

**FOSTERING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT NATION BUILDING
AND INTEGRATION THROUGH THE UNIVERSAL
BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is an ethnically, culturally and religiously heterogeneous state, whose peoples, are also at low levels of economic, social and educational advancement. This state of affairs has impeded national development and hampered nation building and integration. Attempts by successive administrations to address these problems have not yielded much fruit, owing to poor execution and lopsided nature of the programmes. This paper contends that the Universal Basic Education programme could serve as a veritable instrument for fostering national development, nation building integration if primordial parochialism is de-emphasized in its implementation. It further argues a dynamic and eclectic programme should be designed to attend to the varying needs of the people and eliminate the rigidity and staticism, which were the bane of the previous government programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is blessed with policy makers and project initiators that can design such beautiful programmes that could enhance development and radically transform the society industrially, economically, educationally, socially and so on. Yet the levels of infrastructural and human resources development in Nigeria seem appalling and are in sorry state, the enormous financial and human resources committed to them notwithstanding. Government programmes have either been aborted at the foetal stages, were still born, crippled from infancy or even suffered a derailment from the focus of its goals and objectives. This state of affairs has been explained in terms of discontinuities in government policy, the pursuit of sectional or clannish agenda by some government functionaries and the cankerworm of corruption, which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society. The corollaries of this are under development, disunity bickering and recrimination amongst the region groups,

One vital solution to this problem, which has beset the Nigerian society, is education. It is in this light that President Olusegun Obasanjo has introduced the Universal Basic Education Scheme. But there is need for caution in order to save it from derailing and going the ways earlier mentioned of government programmes. This paper contends that the scheme if judiciously executed could foster national development and enhance nation building and integration. And for these to be practicable, parochialism and sectional interests should be eliminated in its execution. Again, the curriculum should be dynamic and eclectic to meet diverse and ever changing needs of 'the people. Therefore, in order to address these issues, the paper will first operationalize the major concepts in this study. Secondly, it gives an over view of the features of Nigerian state, followed by the reasons for the failure of government policies and programmes. Next, it highlights the philosophy, goals and objectives of the UBE scheme, drawing from which it then states how the scheme could foster national development and enhance nation building and integration, It again makes a case for a frequent review of the curriculum as well as the contents

of the programme to meet the needs of the diverse Nigerian. peoples and that of the ever charging society. Finally the paper offers some recommendation and presents the conclusion.

B. OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONCEPTS

Four basic .concepts namely Education, National, Development, Nation building and National Integration, stand out in this Paper. This section of the paper, puts them in the right perspectives for a dearer picture of their meanings,

i. Education

Education, according to Me Henry (1992) is the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. Its primary purpose is to integrate the citizen into his community or society. No

Wonder the National Policy on Education (1981: 8), states the educational aims and objectives as

- (a) The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
- (b), The' inculcation of the tight' type .of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and .Nigeria society.
- (c) The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society,

The key issue in the aims and objectives of education in Nigeria is equipping the recipients of education to become better-adjusted individuals who could also contribute meaningfully to the development of the immediate society and nation. And these could be attained through the transmission of accumulated knowledge, at the-instance of the school.

ii. National Development

National Development is indeed a complex phenomenon consisting of multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological and social relations among others. It is best seen as the development of citizens of a particular country. This is so because a Country's development cannot be measured in abstract terms or purely in terms of the territory at occupies. In the same vein, the extent of a nations development cannot be: measured only by the number of prestigious physical projects or structures it owns, no matter how costly, magnificent and important they may be.

National development is human oriented; whatever a country does in terms of national planning, economic growth and advancement can only be meaningful and relevant if geared forwards the benefit of the citizens, For this reason; national 'development has' to be seen as that which promotes the material and spiritual welfare of the citizens based on social justice. It therefore, entails economic as well as social advancement of the citizenry. Since the focus of national development is on the individual good and collective well being of the citizens, it is proper to think of what the citizenry needs at a particular time and how they can combat those forces that have held them down. It is in this perspective that education can play a vital role.

iii Nation Building

Nation building is a process of mobilizing available resources, be they human, material and financial, for socio-economic and political development of a given state'. It also involve the transformation of existing structure through the collective efforts of the citizens of a state. The right frame of mind is necessary for the citizens to effectively discharge this function, and education should serve as the key, In recognition of the fact that the transformation of the , , society for the better is a cardinal principle of nation building, Igiehon (1975) rightly argues that "to build the nation is about change, change in Nigeria's political and social structures to meet the present needs of the people, their demands, their just expectations and future aspirations". It contains proposals designed to bring about long-term political stability, rapid economic development and visible social justice. It also entails formulation of such policies that could elicit the positive qualities in the citizens of a given state.

