

MANAGING UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL COHESION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *The use of universal basic education (UBE) for implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) will agree with the modernity theorists that development is essentially socio-psychological process. A country thus becomes developed after its people have adopted modern attitudes, values and beliefs necessary for the existence of a modern man and society. This development gives rise to national cohesion because the major challenges of the society are properly addressed. Unarguably, education is a vital tool for achieving this but it must start from the foundation, the basic education level. This study therefore aimed at relating proper management of universal basic education with the attainment of national cohesion in Nigeria. Concepts of national cohesion, universal basic education in Nigeria and management of universal basic education for national cohesion were expounded. It was concluded that UBE, if properly managed, can foster national cohesion in Nigeria.*

Introduction

The drive for national cohesion is ripe for a country with an overheated political environment like Nigeria. Nigeria multi-ethnic factor with variegated economic cum political dimensions as well as a national religious bias would be a ready recipe for disunity of the nation. Okwueze, (2012) rightly stated that human beings that inhabit the world have different views about things and different desires. The result of these desires without the corresponding proper means of achieving those desires makes the world and social life fraught with conflicts and disunity. According to Dunga (2011), educational management involves some planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, coordination and budgeting. Educational management is synonymous with the strategizing, planning, organization, running, governance and supervision of the entire process of teaching and learning that takes place at all levels of the

formal education system. The challenge is therefore managing universal basic education so as to attain the much desired national cohesion in Nigeria. Logically, if education is a veritable tool for achieving national cohesion and unity, it must start from the foundation level, that is, the basic education level. It is also rational to assert that if basic education is a veritable tool for achieving national cohesion, it can only do his when it is properly managed. Thus, this work which is on managing universal basic education for national cohesion in Nigeria is, to say the least, very vital and most timely.

Concept of National Cohesion

The word “cohesion” Udeh (2014) means the act or state of sticking together; it is synonymous with unity. National cohesion may therefore, be stated as the search for a national formula for sticking all the component groups of a nation together, but not by enforcement of it. The need for finding a common solution for ensuring, and

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not enforcing, national cohesion through education cannot be over emphasized. This is further justified by the apathy and disaffection created by an over-heated political economy, resulting from the spillover of economic recession. These also created capacity under-utilization in particular and unemployment in general across the entire nation, (Bello, 2016). The idea, as envisaged in this study, is that education at the UBE level could be restructured to encompass various skills and competences that could engender competitiveness and ensure inclusion and productivity of the greater number of youths population in Nigeria. The search for the formula that would foster national cohesion among the 180 million Nigerian people is therefore prime. Nigerians were hitherto held together by economic and national interest before the civil war. No doubt, the civil war projected ethnic interest over and above national interest. The Civil War (1966-1970) awakened a consciousness in ethnic fragmentations as post-war development and integration failed to recreate national unity and cohesion. However, it is good to understand that what we see as the ethnic interest may eventually be the interest of the few self-centered individuals who orchestrate disunity in order to achieve their selfish aims. Okeleke (2012) hinted that the overall interest of the entire community may be affected through development and employment opportunities. The discovery of oil disenfranchised the people from their agricultural heritage as people begin to migrate from rural farms in search of white and blue collar jobs in the oil-rich cities of Nigeria.

The federal and state governments abandoned their economic mainstay in agriculture to receiving allocation from the Federal Government (a share in the proceeds of crude oil sales at international markets). The economic destiny of Nigeria and Nigerians became heavily dependent on export of crude oil, which prices fluctuate from time to time, thereby undermining the economic budget for emancipation of Nigerians through economic fortunes of Nigerians in terms of state

allocations, employment and socio-economic development. When the market crashed in the mid-eighties, the government had to lay off many workers, and private sector factories were shutdown and unprecedented unemployment ensued; the situation has scarcely abated rather it went on for the worst unemployment levels among many graduate citizens of Nigeria. The political leaders are more interested in the uses of oil proceeds as share of allocation to various federating units of the country, instead of building factories for processing raw crude and other raw agricultural materials before exporting to beef up the country's earnings from the international market. Unarguably, only education and indeed functional education can save Nigerians from this ugly menace.

