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BASIC EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Landmarks developments in the Nigerian basic education sector during the post military era include the declaration of the UBE which in 1999, extended free and compulsory schooling policy from 6 to 9 years. The UBE Act 2004 provides a legal framework for Federal Government intervention in the sector, as well as the institutional arrangement for the management of the UBE funds. Despite Nigeria commitment to basic education for national development, there are still some contending issues and challenges militating against effective delivery of basic education for National transformation. This paper, therefore, examines some of these issues and challenges such as inadequate coverage and unsatisfactory level of meaningful access at all levels of basic education; poor quality and relevance; infrastructural insufficiency; inefficient management and systems; unsustainable funding and inadequate resourcing; as well as negative impact of nutritional deficiencies and poor health on physical and cognitive development. The paper likewise proffers some recommendations as a way forward in ensuring National transformation through Basic Education which include removal of bottleneck in accessing funds meant to implement Basic Education programmes and projects; and that data collection on basic education generally should be intensified in order to stock current data for planning and decision making by the necessary agencies in charge.

Keywords: Basic education, National transformation, Nigerian education

Introduction

Positive growth and development of any given society rest on values that it uses to regulate the life of its members. Based on this, the National Educational Policy in Nigeria seeks a veritable ideal society. It “adopts education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development” through its relevance to the needs of the individuals as well as in terms of the kind of society desired in relation to the environment and the realities of the modern world and rapid social changes (FRN, 2004). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria recognises the right to education of every Nigerian. Indeed, the United Nations (UN) in 1948 recognised education as a Human Right. In 1990 the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which was ratified by Nigeria in 1991 (FRN, 1999). The CRC advocates the right of every child to survival, protection and development. This implies the right of all children to participate in education of good quality no matter their situation (UNICEF/FRN, 2010).

Basic Education in Nigeria

On 30th September, 1999, four months after he was sworn in as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Sokoto, Sokoto state. The UBE was different from the previous UPE in many ways. The UBE covers the six years of primary school and three years of Junior Secondary School (JSS). This is unlike the Universal Primary Education (UPE) which covered only the primary schools. The UBE, as a policy of the federal government also covers the entire country (Arikewuyo, 2002).

The concept of Basic Education is not completely new to Nigerian society. It has assumed a global significance and its meanings have been broadened. The expanded vision of UBE comprises the universalising of access and promotion of equity, focusing on learning and enhancing the environment of learning and strengthening partnerships (Yoloye, 2004).

Basic Education, according to the Jometien Declaration and Framework of Action on Education for All, is not defined in terms of years of schooling; neither it is limited to formal schooling. It sees education in its broadest sense of a close articulation between the formal, the non formal and informal approaches to and structures for the awakening of all round development of the human potentials. The broad aim is to lay the foundations for life- long learning through the inculcation of the appropriate learning-to-learn, self awareness and life skills (Federal Ministry of Education, 2000).

Consequently, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) through the National Policy on Education defines Basic Education as a nine year duration course comprising six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education. "It shall be free and compulsory; it shall also include adults and non formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out-of-school youths" (FRN, 2004, p.13). The specific goals of basic education, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), shall be the same as the goals of the primary, junior secondary, adult and non-formal education.

The objectives of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria are:

1. developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
2. the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age,
3. reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
4. catering for young persons who for one reason or another has had to interrupt their schooling as well as out-of-school children/adolescents, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
5. ensuring 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 Ministry of Education, 2000).

Basic education as a transformational tool

The term “transformation” is derived from Latin roots ‘trans’ meaning across, or more loosely to change and ‘forma’ (that which has been shaped) (Sofoluwe, Akinsolu, & Kayode (2012). Webster Dictionary (2004) defined transformation as an act, process, or instance of change in structure, appearance, or character, a conversion, revolution, makeover, alteration, or renovation. Whichever meaning one adopts, it is clear that the term connotes some process and intent surrounding a profound, deep, intense, and

alter and “make a difference” in a given reality (Mazade, 2005).

Transformation has often been characterized with “quantum change” (Miller & Friesen, 1982), “second order change” (Bartunek, 1984; Bartunek & Reid, 1992), “re-creation” (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985), “restructuring” Hinings, Greenwood & Cooper, 1999), “reorientation (Greenwood & Hinings, 1988), “evolution” (Tushman & Romanelli, 2008), “frame-breaking” (Nadler & Tushman, 1989), and “revolutionary change” (AJA, 2004) in Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009).

The basic education according to Adesina (2011) serves as the fundamental level of all other formal education by providing the children with a good preparatory ground for education (p.104). It is therefore referred to as the key to the success or failure of the whole educational edifice as all other systems of education are built upon it. It is however generally acknowledged that the introduction of compulsory primary education in Europe in the 19th century has been a crucial factor for social and economic development in the area and it has affected not only the wages but also broadened workforce outcomes such as participation in the formal labour market (Ayogu, 2007; Jaiyeola, 2007).