iv. National Integration

National integration consists of those conscious actions and programme of activities designed to wield together the diverse and desperate groups that make up a particular country. Nigeria is an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous state. It is believed that there are more than two hundred ethnic and linguistic groups in the country. These ethnic groups are at different levels of economic and political advancement and equally have different dreams, goals and aspiration. The main concern of national integration should be' to harmonize the aspirations; bridge the existing gaps amongst Nigerians and thereby foster national cohesion. Amacheazi (1980) describes national integration efforts as "collaborative activities, which should outweigh disintegrative ones". One notable way through which this could be achieved, is a well-designed and purposeful civic education curriculum.

C. FEATURES OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

Nigeria is a cultural, ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous state, with more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups and presently has a population of over one hundred million. She was colonized by the British and secured political independence in 1960. The heterogeneous nature of the society has affected' most policies and programmes of the succeeding administrations in the country. Some of the major features of the Nigerian State are examined in this section of the paper.

i. Vestiges of Colonial rule.

By far the most outstanding impact on the Nigerian society were the vestiges of colonial rule. The British created modern Nigeria as a result of the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914. Unfortunately the amalgamation was not done in such a way to unite or even unify Nigeria. Instead, it was done in such a way that the differences among the Nigerian peoples were deepened. In the first place, there was unevenness in the sizes of the region created by the British. The Northern region was larger than east and west put together, thus placing the former in a dominant position. Furthermore, the British introduced the policy of divide and a rule, as a result of which the two parts of the country did not develop national consciousness or outlook on issues;

Secondly, official pronouncements and attitudes continued to discourage national consciousness or unity among Nigerians of different cultural backgrounds. Instead, their differences were emphasized, encouraged and portrayed as beyond reconciliation. For instance, strangers' quarters (sabon gads) were 'treated for Nigerians resident outside their 'cultural areas, particularly in the Northern part of the country. The ultimate result was that the immigrants rarely identify themselves or aspirations with those of their fellow Nigerians among whom they Live.

ii. Disparity in the levels of social and educational advancement.

There exists a wide gap in the levels of social and educational advancement between the Northern and Southern section of Nigeria. The south is advanced educationally because it embraced western education early. On the other hand, the level of its acceptance in the north has remained low. This is due to colonial policies, which disallowed the Christian missions from proselytizing in the north and equally prohibited the establishment of schools. More so, the wide gap could' also be seen in the context of the religious differences, which has further deepened with the recent attempts to introduce the Islamic penal code (sharia) in the northern states. This has led the series of unrests leading to murder and arson as the result of which several lives has been lost and property value some million of naira destroyed.

iii. Unity and diversity,

The nation is diverse in several respects. Yet in the diversity are contained ingredients that unify or unite their groups through interdependence. Geographically, the country is endowed with different weather conditions, which also determine the nature of economic activities and agricultural products of the zones. Each zone supplies the others those products that are available in their environment. For instance the grassland savannah of the middle belt is conducive for grain cultivation and supplies the grain needs of the rain forest area, while the former supplies palm oil and root crops to other regions. Similarly the north supplies onions, tomato and grains to other parts of the country. The south and delta areas are rich in mineral oil, which generates revenue for the nation; this creates interdependence and further strengthens complementarity in the economic relations of the various sections of the country. Furthermore, the rain forest climate supplies pasture for herdsmen of the arid north. It is common sight to see herdsmen with their cattle in several parts of the south. This engenders social interaction between the members of the host communities and such immigrant herdsmen.

Secondly, religion equally provides a unifying force. The two dominant religions have their membership spread across the length and breadth of the nation and are fastly making incursion and wining converts in areas where they hitherto had minimal presence. This has led to increase in the awareness and understanding amongst members of the various religions groups. Though, it could be stated that most disturbances and unrests that have bedeviled the country are precipitated by ethnic and religious differences, hope still exists for a more harmonious relationship. There is no doubt that inter-ethnic and inter-religious collaboration in business, in friendship and even in marriages is a common feature of modern Nigeria.

