

## Article

# The prospect of UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria

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**In this paper, the origin of Universal Basic Education (UBE), its objectives, contents and problems facing the implementation of the programme have been discussed. The major problems facing the success of the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom state were found to include, population explosion and lack of qualified/adequate teachers. Measures that can be adopted to correct some of these failures have been highlighted. The implementation of the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State is viewed by the authors as a measure that should be improved to the latest.**

**Key words:** Akwa Ibom State, UBE, implementation.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital instrument in development. According to the National Policy on education (1998) "education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development". What Nigeria needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to turn her economy around is not extended primary or elementary education, but a basic education programme that will ensure that every Nigerian youth on graduation is sufficiently equipped with the knowledge, skills and experience required for initial entry into one occupation in the world of work, whether college bound or not (Anyabolu, 2000).

Universal Basic Education is the transmission of fundamental knowledge to all facets of the Nigerian society from generation to generation. It has three main components - universal, basic and education. Universal connotes a programme that is meant for all facets of the society - the rich and poor, the physically fit and physically challenged, the brilliant and dull, the regular students and the dropouts including every other individual that is ready to acquire knowledge. The term basic connotes that which is fundamental or essential indicating that basic education is the starting point in the acquisition of knowledge and that it is for all citizens. It is that type of education that can help an individual function effectively

in the society (Adewole, 2000). Enoch and Okpede (2000) described it as the form of education, which is essential for life. They also saw UBE as the form of education, which must equip an individual with the necessary skills to survive in his environment. It should be a practical and functional education.

The origin of the universal basic education (UBE) in Akwa Ibom State is not different from situations in other parts of the country and can be traced back to January 1955. During this era, the western regional government under the Premiership of late Obafemi Awolowo launched the free universal primary education (UPE) (Arikewuyo, 2002). The packages associated with the UPE were among others abolishment of school fees, reduction of the duration of study in the primary school from eight to six years and an increase in funding to the tune of about 60% of the total budget. This era also witnessed a great influx of students into the primary school system. In 1957, Nnamdi Azikiwe launched another UPE programme as a counter programme to weaken the strength of the Action Congress Party. This programme was characterised by a short period of planning and as such numerous problems were associated with it (Akinyemi, 1983; Ajayi, 1989).

During the military rule (1977), the then government of General Olusegun Obasanjo re-designed the content of the UPE programme by launching another programme. In 1999, the government of General Obasanjo also launched another programme with the tag, UBE instead of UPE.

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According to Nwagwu (2002), the aims and objectives of the UBE programme are as follows;

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system (through improved relevance quality and efficiency)
- Catering for young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling as well as other out of school children, adolescent, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeric, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life long learning.

### THE UBE IN AKWA IBOM STATE

The idea of "education" connotes the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. In the UBE programme, it is expected that theoretical and practical knowledge will be transmitted to learners in its simplistic form. This involves starting from the scratch and being able to carry the learners along. This education is the "aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours, which are of positive value to the society in which he lives" (Fafunwa 1976).

UBE by definition must provide minimum education. Citizens should have easy access to it and it should be free. In the implementation guidelines for the UBE programme, there is a "UBE" commission which runs the affairs of the UBE. They set up minimum standards of primary, junior secondary and adult literacy throughout Nigeria. It is expected that stiff penalties should be imposed on persons, societies or institutions that prevent children, adolescents and youths from benefiting from UBE (Adewole, 2000, Obayan, 2002). UBE is also expected to provide basic education which is expected to be terminal. Such education (UBE) is not meant for school age children alone, it is also designed to take care of the educational needs of young people and adults who have not had the opportunity to receive adequate schooling. Thus the UBE programme will include: nomadic education, education of migrant fishermen, school drop outs, out of school children and adult education.

The UBE programme is intended to be universally free and compulsory. These terms imply that appropriate types of opportunities will be provided for the basic education of every Nigerian child of school-going age (Obayan, 2000). The UBE programme has enormous implications for various spheres of the nation and the state, from budgetary expenditure to other developmental programmes. This programme must fully justify the

opportunity cost that goes with its implementation. The objectives of the UBE according to Obayan (2000) (2) are far reaching and they include;

- Pre-primary education sector.
- Physically challenged children sector.
- Primary education sector.
- Junior secondary education sector.
- Senior secondary education sector.
- Technical education sector.
- Teacher education sector.
- University education sector.
- Adult and continuing education sector.

From the above, it can be seen that the content of the programme is even much more expensive, as it covers all dimensions of the various sectors above. According to Obayan (2000) (2), its scope covers the provision of;

- Programme/initiatives for early childhood care and socialization.
- Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy.
- Out of school and non-formal programmes for updating knowledge and skills.
- Special programmes for nomads

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to collect data, two hundred questionnaires were distributed to teachers in some primary and secondary schools within Akwa Ibom State. The questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents after their responses. Data deduced from the questionnaires were analysed using simple statistics.

In order to validate the results obtained from the questionnaires, the following research questions were raised;

- Is the UBE programme properly planned in Akwa Ibom State?
- Is the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State properly funded?
- Are there qualified and adequate teachers in Akwa Ibom State?
- Is the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State properly implemented?
- Is population explosion a problem in the Akwa Ibom state UBE programme?