Dunga (2011) defined education as the aggregate of all the processes through which a child develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to society. Hence, the focus of education is to equip the individuals with the knowledge, abilities, skills or behavior to enable them function in their immediate environment and the society at large. Education in general terms, is the process of transmitting societal norms, values and desirable attitudes from one generation to another. Education seeks to socialize individuals so as to equip them with the desired mode of behavior that is in conformity with the way of life of the society in which they live. Undoubtedly, good and functional education begins with the basic education. In Nigeria, the universal basic education (UBE) is the bedrock of the entire educational system. According to a UNESCO report (2001), basic education comprises both formal as well as a variety of informal public and private educational activities offered to meet the learning needs of groups of people of all ages, sex and status. Similarly, Omoke (2014), view basic education as live-long education that spans all fields of human endeavour. It is, therefore developmental, meeting the learning needs of all people. To achieve the developmental objectives of

developing nations such as Nigeria, basic education is supposed to be mainstreamed into the development goals. There is therefore, the need to orientate the educational managers, especially in developing countries to reflect societal needs-incorporating the entire section of the society. This is because the quality of this level of education affects every other levels hence, the need for proper management of this level of education. FGN/UNICEF (2001), was right, when they posited that the concept of participation is part of the culture of democracy. The rights of children and women to participate are grounded in the idea; that like any other human beings, they have the right to share in making of decisions which affect their lives and life of the community of which they are part.

Looking inwards, Nigeria must restructure by increasing capacities to encourage local production and discourage imports. National cohesion and unity start with equal access to free and compulsory basic education. Also required is equal employment opportunities and unhindered access to social welfare for all and sundry. Most advanced economies of the world operate social security systems (allowances paid by the government to persons above 18 years of age and classified as unemployed youths) for the purpose of reducing the effects of harsh economic down turns on youths, and avoid youths' restiveness. Other countries are equally reacting in response to economic malaise, with a view to reducing its negative impact on the citizens of their respective countries; the ultimate objective on the part of each country is to induce national stability by reducing unemployment and other preventive measures against social restiveness.

Nigeria cannot afford to be disunited more so, with the diverse ethnic setting that has been politically prejudiced. Udentia, (1999) hinted that men do what is expected of them in the society because if they fail to comply, they would be punished. One must not lose sight of the real cause or causes of problem; the best approach is to first

identify the primary cause or better still the potential cause of a latent national restiveness in order to be in a better position to proffer solutions of national unity. Problems identification would enable the leaders avoid the frustration of treating symptoms instead of the actual causes of the sickness in a patient. The socio-economic diagnosis must be properly conducted to avoid wasting economic resources on issues extravagant rhetorically on national orientations jingles that have little or no effect on the actual problem of national disaffection and apathy.

Every nation or any community of persons that desires growth and development, unity is a sine qua non. Thus, it is very important that leaders such as educational managers should pursue the objective of national unity, through visible impact of development in the lives of people they lead. From the beginning of the world up till this moment, there has never been any time a people rose beyond their educational status. This educational status starts from the basic or foundational education stage. According to Adeosun, (2018), national cohesion and unity in Nigeria have suffered much set back resulting from the Civil War in the 1960s, Niger-Delta terrorism, the clamor for the Republic of Biafra, Boko-haram insurgency and herdsmen attacks. Therefore national cohesion has always been subjected to question.

The formal education system has the inherent features that predispose learners of different family backgrounds, social statuses and religious inclinations. In the process, there results social integrating among students in their group of friends, and acquaintances. But because the integration is personal and informal, its post-school impact is usually not effective for fostering national unity and cohesion. The only way education could foster national cohesion is where education as a product is meaningfully accepted in the society for the effective emancipation of the school products (people who acquired the education), but where persons who graduated from school have no relevance in the society,

then educational efforts, would have failed to advance national cohesion.