D. REASONS FOR THE COLLAPSE AND FAILURE OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES.

There is no gain saying the fact that Nigeria is endowed with material and human resources, which can sustain any development project. And succeeding administrations have initiated several worthwhile projects and programmes. Unfortunately, these have not yielded the desired result. Several reasons may account for this ugly trend. This section of the paper attempts to highlight them and proffer some remedies. It is pertinent to state this in order to forestall the collapse of the UBE scheme as well as the derailment from its focus.

i. Corruption

This is the bane of the success of most government projects. Corruption in Nigeria takes different forms and dimensions. The problem of corruption is compounded by the fact that agencies set up to curb them have also become victims of corruption and corrupt practices. Attempts made by successive administrations have been lip services and smoke-screen actions. Unless something is done urgently, the situation may for a very long time remain unabated.

ii. Political Consideration

Most projects have been initiated just to further the political interests of those in power and, achieve ethnic balancing. The case of sitting an oil refinery at Kaduna readily comes to mind. The cost of the underground movement of crude oil from source to Kaduna is enormous. Yet, the government out of political expediency embarked on the project, which defies all economic sense.

iii. The activities of international financiers and financial institutions

Nigeria has often relied on loans from financial Institution, which 'are obtained, at outrageous interest rates to finance and execute projects. This puts the country on edge especially when the time is due for repayment. A note of warning is necessary at this point. The Federal Government has negotiated for loans from the World Bank for the implementation of the VBE scheme, This ought not to 'be so, since the programme does not generate income and revenue. Funds for projects 'such as the UBE should be sourced Internally. Special 'taxes could be levied on companies and corporate organization to raise revenue for the funding of such projects.

iv. The triumph of mediocrity.

The multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian society necessitates the introduction of policies such as the quota system and federal character principle. Acceptably, 'these are veritable- instruments of nation building and integration, But their application has not been properly guided. Mediocre, have rode on their back to assume -offices and position', 'which they are-ill equipped to occupy. This has affected the quality of output of such offices and also bred discontentment in the less favoured group.

v. Discontinuities in government projects

Successive governments in Nigeria have not shown keen interest in the continuation of the projects initiated by their predecessors. Each leader that assumes office immediately jettisons existing projects for its Own. This is due to. problems associated with succession to office. A Survey of the nations political; history reveals that with the exception of military hand over to civilians in 1979 and 1999, the other administrations and regimes came on board through the ,instrumentality 'of a coup d'etat None has shown willingness to continue the programmes initiated by its predecessors; A few examples may suffice. The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of Gen Olusegun Obasanjo was supplanted by president Shehu Shagari's Green Revolution. Similarly, the OMPADEC (Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission) initiated Gen. Ibrahim Babangida has now given way to Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). President Olusegun Obasanjo has scrapped the Petroleum Trust Fund of late Gen. Sanni Abacha. Judging by there developments, one does not require a prophetic vision to state that the UBE scheme might be ill jeopardy If the leader that initiated it leaves office.

v. Lack of long term planning

A good project should survive several years or may even become a permanent phenomenon. Projects and schemes, which are expected to be permanent hardly; survive beyond few years. This is the result of lack of focus and long term planning. Often, adequate projections are not made on the viability of such project and so, they flounder shortly after take-off. A case in point here is the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme. It was a grandiose scheme that took off with great zeal, which the initiators did not project into the financial commitment 'required for 'its future sustenance. Thus; with the downturn in the nations economy, the scheme collapsed before its' first set of recipients could graduate from the primary school.

E. THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION SCHEME: PHILOSOPHY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

According to the Federal Government (1999) implementation blue print for the Universal Basic, Education, (UBE) scheme is designed to provide free and compulsory education up to junior secondary school level for all Nigerian children. Basic Education is the foundation for sustainable life long learning. It provided reading writing and numeracy skills. It comprises a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners acquire functional literacy. The scope of the Basic Education programme covers primary, junior secondary and normadie as well as adult literacy.

i. Aims of the Basic Education Programme

basic education is aimed at enabling individuals to acquire such knowledge, attitudes and skills that will among others things, enable him to:

- a. Live meaningful and fulfilled lives;
- b. Contribute to the development of the society;
- c. Derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society;
- d. Discharge his civic obligations competently.

ii. Goals and objectives of the UBE scheme

The goals of the UBE scheme are to universalize access to basic education, create a conducive learning atmosphere and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria, within the shortest possible time. The specific objectives of the scheme are to;

- a. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- b. Provide free compulsory universal basic education for every Nigeria child of school going age.
- c. Reduce drastically; drop out rate from the formal school system, through improved relevance and efficiency.
- d. Cater for dropouts and out-of school children/adolescents through various forms of complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- e. Ensure the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative skills (as well as the ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying the foundation for life-long learning.

iii. Components of the scheme

There are three component of the UBE scheme, namely;

- i. Formal basic education encompassing the first nine years of schooling (primary and junior secondary education) for all children.
- ii. Nomadic education for school age children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen.
- iii. Literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school children, youths and illiterate adults.