Justifying the importance of basic education, the world development report (2000/2001) according to Adesina (2011) indicated that the biggest problem of poverty besides the lack of fund is lack of power directly related to a lack of knowledge worldwide where almost one billion people lack the basic skill to acquire knowledge (illiterate). According to Peter (2005), they are illiterate because they had no primary education or because the quality of their education is too low.

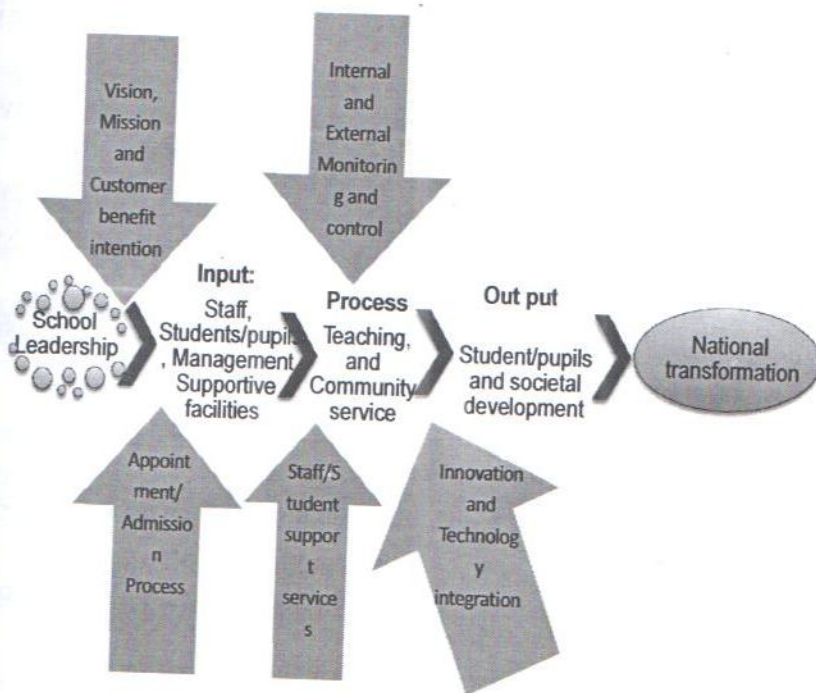


Fig. 1 Transformational Process of Basic Education in Nigeria. Adapted from Sofoluwe, Akinsolu & Kayode (2012).

Nigeria's Commitment to Basic Education

The United Nation Children's Fund/ Federal Republic of Nigeria (UNICEF/FRN, 2011) in their Situational Report (SITAN Report) outlines the Federal Government's commitment

to Basic Education. Government continues to show commitment to the eradication of illiteracy and improvement of the quality of basic education. Education is a key component of Federal Government's transformational Agenda and a fundamental aspect of the Vision 20-2020, which the government is now strategically pursuing so as to improve quality of learning outcomes. Landmarks developments in the Nigerian basic education sector during the post military era include the declaration of the UBE which in 1999:

- increased investments in basic education have resulted into gradual increase in Nigerian children's access to basic education. Girls, rural and other disadvantaged groups are benefiting from basic education.
- extended free and compulsory schooling policy from 6 to 9 years;
- the UBE Act 2004 provides a legal framework for Federal Government intervention in the sector, as well as the institutional arrangement for the management of the UBE funds;
- the disarticulation policy whereby junior secondary education is separated from senior secondary was meant to align the secondary education subsector with the national policy requirements;
- there is a recent review of the basic education curriculum, to improve its responsiveness to emerging global and technological demands;
- there is also the implementation of improved Salary Scale for Teachers (TSS), which has improved the stability of the academic calendar for most of the States.

of Nigeria's developmental aspirations. This has increased the impetus for Nigeria to accelerate the development of basic education sub-sector.

Persistent Challenges in Basic Education in Nigeria

Despite the introduction of some progressive and child friendly policies by the government,

These factors manifest as poor access and participation in terms of school enrolment,

including infrastructural facilities and learning materials, relevance of curriculum, adequacy of teacher supply and competency, and children's learning outcomes.

Poor access and participation

Although it is obvious that all primary school-age-children are not in school, this may be associated with cultural, economic, religious and gender issues. In addition, it is observed that the girls are more disadvantaged in enrolment virtually in all geopolitical zones.

As shown in Table 1, the total number of primary schools in 2008 was 54,434. The point it was since 2006 (NBS, 2009). Pupils enrolment dropped by 1.56 percent in 2008 from the 2007 figure. This situation could be responsible for a drop of 21.74 percent in teacher/pupil ratio within the same period which amounted to a healthier development. Total number of classrooms also remained the same (319,590) in 2008 as it was 2 years back (2006).

