

Assessing the Preparedness of Nigeria for Her Universal Basic Education Program

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Abstract: The dynamism of life and everything associated with it, permeates every society and the institutions; education inclusive. The dynamism of Nigerian educational system had led Nigerians from a 6-6-2-3 system, to a 6-5-2-3 system, to 6-3-3-4 system, to the newest addition of 9-3-4 system. The objectives of the 9-3-4-system are quite lofty and ideal, but the reality of its implementation is that it is difficult to achieve, because of various problems. This study tries to assess, the preparedness of Nigeria for her universal basic education. It finds that the problem of implementation, which the universal basic education has in Nigeria, ranges from infrastructural to personnel and even cultural. The study notes that most of those who attend teachers' training colleges, neither want to teach, nor would encourage their children to become teachers. The teachers thus, need to surmount both the obstacles of labeling, lack of motivation and poverty. Thus, it recommends a radical review of their condition of service and installation of facilities for the schools.

Key words: Preparedness, universal, basic education, society, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, every society tries to cater for the needs of her people. Thus, every institution in the society is tailored to suit the societal norms, values and aspirations. Socialization; which ensures the continuity, growth and development of every society, is usually as old as the society and covers the formal, informal and non-formal learning in the society. The implication of this is that what we learn at home and our daily experiences; through the apprenticeship system or from the formal school system (pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary levels), all work on the 3 domains of the individual. These are the Cognitive (mental process; represented by the head), Affective (Behavior; habit, emotional and feeling; represented as the heart) and the Psychomotive (dealing with activity skills demonstration; represented by the hand). Thus, the development of the 3 Hs (Head, Hearth and Hand) ensures the development of a wholesome individual and by extension wholesome society.

Yesufu (2000), argues that nations with well educated individuals should usually prosper because better educated individuals are socialized in ways that increase their productivity and improve their economic standing. Sociological and Economic studies on School-to-Work Transition and occupational attainment of people have revealed that these vary across industrialized and industrializing societies (Shavit and Muller, 1998). Thus, it is not just enough to have lofty educational goals and

ideals, the implementation must be equally thorough. This is because expansion does not always alter the effect of social background on educational tradition.

This study therefore, wishes to look at the evolution of the 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria and critically look at the problems the schools are encountering in the implementation of the education policy. It will also, look at how prepared Nigeria is for the implementation of the new system; in particular the preparation of teachers and what she needs to do for a successful implementation of the new education policy.

ORIGIN

The foundation for the universal basic education was laid at the 1990 Jomtien Declaration of education for all by the year 2003. After this, others, like the 1991 New Delhi Declaration on E-9 countries, 1996 Amman Affirmation on the pursuit of the goals of Jomtien and the 1998 Durban Statement of Commitment on the Inter-African collaboration for the Development of Education followed. Also to emphasize the importance of Basic Education for All, The Organization of African Unity (OAU) declared a Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006). In 2000, there was the Dakar World education forum; which led to the adoption of Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015, policy by most African countries; including Nigeria. This policy thus, became a very important aspect of their Poverty Alleviation Strategy.

As a follow up to all the above decisions, which Nigeria was signatory to, in 1999, Nigeria's President; Olusegun Obasanjo, launched the universal basic education program in Nigeria. To legalize it, efforts were made to pass the bill into law. This bill encountered a lot of obstacles and was only passed into law on 26th May 2004; almost 5 years after its launching.

Section 2 (1)-4 of this act states that:

- Every government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age
- Every parent shall ensure that his child or ward attends
 - Complete his primary school education
 - Junior secondary school education, by endeavoring to send the child to primary and junior secondary schools
- The stake-holders in education in a local Government Area shall ensure that every parent or person who has the care and custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him under section 2 (2) of this Act
- A parent who contravenes section 2 (2) of this Act, commits an offence and is liable
 - On first conviction, to be reprimanded
 - On second conviction, to a fine of N2000.00, or imprisonment for a term of one month or to both
 - On subsequent conviction, to a fine of N5000.00 or imprisonment for a term of two months or both

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN NIGERIA

Informal and Non-formal education is as old as Nigerian society, while the western formal education came to Nigeria in 1842, when the Missionary Societies established the first primary school in Lagos. The first grant-in-aid of 30 pounds sterling for education was given to each missionary body in 1872. In 1926, these formal primary schools became standardized into infant 1 and 2 and standard 1-6. However, Mr. R. Hussey, the then Director of Education, proposed a 6-6 program 6 years of primary and 6 years of secondary education. By 1951, regionalization of education led to the adoption of 6-6 program by western region, 7-5 program by eastern region, 7-6 program by northern region and 8-6 program by Lagos metropolitan area. These various educational programs, gave birth to the 6-5-2-3 system of education.