The real life experiences according to Ozochi, (2010) is that there are people who are deprived of basic education due to religious and cultural reasons, while there are others who dropped at various levels of education. There are therefore, different forces operating within Nigerian socio-economic environment that inhibit the influence of consistence spread of educational privileges among Nigerians. Even where education could have served as a unifying factor, certain other extraneous variable very often interfere to disenfranchise some Nigerians from acquiring education. It is therefore, the view of this paper that if educational products are evenly distributed in a country, then its unifying features for producing national cohesion may be better perceived. Education is capable of unifying the recipients if the change in the recipient is consistent, but when some people dropped out for one reason or the other, education may not accomplish its role as a unifying agent among the people of any country. Again Ozochi, (2010) posited that accelerated social, political and economic development can hardly take place when greater population of Nigerians cannot read or write. This means that if it were possible for everyone to be educated in Nigeria to a reasonable level, say upper basic education (Junior Secondary School) level, then there could be tendencies that the level of understanding and integration would be fairly consistent. But where large numbers of the population are illiterates, it becomes a situation of trying to blend different incompatible elements of a nation to become compatible.

Nigeria is hybrid society with different units tightly knitted together through market system, with goods and services moving from north to south and south to north. Another unifying factor is the seeming prospering economic environments where market participants are at liberty to do their business anywhere. Tourism also is another facilitator of national cohesion. But where national politics is conflicting with religion, then the

hybrid function would be distorted because religion is not and would neither be a unifying factor nor a vehicle for national cohesion. If this is true then blending religious issues or matters with serious social, political and economic issues is to subjugate the interest of national unity to the whims and caprices of religious devices. This further reaffirms that education is the best tool for fostering national cohesion in Nigeria. But this education must be well managed especially at the Universal Basic Education level.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria

The Universal Basic Education(UBE) was flagged off on 30th September 1999 in Sokoto, Sokoto State by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. The programme is nine (9) year basic educational programme, which was launched and executed by the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. The scope of UBE included programmes and initiatives for early childhood care and education (ECCE), Six-year Primary Education, and three (3) years of Junior Secondary Education. The UBE Programme is Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals, (Bello, 2016). According to Hafiz (2015) the implementation process of the UBE has been on since 1999, but progress was hampered by lack of an enabling law to execute certain aspects of the programme. However, the national assembly passed the UBE Bill which was signed into law on 26th May 2004.

The UBE Act 2004 makes provision for basic education comprising of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Primary and Junior Secondary Education. The financing of basic education is the responsibility of States and local Governments. But the Federal Government has decided to intervene in the provision of basic education with two percent (2%) of its Consolidated Revenue Fund.

The Act also provides for the establishment of the Universal Basic Education commission (UBEC) to co-ordinate the implementation of the programme at the states and local government through the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) of each state and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was formally established on 7th October 2004. The vision statement of the UBE is to be a world class education intervention and regulatory agency for the promotion of uniform, qualitative and functional basic education in Nigeria. While the mission statement is to operate as an intervention, coordinating and monitoring Agency to progressively improved the capacity of states, local Government Agencies and communities in the provision of unfettered access to high qualitative basic education in Nigeria (Ndolo, 2015).

Another attempt in defining universal basic education was during the Dakar education conference (2000). That conference has stated that basic education encompasses not only primary education, but also early childhood programme, using both formal and informal approaches, it must take account of the needs of the poor and most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads and other linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflicts, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health and those with special needs. These observations are that the UBE, in scope and content should not be discriminatory in application, ages, sex, educational level or status are, therefore, no hindrances to the right of basic education for a process of human development which is measurable, sustainable and environmentally friendly, the role of basic education in providing the necessary skills, knowledge, information and right attitudes will, therefore, be invaluable.

The objectives of UBE in Nigeria are as follows;

- i. Ensure unfettered access to nine (9) years of formal basic education.

- ii. The provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school age.
- iii. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- iv. Ensuring the acquisition of 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.