Table 1 National summary of primary school statistics in Nigeria

Year	2004	2005	2006*	2007*	2008*
Total Schools	60,189	60,189	54,434	54,434	54,434
Total Enrolment	21,395,510	22,115,432	23,017,124	21,632,070	21,294,517
Total Male Enrolment	11,824,494	12,189,073	12,575,689	11,683,503	11,483,843
Total Female Enrolment	9,571,016	9,926,359	10,441,435	9,948,567	9,810,575
Total Teachers	591,474	599,172	586,749	468,202	586,930
Total Male Teachers	291,384	294,434	323,798	241,826	300,931
Total Female Teachers	300,090	304,738	262,951	226,376	285,999
Total Classrooms	254,319	254,319	319,590	319,590	319,590
Teacher/Pupil Ratio	36	37	39	46	36

Sources: Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja/Universal Basic Education Commission, Abuja.

Note: * Provisional (Public Primary Schools only).

Nomadic Education Programme (NEP)

Greater commitment to the universalisation of access to basic education heightened interest in the provision of quality basic education to nomadic and other educationally disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. This segment of the population has serious limitations to equitable access to basic education through the conventional education system due to their occupational and socio-cultural peculiarities.

According to NBS (2009), the total recorded nomadic schools in 2008 was put at 2289, a decrease of 5.65 percent from 2007 record. Total enrolment also decreased by 3.93 percent, although the total number of teachers increased significantly within the same period (2008) by 39.17 percent. The total number of classrooms has also increased by 1.55 percent. However, the pupil/teacher ratio decreased by 2.94 percent which could be a direct effect of the decrease in pupils' enrolment and increase in teachers' engagement

over the same period. Bauchi State had most of the teachers followed by Kaduna State as shown in table 3.15, while Kano State followed by plateau State recorded the largest pupils' enrolments with 39,225 pupils and 32,105 pupils respectively.

School Based Management Committee (SBMC) and Community Participation

In order to improve school governance and encourage community participation, SBMCs have been established in all schools. However, except for the GEP and a few other States, SBMCs have not been trained or adequately empowered on their mandates. There is also a threat to their sustenance in states where members expect some form of remuneration. Though, SBMCs are expected to support School Development Planning and school based resources management; many states have not deployed resources especially funds, to schools.

Teacher Quality and Relevance

The various projects and programmes of the NTI and NCCE, specifically designed to ensure the realization of basic education goals and conformity with the new policies/curricular demands include the Special Teacher Upgrading Programme (STUP); execution of Federal Teachers Scheme in conjunction with UBEC; capacity building for teachers under the MDGs and the Pivotal Teacher Training Programme (PTTP) organised in collaboration with State Governments. NCCE has developed guidelines for implementing the new basic education curriculum and for institutional management of the COEs. Impact Assessment of all these training has not been conducted in identifying all necessary gaps to improve learning outcomes in schools.

In the study carried out by Ndaga (2007) on the preparation, availability, distribution and retention of primary and secondary school teachers in Borno state, it was revealed that 74.4% of the primary school teachers are non-professional teachers while 27.1 % of the secondary school teachers are also regarded as non-professional teachers. This was also reflected in the National Bureau of Statistics provided by the federal ministry of education in 2009 where only 58% of the primary school teachers are qualified with minimum of NCE certificate examination. The breakdown is shown in table 2.

Institutional Efficiency

There is low institutional efficiency as evidenced in human resource gaps and the absence of requisite technical capacities in supervisory institutions. This shortcoming is more prevalent in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Education Management Information System applications.

