

AN EXAMINATION OF CHALLENGES FACING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UBE PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA: SUGGESTED COURSE OF ACTION

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ABSTRACT

It is hardly debatable that implementation is the bane of public policies and programmes in Nigeria. A well formulated policy or programme is useless, if not properly implemented as its stated objectives will not be realised. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was introduced in Nigeria in September 1999 by the Obasanjo administration. Twenty-one years after inception, the programme is still bedeviled by a number of implementation problems. This paper examines some of the major constraints impeding the effective implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria. The paper then suggests some courses of action, to facilitate the successful implementation of the programme. Secondary sources of data collection with personal experience of the writer were called to bear on the findings of this paper.

Keywords: Basic Education, Implementation, Nigeria Policy, Programme, Universal Basic Education.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country blessed with abundant human and material resources which contribute to raising the standard of living of its people and industrial establishment. Education, as a process whereby individuals are provided with means, tools and knowledge for understanding their society and its structures is a priceless asset of fundamental importance to the individual and the nation (Ajaegbo & Ibezim, 2011).

As primary education is the foundation of all other levels of education, it has been recognized by the government of Nigeria as the key to the success of the whole education system. The government has also put in a great deal of efforts in order to fashion out an educational system that would be able to liberate her citizens from mass poverty, illiteracy, and other ills of underdevelopment (Aba, 2013).

In order to develop, a country must have a very considerable proportion of trained educated citizens and not only as medical doctors, engineers, teachers, agriculturalists, scientists and the like, but also create a new class sufficiently large and strong to establish its own values of justice, merit, flexibility and efficiency (Curle, 2000). For education to be potent and useful, it must have to be designed according to the prevailing needs of that particular society. This explains why the Nigerian educational system has since independence, gone through series of reviews to commend it to the prevailing needs of the Nigerian society. From independence till now, the National Policy on Education for the nation's educational practices has been reviewed several times. The revision has led to the evolvement of many educational systems namely: the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976, the 6-3-3-4 of 1982, Universal Basic Education (UBE) of 2000 simply called 3-9-4.

Basic education means the type of education, in quality and content, that is given at the first level of education. However, there are variations in its scope and duration, from country to country. In Nigeria for instance, basic education was equated with six years of primary schooling in the past. Currently, basic education is extended to include the three years of junior secondary school. Universal Basic Education (UBE) is conceived to embrace formal education up to age 14 or 15 as well as adult nomadic and non-formal education of the marginalized groups within the Nigerian society.

In a clear form, Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a reformed programme in Nigeria's basic education delivery (from primary one all through to junior secondary school class 3) and is to reinforce the implementation of the National Policy on Education (NPE), in order to provide greater access and ensure quality throughout the federation, as it is free and compulsory (Adomeh, Arhedo & Omoike, 2007). UBE is a scheme and process of fulfilling the aim of Education For All (EFA) as endorsed at the World Conference on Education held in Jomiteien in 1990. According to the world conference on education, basic education is made free and available to all and sundry, thus emphasizing free access, equality, efficiency, literacy, numeracy and life skills for all. This paper therefore examines certain challenges facing the implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria, with suggested actions.

Challenges facing the implementation of UBE Programme

The educational system in Nigeria has overtime faced many challenges, including those related to the implementation of the UBE programme. Factors responsible for the implementation problems of UBE programme in Nigeria are examined within the framework of the conceptual model of implementation propounded by Horn and Meter (1975).

Policy Standards and objectives

Nigerian government at all levels is characterized by fanciful policy formulation, but with ineptitude in setting into motion the necessary machinery for its implementation. To Ejere (2011), a general policy problem in Nigeria is that of inadequate and poor data which poses planning difficulties and invariably implementation challenges of projects and programmes. The source reiterated with respect to the UBE programme that unreliable data makes it difficult to make adequate projections in terms of expected enrolment, required teachers, infrastructural needs and equipment. These, without reasonable doubt, are needed for evidence based on planning and budgeting for basic education. An action plan, which is one of the conditions that the UBE requires each state government to fulfill prior to accessing available UBE intervention funds (UBE-IF), is most at times neglected by state governments. Failure of many states to meet up with the condition of coming up with an action plan as when due impedes the effective implementation of the UBE programme.

Policy Resource

Inadequacy of policy resources tends to undermine the successful implementation of the UBE programme. Many researchers such as Opoh (2011) and Mezieobi, Fubara and Mazieobi (2013) revealed that overcrowding and shortage of classrooms (a situation where students learn under tree shades), poor sanitation facilities and teaching equipment are militating against effective teaching and learning in the schools. According to Isangedighi (2007), the teacher is a significant factor in the quality and standard of education at all levels. But the basic education level in Nigeria according to Ejere (2011) is plagued by acute shortage of professionally qualified teachers. Sadly, Oloruntoyin (2011) stressed that many of the buildings were erected in the late 1950s and early 1960s with mud blocks. Today they are not only a health hazard but also potential death traps. In fact, in many areas, classes are held in the open during the dry season, and when the rainy season sets in, children are crowded into the few available ramshackle buildings.

Inter-governmental Communications and Enforcement

Based on the Universal Basic Education Commission Standard Action Plan, various government agencies at the three levels of governance in Nigeria - federal, state and local government are involved in the implementation of the UBE programme. However, it has been observed that many agencies/parastatals involved in the UBE implementation have brought about fragmentation and conflict of roles/responsibilities (Ejere, 2011).

Though the federal government takes the lead in setting policy and financing basic education through transfers to states, financial responsibility for basic education is split largely between the states and local governments. Local Governments, for instance, are charged with paying the salaries and allowances of primary school teachers. Despite the shared responsibility for UBE financing by the three tiers of government, funding has remained a problem.