This system was in operation in 1976, when the military regime under General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE).

The 6-3-3-4 system: The 6-3-3-4 system was the baby of the National Curriculum Conference of 8-13th September, 1969. This was in response to the need of a more functional educational system. This system, which makes a child spend 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior secondary school, 3 years in senior secondary school and 4 years in tertiary institution, is fashioned after the American system. This system suffered a lot of implementation problem; as the purpose of the break between the senior and junior secondary section was defeated. Every one believes that their children or wards must all move on to the senior secondary level. Besides, there were no orientation for teachers and administrators, while the infrastructure required were not available (Omokhodion, 2006). Also, Nigerian Factor of Long Leg in local parlance, had a lot of negative effects on its implementation.

The 9-3-4 system: The 9-3-4 system of education; which is the latest addition, in Nigeria, can be described as an old wine in a new bottle because of its similarity to the 6-3-3-4 system. The only major difference between the 2 systems is that the 9-3-4 system insists on a 9 years compulsory basic education, while the 6-3-3-4 system insisted on only 6 years of compulsory basic education.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is projected to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty and accelerate national development and integration. The UBE program is under the management of the UBE Commission based on the provision of the 2004 Act of Parliament, as stated above.

The target of this program is to provide a basic education that includes the following:

- Program and initiatives for Early Childhood Education and Development (ECCDE)
- Six years primary education
- Three years of junior secondary school, which will expand access, eliminate inequalities, reduce drop-out rate and encourage massive literacy
- The provisions of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age
- Development of a strong education consciousness and commitment in every member of the society
- Development of good personalities in the learners, through good moral and academic socialization

IMPLIMENTATION OF THE UBE PROGRAM

The UBE commission provides leadership and advisory services to the states and local government; who are the major implementers of the basic education program. Thus, the major duty of the federal government here is to provide policy guidelines to the providers of basic education.

The UBE program has started operation in many public and private schools across the country and it seems to be facing a lot of implementation problems. The program requires good infrastructure, accurate statistics, a lot of highly motivated and qualified personnel and funds for a successful implementation; to achieve all its projected aims and objectives. For instance, for any existing primary school to be qualified and able to operate up to Basic 9; which is the equivalent of the former JSS3 (Junior Secondary Class 3), the school must put the following laboratories in place:

- Introductory technology laboratory
- Home economics laboratory
- Integrated science laboratory
- Business studies laboratory
- Computer laboratory
- Library
- Fine arts laboratory
- Examination hall

In addition to these, more classrooms for the extra classes, more qualified and well motivated personnel and a lot of money to pay for and maintain all these will be urgently needed. To resolve these challenges, Nigeria requires new orientation in teaching, research and public service (Obanya, 1999).

The united nations in recognition of world teachers through the annual celebration of world teachers day is now on its 42nd year. This recognition gave a voice to teachers and tries to erase the image of teachers as ladders on the wall through, which everyone climbs up and abandons thereafter (Usang, 2006). To be very effective, the teachers need to be well trained and highly motivated, while the label of low social status must be removed from them. Towards this end the professionalization of teachers by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria is a welcomed step in the right direction.

Thus, answers are required to the following questions:

- Are the teachers prepared and available for the successful implementation of the 9-3-4 system of Education in Nigeria?

- What is the image of the teacher in the society and how attractive is the profession?
- How many teachers want their children to become teachers just like some other professions?
- Is the image of the teacher a real one or a social construction by the society?
- Are there sufficient and available infrastructure and equipments for the successful implementation of the UBE program?
- What is the way forward?

What is the image of the teacher in Nigerian society:

One important factor that can positively or negatively affect the successful implementation of the UBE program is the factor of teachers. A study that sought to know the perceived image of Nigerian teachers from 100 adults in Lagos, found that they saw teachers as unhappy 37%, Boring; 20%, wretched 70% and poor 60%. Seventy two percent say that female teachers make good wives, 81% say that they make good mothers, 68% say that they are not fashionable, while 30% say that many teachers are not dedicated because of poor salary. However, 86% argue that teachers need upgrading and more attention because teachers build lives, they are performing a vital duty of socializing people and contributing their quota to the continuity and development of the society.