Table 2

Quality of Primary School Teachers by State, 2006

STATE	Graduate+NCE		Below NCE		Unspecified	Grand Total	% of Qualified
	Total	Total	Total	Total			
Abia	6,277	4,027	10,304	331	10,635	61	
Adamawa	5,929	10,041	15,970	1,541	17,511	37	
Ado Irom	11,441	3,692	15,133	157	15,290	76	
Agbora	10,421	1,174	11,595	847	12,442	90	
Akwai	2,646	10,111	12,757	1,393	14,150	21	
Bayelsa	1,590	2,460	4,050	366	4,438	39	
Benue	14,662	6,249	20,911	136	21,049	70	
Borno	6,880	7,539	13,419	1,960	15,399	44	
Cross River	8,143	6,494	14,637	515	15,152	56	
Delta	10,596	4,390	14,986	550	15,536	71	
Ebonyi	2,947	5,673	8,620	184	8,804	34	
Edo	7,959	1,793	9,752	224	9,976	82	
Ekiti	7,740	820	8,560	110	8,670	90	
Enugu	9,147	3,491	12,638	293	12,931	72	
Gombe	3,043	6,221	9,264	1,238	10,502	33	
Ibo	11,012	2,327	13,339	461	13,800	63	
Imo	2,403	6,911	9,314	1,770	11,084	26	
Kaduna	11,612	14,210	25,822	4,347	30,169	45	
Kano	7,014	19,689	26,703	6,501	33,204	26	
Katsina	4,993	9,390	14,373	3,632	18,005	35	
Kebbi	2,966	6,759	9,725	1,753	11,478	30	
Kogi	13,237	4,017	17,254	539	17,793	77	
Kwara	12,246	3,367	15,613	637	16,250	78	
Lagos	13,270	1,542	14,812	427	15,239	90	
Nasarawa	5,026	5,442	10,468	1,266	11,734	48	
Niger	6,345	12,573	18,918	1,097	20,015	34	
Ogun	12,118	2,706	14,824	349	15,173	82	
Ondo	9,454	1,970	11,424	200	11,624	83	
Osun	11,658	774	12,432	177	12,609	94	
Oyo	23,231	3,213	25,444	411	25,855	88	
Plateau	8,335	8,292	16,627	1,693	18,320	50	
Rivers	7,125	1,329	8,451	268	8,722	84	
Sokoto	1,767	6,235	8,002	2,873	10,875	22	
Taraba	5,616	11,565	17,181	863	18,044	33	
Yobe	1,578	4,622	6,200	1,205	7,405	25	
Zamfara	1,515	5,236	6,753	1,294	8,047	22	
FCT	4,801	863	5,664	200	5,864	85	
TOTAL	285,743	287,139	492,942	41,852	534,794	58	

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja

Adult Literacy Rate

The 2006 population census suggests a growth rate of 2.3% per annum with the age distribution showing that persons aged 15 years and below constitutes about 45% of the 140 million Nigerians while those of 60 years and above are just 3.3%. Literacy rate is 70.8% consisting of 63.8% for females and 77.8% among males. Serious gender inequalities exist in educational attainment and a huge disparity exists nationally between men and

women: as at 2005, literacy rate for adult men was 57% while for adult women; it was 43% (UNESCO, 2010). The total enrolment in adult literacy education in 2008 in Nigeria was recorded as 1,129,365, a 39.24 percent decrease from the previous year (NBS, 2009). Female enrolment took a larger proportion of the total with 50.35 percent than that of the male. The larger enrolment was recorded in Osun State with 6.96 percent, followed by Kano State with 6.69 percent. The least was recorded in Ekiti State with 0.18 percent.

Performance Management

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is yet to institute compulsory examinations for teachers that wish to renew their registration, as required by its mandate. There is weak reward system to serve as adequate motivational spur. Only few States and the FME have instituted annual merit award for teachers. However, the adoption and implementation of the new Teachers Salary Scale (TSS) by the Federal Government and States have greatly reduced agitations and incidences of threat of strike actions.

Education Management Information System (EMIS) Development

EMIS is still very weak in the states. A number of factors, including low commitment of top management, sometimes resulting from low awareness on the import of data, low demand for data, lack of evidence-based decision-making and planning are responsible. This situation has resulted in poor funding and irregular Annual School Census. Other factors that constrained sustainable EMIS include, skills gaps in data management, weak capacity of Head teachers in completing school census forms, poor record keeping competencies among teachers and lack of synergy of data collection agencies resulting in multiple data collection and release of inconsistent data by agencies. One of the Departments for international development's (DFID) initiatives in basic education focuses specifically on Nigeria Educational Management Information System (NEMIS) development. A technical support

Management of UBE

There is crisis in the management of existing structure for the UBE scheme at state level. The conferment of authority to manage UBE resources on State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) completely cuts out State Ministry of Educations (SMOEs) from UBE Funds. This crisis threatens the success of the basic education programme.

Conclusion

Many studies have revealed the role of basic education in the transformational process of any country and it is of no doubt that, if the aforementioned issues and challenges in this paper are urgently and technically addressed; basic education will become a significant instrument for the transformation of Nigeria in terms of its social, political, moral and economic advancement . It is, therefore, obvious that the government alone cannot do all these; parents and the community members need to play their own roles towards resolving the issues and challenges in basic education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

As UBE is critical to the attainment of EFA and MDGs, it is, therefore, recommended that the Federal Government needs to be more proactive in addressing all the identified challenges. The following are hereby recommended:

- Teacher/Caregiver supply to all sub sectors should be improved
- Infrastructural facilities should urgently be provided for all primary schools in Nigeria
- Learning materials should be supplied to all schools
- Bottle necks should be removed to facilitate accessing of fund meant to plement Basic Education programmes and projects
- Every school in Nigeria should have copies of Basic Education curriculum and the teachers' guide
- NEMIS and EMIS should intensify data collection on basic education generally in order to stock current data for planning and decision making
- Parents, especially those residing in rural communities need persistent advocacy to enable their children have access to basic education
- Government should enforce the UBE Law to ensure that all children of school-age access their right to basic education.

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