From the foregoing, basic education in Nigeria encompasses those skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for an individual to adapt and function effectively in his immediate environment. The global and dynamic nature of the society has created the need for skills and knowledge to be updated for one to hold onto his position or advance. This nature of education was noted during the world education for all (EFA) conference in jometein, Thailand in 1990. The conference rang a death-knell on the traditionally rigid, perspective education system and ushered in an era, where flexibility could thrive in planning and administration of educational programmes. Consequently, education is no longer meant for any age bracket.

According to the UBE report (2001) the universal aspect of basic education has the following implications:

- a. Inclusiveness: Implying that persons in all manners and conditions of physical, spatial and psychological existence will benefit from programme.
- b. Special attention to special groups: Implying that special needs of all sectors of the population will be taken into account.
- c. Encouragement for the provision of facilities for early childhood education and development with due attention given to the need of specific social groups and geographical zones of the country,

bearing in mind the need of specific groups and geopolitical zones of the country, bearing in mind the need to lay solid foundation for life-long learning from early childhood. Hence, UBE can foster national cohesion.

Universal Basic Education and National Cohesion in Nigeria

Unarguably, development and indeed human development is the key factor in bringing about national cohesion in any country. The best way to appreciate the role of UBE in promoting national cohesion is to expound the concept of development. Development has been defined as a process of both economic and social transformation based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interaction. Ituma (2010) highlighted some indices that determine a developed nation. These, include what Ituma described as increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resource and ideology, physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelters), Employment, and equity, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education gender equality, sustainable development and peace. The above indicators no doubt, show how people are at the centre of all development processes. According to the United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR) (2009), human development is all about putting people at the centre of development. It is all about realizing their potential, increasing their choices and enjoying their freedom to live the lives they value.

This new approach to development focuses more attention to measures and strategies to reduce poverty and inequality and to realization of the potentials of human personality. Thus, human development agenda have become a development paradigm which focuses on empowering the individual with the knowledge and skill to face the social challenges that may hinder his/her productivity. Undoubtedly, human resources is the most essential and vital of the major resources for development

because with it in place, financial, physical, information and other resources can be substantially harnessed. As Rahji (2010) puts it, the human resources of a nation are considered to be the engine of growth of the country.

Harrison (2011) defined human resource development as the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills and the capacity of all the people in the society for promoting its economic, political, and social growth. Evidently, the greatest tool for human development is education. The role of education in bringing about human development cannot be over-emphasized. This role definitely starts with a good foundation at the basic education level. Hence, the needed orientation in basic education are to ensure that:

- a. Education does not have only academic purposes, it should also enable the educators and learners to learn to live healthy in the world with HIV and AIDS and other health risks.
- b. Educational institutions are not only venues for teaching and learning, but can be centers of support for learners and educators to promote referrals to school services.
- c. Policy management and system should provide guidance, oversight and coordination to ensure effective, suitable and institutionalized educational responses to health challenges.
- d. Educational content, curriculum and materials should emphasize value clarification, capacity development and skill-building to enable learners to adopt learning and supportive attitude to others and protective and health seeking behaviours for themselves.
- e. Learning outcome should not only address academic performance, but should also be directed to the full development of human potentially and to ensure that education is a life-long process and in all social contexts (family, school, work place and community)

To the above, UBE programme activities in Nigeria have led to:

- i. Transformation of the educational terrain as it affects basic education in the area of school infrastructural development. This has been achieved through judicious use of FGN-UBE intervention funds. For the first time Basic Education has a quantum of funds being pumped in by Federal and State Governments.
- ii. Improved infrastructural development led to increased access to basic education.
- iii. Teacher Professional Development being accorded priority attention as a percentage of the intervention fund goes directly to in-service training of teachers in all states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT).
- iv. Education of the girl-child and other disadvantaged groups being given greater attention than ever before.
- v. Effective monitoring of UBE implementation to ensure quality, (Bello, 2016).