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Poor planning

**Research question 1:** Is the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State properly planned?

87% of the respondents agreed that poor planning is one of the major problem that is facing the successful implementation of the UBE programme in the state. According to Adamaechi and Romaine (2000), proper planning has been found to be at the root of the success of every good educational policy or programme. Without proper planning, the best education programme is bound to fail. The UPE programme of the past suffered from lack of plann-

ing. This view is in consonance with Nwagwu (2000) who observed that poor planning was one of the problems responsible for the unsuccessful implementation of the former UPE programmes. This problem still tends to thrive and has not been adequately improved. The Punch newspaper (2008a) also stated that the unity schools debacle exposed the unseriousness in planning the UBE programme.

### **Inadequate funding**

**Research question 2:** Is the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State properly funded?

90% of the respondents agreed that the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State is not properly funded indicating that inadequate funding is one of the problems that is facing the prospect of the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State. Also the authors observed that funding of UBE programmes in Akwa Ibom State is solely left to the hands of the government implying that the private sector is left without functions with respect to UBE programmes. This is a major set back to the growth of this noble programme.

Funding is central to the development of education in general and technical education in particular. According to Olaitan (1996), no educational programme can be successful in the face of inadequate funding. Educational funding in Nigeria has been dwindling in recent times. The yearly average allocation to the educational sector has even declined to about 7%. This tends to confirm the UNESCO (1969) Paris plan which observed that many low-income countries would be unable to give universal free education at all levels owing to the unrestricted population upsurge in those countries. According to Okoh (2002), the inability of the federal and state government to effectively sustain educational funding demonstrates lack of adequate government planning. The Punch newspaper (2008 b) also stated that the educational budget is a far cry from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization's (UNESCO) 26% recommendation indicating that the programme is yet to experience its full boss inspite of efforts put in by the state government.

### **Lack of qualified teachers**

**Research question 3:** Are they qualified and adequate teachers in Akwa Ibom State?

60% of the respondents agreed that there are qualify teachers in Akwa Ibom State. 70% also agreed that the teachers in Akwa Ibom State are not adequate for the successful implementation of UBE programme while 40% admitted that Schools in Akwa Ibom State lack qualified teachers. From the analysis of the above responses, it is

logical to state that there are still some grey areas that must be addressed with respect to the provision of adequate and qualified teachers.

In spite of the presence of the University at Uyo, Akwa Ibom State College of education, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic and Akwa Ibom State College of Art and Science, it is nevertheless suffice to state that most primary and secondary schools lack teachers and where the teachers are found, some are not qualified. According to Obayan (2000) no educational system can rise above the level of its teachers. In his own contribution Fafunwa (1976) opined that no significant change in education can take place in any country unless their teaching staff was well-trained and retrained. The teacher plays a central role in the actualization of educational goals as well as ensuring the survival of the entire education system. In the previous free education schemes, teachers were in very short supply leading to the employment of mediocres, and half-baked individuals (Adamaechi and Romaine 2004). Ezeocha (1990) also noted that the crash programme of the UPE attracted the wrong calibre of people into the teaching profession. Nevertheless, in spite of such crash programmes and the subsequent recruitment of mediocres and sub-standard teachers, the teachers were still grossly inadequate.

### **Poor Implementation**

**Research question 4:** Is the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State properly implemented?

90% of the respondents agreed that the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State is not properly implemented indicating that implementation is one of the major problems facing the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State. Just like in Nigeria, in Akwa Ibom state, policies are formulated but implementation often becomes a long awaited issue. Previous UPE schemes as well as many other educational policies in Nigeria suffered from the problem of poor or ineffective implementation. In most cases, the policies and programmes were sound in terms of targets to be reached and means of reaching those targets but as the implementation is being carried out, there will be a breakdown somewhere along the line. Cox (1996) stated that the main problem confronting education in less developed countries is the inability to coordinate and effectively manage available resources.

### **Population explosion (increase in enrolment)**

**Research question 4:** Is population explosion a problem in the Akwa Ibom state UBE programme?

100% of the respondents agreed that there is excessive population explosion in primary and secondary schools located in Akwa Ibom State especially in government

owned institutions indicating that the current policy of free education at primary and secondary schools implemented by the government of Akwa Ibom State must have led to population explosion.

The size of the class will definitely affect the implementation of the UBE programme. Ohuche and Ali (1989) observed that if the class is too large less attention will be paid to each pupil. Nowadays, there is population explosion in primary schools. In their own contribution, Okoh, (2000) and Salami and Uko-Aviomoh (2000) observed that an increase in class size also affects the effective implementation of vocational programmes at the primary level. In Akwa Ibom state, some school buildings are under construction in order to compensate for the large influx of pupils into public schools. However, when the student to teacher ratio is too high, successful implementation of the UBE programme can not be achieved.

## Conclusion

The UBE programme is an expression of the strong desire of the government of Nigeria to reinforce participatory democracy by raising the level of awareness and general education of the entire citizenry. There have not been records of successful free education programmes in Nigeria. Therefore, for the successful implementation of the UBE programme, all hands should be on deck and the strategies/recommendations put forward in this paper must be strictly followed and implemented. Adequate funds must be put into the programme and the required level of participation needed from the state government, local government and other agencies in terms of funding must be clearly specified. The Universal Basic Education commission therefore, must device a way of combating these ills; otherwise the hope of Nigeria implementing UBE as an instrument for national development will remain a myth.

Women should be encouraged to participate in education and trade union activities. Women have critical and imperative roles to play in the development of the country's educational sector. The establishment of a national education labour relations council in line with the 2005 Pretoria Declaration on Teachers by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), SADC and Nigeria should be implemented. The establishment of the council would ensure social dialogue between employers of labour in the education sector and teachers.

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