Certainly, the UBE scheme is designed to inculcate in its recipients the right attitude to life in society. President Olusegun Obasanjo rightly observed this when he started that "the rationale behind the free and compulsory education is to ensure that the children of all Nigerians have equal access to education which is a vital instrument of nation building". (Quoted in Ademola 2000). Furthermore, the UBE could reduce the level of ignorance in the country to the barest minimum, enhance general awareness, empower the citizens as well as enhance their ability to contribute towards meaningfully harnessing the nations abundant resources. Hence nations with high literacy level tend to grow more rapidly than those with low literacy level. This underscores the need, relevance and importance of the scheme. However, to achieve these, it is universally acknowledged that the educational pattern' should be tailored to meet the aspiration of the state or society. Thus, it can be stated that for education to serve as a veritable instrument for accelerated socio-economic development; it must be designed to satisfy the national aspiration, which are embodied in national development, nation building and integration. This establishes the need for a frequent review of the curriculum and the contents of the scheme to meet the needs of the diverse and disparate groups in the country.

F. A CASE FOR FREQUENT REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM, AND CONTENTS OF THE UBE SCHEME

It is an undisputable fact that education is indispensable in national development. However; only a functional education can achieve this purpose. And for education to be functional, there is need for frequent evaluation and review of its curriculum; in order to improve upon it and make it meet the needs of the changing society. What then is curriculum? Some definitions are offered.

Wheeler; (1978) defines curriculum as planned experiences offered to the learner under the guidance of the school, Onwuka (1981) sees curriculum as a structured series of intended learning experiences. It embraces purposeful experiences provided and directed by educational institutions to achieve pre-determined goals. For Tyler (1979), curriculum embraces programme of study educational purposes and experiences provided to the learner.

The foregoing definitions have a common feature. The experiences provided under the guidance, control and co-ordination of the school to the learner. Therefore these guided experiences should be evaluated and reviewed from time to time in order to keep them in line with those needs and aspirations of the learner that are relevant to national development. Civic education is a key issue in this matter. It will equip the learner with the right attitude, orientation and most especially, remind him of his contributions to national development. Again, consideration should be given to the needs of the diverse Nigerian peoples within the context of the national goal. This can make each people to be properly adjusted and equipped for effective participation in national issues, which is a sine qua non for national development nation building and integration. The widening of the scope of the scheme to include nomadic education for school age children of pastoral nomads, migrant fishermen as well as adult literacy is most commendable. This will raise the literacy level in the country and inculcate in the citizenry the requisite attitude to nation building. Secondly, the society is in constant flux and therefore susceptible to forces of exchange from within and without. The curriculum should be designed to equip the citizenry meet the demands of an ever-changing society, especially those that impinge on it from without. This will foster a sense of patriotism and an aversion for foreign tastes and way of life.

G. RECOMMENDATIONS,

This paper makes the following recommendations.

- a. The VBE scheme should be allowed to stay.
- b. It should be closely supervised so as to prevent it from derailing from its goals and objectives.
- c. The educational needs of the various Nigerian peoples should be considered while designing the curriculum and content of the UBE scheme.
- d. Seminars should be arranged for field officers of the state Primary Education Board (SPEB) to keep them abreast with the changing demands of the programme. They will in turn hold refresher courses for the teachers.

- e. The aspirations of the recipient of Islamic and that of Western. education should be harmonized in order to bridge the gap that exists between them.
- f. Government should intensify its present efforts to encourage nomadic education for the school age children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen .
- g. Islamic education should be closely supervised by relevant government agencies so as to equip its recipients with learning experiences relevant to life in the contemporary society.

H. CONCLUSION

Education is the key to nation building, national development and integration. The introduction of the UBE scheme to provide free education up to the junior secondary school level and those out-of-school children of school age as well as adult literacy programme, certainly will eradicate illiteracy and equip majority of Nigerians to participate in nation building. Government agencies responsible for the implementation of the scheme should assiduously discharge their responsibilities so that the objectives could be achieved. The curriculum and content of the programme should be frequently evaluated and reviewed to meet the needs of the changing society as well as those of the various Nigeria peoples. Certainly, this will bridge the gap existing in the relations between the Nigerian peoples and launch the 'nation into greatness.

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