Another case in point is the lukewarm attitude of many state governments to the Federal Teachers Scheme (FTS) that is meant to assist them with needed manpower. Despite the importance of the FTS to quality UBE delivery, numerous teachers under the scheme have suffered untold hardship in their states of deployment particularly with regard to accommodation which the states are to provide. To make matters worse, in some states (Cross River inclusive) when UBE teachers finish their mandatory 2 years' service, they are not automatically absorbed into the teaching service as envisaged.

The Characteristics of Implementing Agencies

Policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria are often plagued by a number of factors. Very often, laudable policies formulated by government go into thin air at the implementation stage. The effectiveness of policy implementation is largely determined by the efficiency and competence of governmental implementing agencies. Because corruption is of serious concern in the Nigerian society, the issues of proper utilization of funds and accountability are critical. It is obvious that not all funds allocated for the UBE programme are used for the intended purposes due to high level of corruption in key implementing agencies and wasteful spending. Today, most primary and junior secondary schools in many parts of Nigeria are not being effectively monitored and supervised by the appropriate agencies in order to maintain uniform national minimum standards.

Therefore, Nigeria cannot be said to possess the required executive capacity to effectively implement the UBE programme on a national scale, as there is lack of high quality personnel in the implementing agencies especially at the state and local government levels. In evaluating the UBE, Santcross, Hinchliffe, Williams, and Onibon (2009) report that the Nigerian education sector suffers from weak capacity at the institutional, organizational and individual levels.

The Economic, Social and Political Conditions

Owing to the nature of primary education and the school system in general, government gives less attention to issues of funding, provision of infrastructure and supply of qualified and experienced teachers. Given the obvious importance of teachers, problems in supporting newly qualified teachers and a lack of career development opportunities in school settings often combine to make teachers' effectiveness difficult. Policy environment is a critical factor in policy implementation. Dwindling economic fortunes worsen the problem of underfunding of the programme.

Suggested Course of Action for Effective Implementation of UBE Programme

For a programme to solve the social problem for which purpose it was designed, successful implementation is imperative. The following strategies could be adopted to ensure the successful implementation of the UBE programme.

a) **Human Resources:**

According to Isangedighi (2007), the teacher is a decisive element for any instructional setting that decides the mood of the class. His qualification and experience determine his productivity. In most cases Nigerian basic school teachers who are overloaded with the task of teaching the students are not even qualified to teach (Opoh, Unimna & Ogbaji, 2014). To overcome this problem of acute shortage of qualified teachers to cope with expected increase in students' number, there is need for the training of teachers in the right quantity and quality. They should also be made to benefit from training and capacity building for the acquisition of pedagogical skills.

b) **Financial Resources:**

A major challenge facing the UBE and implementation of the curriculum at this level is funding in the midst of rising demands and cost of education. To address this worsening problem, governments at the local, state and national levels must shoulder responsibility for boosting basic education by allocating more funds to the sector. Adedeji, Okemakinde, and Sempebwa, (2008) affirm that finance is one of the problems confronting the education sector, despite UNESCO's recommendations of allocation of 26% of a nation's national income to the sector. Contrary to this recommendation, Nigeria allotted just 6.4%, 7.5%, 8.4%, 8.7% and 10.69% of her annual budgets to education in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 in that order. Ladan (2012) reported that the low level of fiscal allocation to the sector which is below UNESCO's threshold of 26% of the total budget certainly affects the implementation of government policy on education in the country and in particular the Universal Basic Education since its inception. UNESCO's recommendation of 26% should therefore be adhered to.

c) **Infrastructure:**

To enhance the learning environment, massive investment in school infrastructure improvements is needed. There is need for a complete overhaul of primary education infrastructural facilities, monitoring of its leadership, teachers and use of resources for education by multi-stakeholder's forum. Every primary and junior secondary school according to Ejere (2011) should be provided with adequate infrastructure and other physical facilities like classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computer centres, potable water, electricity, toilets and furniture.

d) **Quality Assurance:**

Nigeria is a country with a culture of anything goes, characterized by utter neglect and abandonment of projects without a call to order. Quality control through effective monitoring and proper evaluation should be conducted on a regular basis at the various stages of the UBE programme. More attention should be paid to school inspection, monitoring and evaluation as a quality strategy to check the quality of delivery of the UBE programme (Ejere, 2011).

e) **Social Mobilization and Enforcement:**

The success of UBE plan depends on the commitment and support from stakeholders such as parents, community members, teachers, church and donor agencies, and all levels of government. There is need to ensure sustained community participation and ownership of basic education. As such, public enlightenment and social mobilization should be a continuous process in UBE implementation, so as to engineer full participation by all sections of the Nigeria society particularly at the community level.

f) **Data**

Without accurate and reliable data, no meaningful planning can be done and it will be difficult to avoid policy breakdown at the implementation stage. As such all UBE operators (government and non-governmental) should commit themselves to the collection of timely,

accurate and reliable data. At the school level, head teachers or principals and their teaching staff should ensure that basic records are kept and maintained at all times. The adoption and use of functional Education Management Information System (EMIS) at all levels of governance is a necessary measure for education authorities in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The implementation stage of the policy process provides for linkage between policy intention and performance. Hence policy performance is essentially dependent on the effectiveness of policy implementation. A number of constraints to the effective implementation of UBE programme in Nigeria were highlighted in this paper. In order to facilitate the achievement of UBE objectives, some suggestions for the successful implementation of the programme were advanced. An ambitious programme of this nature requires rigorous planning, extensive resource mobilization and above all, prudent use of available resources. It is important to also emphasize the need for participatory approach in UBE implementation. Being inclusive in conception, the programme requires massive participation of the Nigerian populace, if it is to succeed. As such, everybody should be involved and carried along in the implementation process.

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