Furthermore, the UBE commission tracks utilization of UBE Intervention and States Counterpart Funds based on the level of utilization. During the period 2005-2009 the following have been provided through the utilization of the UBE Intervention and Counterpart Funds in 36 States and FCT.

1. Infrastructural Development
 - a. Construction of new classrooms = 41,009
 - b. Renovations (Classrooms) = 59,444
 - c. Provision of furniture (Pupils and Teachers) = 1,139,196 sets
 - d. Construction of toilets = 14 769
 - e. Sinking of boreholes = 996
2. Provision of Instructional/ Play Materials = 77,570,540
3. Teacher professional development = 1,493,352 teachers trained

4. Provision of Primaries 4 & 5 Textbooks in Mathematics, English Language and Activity Based Science = 16,356,812
5. Assorted Library Resource Materials for JSS = 1,710,091
6. Deliverables from Special Education (Physically Challenged Children Fund)
 - a. Number of Schools/Centers that have benefitted = 368
 - b. Enrolment = 20,639
 - c. Classrooms = 710
 - d. Resource Rooms = 344
 - e. Boreholes/Hand pumps = 36
 - f. Toilets/ bathrooms = 263
 - g. Furniture (Pupils) = 3,616 sets
 - h. Furniture (Teachers) = 1,259 sets
 - i. Bedding = 2,266
 - j. Instructional Materials = 75,255
 - k. Equipment (Computers, wheelchairs, Braille Machine, TV sets, radio sets etc = 14,641
 - l. Teachers trained = 6,247

With all these achievements it is obvious that universal basic education, if managed properly has the potentials for fostering national cohesion in Nigeria.

Managing Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

It is imperative that educational managers in Nigeria generally and at UBE in particular should take cognizance of the global trend in education to renew and re-direct our educational programmes to be more functional and target oriented. To do this effectively, the knowledge of various human development approaches and theory implication to educational planning become necessary. The key in determining economic performance is to the participation of the individual in the new global economy. This school of thought is of the belief that educational training is an investment to produce the man with necessary skill to alter the work and wages individual receive.

According to Abdullahi (2015) management of the universal basic education in Nigeria is coordinated by the UBE Commission. The UBE Commission (UBEC) is federal Governments Agency saddled with the responsibility for coordinating all aspects of UBE programme implementation. The vision of the UBE commission is to be world-class education intervention and regulatory agency for the promotion of uniform, qualitative and functional basic education in Nigeria. The mission of the UBE commission to operate to operate as an intervention, coordinating and monitoring Agency to progressively improve the capacity of State, Local Government Agencies and Communities in the provision of unfettered access to high quality basic education in Nigeria. Cores values of the UBE commission include honesty and accountability, integrity and transparency, team work and commitment. UBE programmes are implemented through close collaborative partnerships between UBEC and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBS), Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) and Basic Education stakeholders at all levels.

Also important in the management of UBE in Nigeria are the various school heads, that is, head teachers and the principals. These administrators (head teachers and the principals) are major in the field. They interface with the parents, learners, environment and other stakeholders. They bridge the gap between the government and the people at the grass root. The need to train and re-train these managers to make them conversant with the objectives of UBE cannot be overemphasized.

Conclusion

With the exploration of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the United Nation has drawn up a blueprint for educational planners, in terms of human capital requirements, in empowering all sections of the society to grapple with the basic human needs. Development outcomes and policies which play critical roles in enabling educational system should be vigorously

pursued to make the individual a center article of faith. The implication of this is that educational managers, especially at UBE level are to address the objectives of education toward the country's manpower needs. Educational programmes, therefore, nee to be expanded beyond the narrow and rigid restrictions, to boarder scope in content and universality in application. The UNESCO perspective is that, "basic education is to be addressed in terms of goals, as a means of equipping the individual with the knowledge, skills and attitude to make him among others, live meaningful and fulfilling lives and for one to discharge his civic responsibilities competently". This perspective should guide the management of our universal basic education. When this is guaranteed by all stakeholders generally and UBE managers in particular, we can be sure that national cohesion can be substantially harnessed in Nigeria.

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