The inference here is that society has a negative impression of the status and attitude to work of the teachers and consequently poor expectations. This impression is based on the perceived status of teachers and their salary; which is poor. Here, one can argue that the attitude of teachers to work as observed by some interviewed members of society is caused by their salary; which is quite poor; thereby pushing them to seeking other ways of supplementing their meager income. This thus, looks like the case of the chicken and the egg and the question of which of them comes first.

Why are you a teacher: This was an interesting question; as the responses from 100 teachers from some public and private schools in Lagos show that 78% of the respondents are teaching because there is no better job for now, because the salary is quite poor. They are thus, likely to leave as soon as a better job comes up. Thirty eight percent like the working hours; which gives them more time for other interests. Sixteen percent of female teachers interviewed, say they are teaching because their husbands say so, 12% are teaching to gain experience to go and establish their own schools later, while 26% teach because they love interacting with children.

Will you encourage your children to become teachers:

Most of the teachers did not have to think much to answer the question on if they are likely to encourage

their children to become teachers. Eighty nine percent of the respondents say they will not encourage their children to become teachers, because their statuses and salaries are poor, while a mere 11% said that they may/will encourage their children, because they are building lives. This has a far reaching undertone of dissatisfaction. This is because if they love their profession, they will want their children to take to it.

How prepared are Nigerian teachers for UBE:

- Those who have gone to well equipped teachers' colleges; with well motivated personnel are given the standard training
- Fewer people are going for training as teachers, because of the salary and status
- Those who go for training as teachers do not really want to teach. Many of them end up in other better paying employments; like the financial sector, oil and gas and the manufacturing sector or civil service
- Many of the private universities do not have faculties of education
- The teachers colleges are usually not well equipped and this affects the products

Asking one hundred new part time education degree students, if they will like to teach after graduation, only 23 (23%) of them said they want to teach. Fifty two percent of them wanted admission into the university to earn a Degree and they were offered admission in the Faculty of Education and would rather do any other work than teaching. Eighteen percent wanted the education Degree to give them confidence and help them in their business enterprises, while the remaining 7 (7%) wanted the education Degree, so that they can establish and run a private school of their own.

The implication of this is that there will be shortage of trained teachers and manpower problem in the following ways.

Unstable teachers: These are teachers who come into teaching because it was the only job they could get, yet it is not well paying. Thus, they use teaching as a stop-gap; to at least give them some little money in their pockets, while looking for better and more lucrative jobs. Some of these teachers also move from one school to the other in search of improved pay and financial packages.

Untrained teachers: These are those who are employed by the schools in desperation. These schools need teachers and those with teachers' qualifications are not

usually available, so they manage those that have applied to them for employment. These candidates usually have degrees in Arts, Science, Social or management Sciences or sometimes, Higher National Diploma.

Sub-standard teachers: These are teachers, who have been so poorly trained from an ill-equipped school, by ill-motivated teachers and they come out of teachers' Colleges as half-baked teachers. They are thus, unable to teach properly.

Also asking the 100 teachers interviewed above how prepared they were for UBE program? 76 (76%) of them argue that they are capable and prepared for UBE, while the remaining 24% feel that they require at least some in-service-training to prepare them adequately for the UBE program. They unanimously 97%, however argued that the schools require a lot of infrastructure and equipment to make them more efficient and effective.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that:

- The 9-3-4 education program has good objectives
- There is shortage of trained teachers for the program because of poor salary
- There is shortage of equipment and infrastructure for the successful implementation of the UBE program
- Teachers have deep rooted dissatisfaction with their jobs; which manifests in their not wanting their children to become teachers, in the future
- Most of the products of Teachers' Training Colleges and Faculties of Education are not interested in becoming teachers after graduation, which results in the shortage of trained teachers in schools

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important for the federal government to look at the cost of schooling to the masses in Nigeria, because if they cannot pay the cost of educating their children, it will defeat the purpose of the UBE objectives.

- Teachers' condition of service, should be improved to make the profession attractive
- Government should assist in the equipment and infrastructural development of schools
- Teachers' colleges should be subsidized and their products should be bonded to teach for at least five years before being allowed to take up other employments

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