruption in the education industry should be completely reduced, if possible eradicated. This will ensure that available funds for the free education programme is not misallocated for private use.

Educational managers saddled with the responsibility of implementing the free education programme must ensure that effectiveness and efficiency of scarce education resources is adhered to.

The political structure of the country should be designed to contain an inbuilt stabilizer that will not affect the free education programme even if government changes from one political party to another.

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