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TOWARDS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION :
A CASE STUDY OF ADMINISTRATORS'
PERCEPTION IN DELTA STATE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine strategies needed for effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. The population for the study was made up of all administrators of primary and secondary school systems in Delta State of Nigeria. The questionnaire was used for data collection, and data analyses were converted into percentages. The findings revealed that the Government and administrators have important contributions towards effective implementation of the UBE. Fourteen strategies were identified for adoption by the Government while nine were identified for the administrators. Recommendations were based on the findings.

Introduction

The universalization of basic education for all is a major challenge facing Africa. The inability of African states to implement the action plan on education for all is caused by a

number of factors including political instability, low economic growth, poverty, civil wars and high illiteracy rates. UNESCO (1995) emphasized that "Education for all" is an indispensable pre-requisite for fulfilling all other pre-conditions for a culture of peace.

Nigeria has made appreciable efforts to implement the 1950 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by entrenching this concept in her constitution. Essential aspects of this declaration are that:

1. Everyone has the right to education
2. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available
3. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit, and

4. Parents have a right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Akinkugbe, 1994 : 42).

The Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 was launched with good intention and purpose. It was to be the main corner-stone in Nigeria's determination to produce a literate society. Unfortunately, the programme suffered major setbacks from the economic, political and social systems of the country.

Ejiogu (1991) observed that the UPE scheme gradually died off as a result of

1. poor financial standing (dwindling economy),
2. over-estimation of Nigeria's potentialities.
3. lack of accurate data and
4. political instability and poor management.

Causes of the failure of the UPE programme should be worked on to avert a recurrence in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme which was launched in 1999. Researchers (Tamuno & Atanda, 1989; Oragwan, 1998 & Ubaka, 2000) asserted that the failure of the

UPE should be blamed on the implementation rather than the policy.

It is important to assess resources as well as elements of teacher quality, intellectual ability of children and learning environment when introducing educational reforms. What is expected in the implementation of the UBE is the evaluation of antecedents. It is the basis of such evaluation that wise decisions can be made on budget allocations and programme planning. This will lead to fine-tuning what worked and what did not work well.

The UBE covers the primary and junior secondary school children as well as adult literacy. The scheme is a priority task which guarantees the right to learn how to read and write, acquire basic technical/vocational skills and to learn of democratic ideals (Obasanjo, 1999). This means that youths and adults have opportunities, individually and collectively, to realize their potentials as human beings. This is a human-centred development which will lead to sustainable and equitable development if effectively implemented. Since UBE is an extension of UPE, care must be taken so that it does not fail.

This study was designed to propose mechanisms for effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What strategies can be adopted by Government to implement the Universal Basic Education ?
2. What strategies can administrators adopt to make the UBE scheme effective?

Method

Population and Sample

The population for the study was made up of all the Chief Inspectors of Education (CIE), Principals of public secondary schools, Headmasters/Headmistresses and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) Secretaries in Delta State. There are 25 CIEs, 318 Principals, 1015 Headmasters/Headmistresses and 25 LGEA Secretaries (SPEB and Ministry of Education data, February 2000). Using stratified random sample, 460 respondents were selected for the study. This was made up of 12 CIEs, 106 Principals, 330 Headmasters/Headmistresses and 12 LGEA Secretaries.

Instrument

The instrument used for collecting data was a questionnaire titled "Universal Basic Education Implementation Questionnaire" (UBEIQ). It was made up of two sections. Section A provided demographic data while Section B contained 25 structured items which were developed through extensive literature review based on the research questions. Each structured item had a 4-point scale of "Highly Important, Important, Unimportant and Highly Unimportant." Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of each item to the implementation of the Universal Basic Education. The instrument was validated by four experts in the field of study.

Test-retest reliability was carried out with the instrument at a time lag of two weeks. Correlation analyses using Rank difference correlation ratio yielded 0.89. This was considered adequate.

Data Collection Technique

Four hundred and sixty copies of the instrument were distributed to the subjects by hand. Four hundred and thirty-seven were completely filled and returned for analysis after a period of three weeks. This represents 95% return rate.

Data Analysis Technique

Percentages were used to analyse data generated by the questionnaire. Based on the four point scale employed in the instrument, Highly Important and Important were merged into

'Important' while Unimportant and Highly Unimportant were merged into 'Unimportant' for the purpose of analysis. Thereafter, items were ranked from the most important to the least important.

Table 1
Responses on Strategies to be Adopted
by Government

S/N	Items	% RESPONSE			
		Highly Important	Important	Unimportant	Highly Unimportant
1.	Make UBE compulsory for all school age	75	25	-	-
2.	Centrally locate pre-vocational workshop for schools within short distance locations	41	47	6	6
3.	Equip laboratories and workshops	95	5	-	-
4.	Provide a system of regular maintenance of equipment	65	35	-	-
5.	Provide buildings	63	37	-	-
6.	Provide laboratories	65	35	-	-
7.	Provide workshops	55	4	-	-
8.	Use all schools for UBE programme	25	50	25	-
9.	Select some existing Primary and JSS schools to be used as experimental schools	32	26	32	10

Table 1 cont'd

S/N	Items	% RESPONSE				
		Highly Important	Important	Highly Unimportant	Unimportant	
10.	Put students in primary and J.S.S. in a common location	10	15	75	-	
11.	Provide quality control services more regularly and effectively	45	55	-	-	
12.	Equip quality control services to make it functional or perform	29	61	5	5	
13.	Ensure that all teachers for UBE have professional teaching qualifications	66	29	5	-	
14.	Pay teachers' salary as and when due	81	14	5	-	
15.	Provide incentives for teachers (e.g. Housing loan, car refurbishing loan)	57	43	-	-	
16.	Encourage pension board to pay teachers' pension regularly	76	24	-	-	

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Table 1 shows the percentage responses of the strategies to be adopted by Government. From the table, the respondents indicated the

level of importance of each item to the effective implementation of Universal Basic Education. Most of the items were perceived to be important except for items 9 and 10 which have low percentage values.

These are:

1. Select some existing primary and JSS schools to be used as experimental schools.
2. Put students in Primary and JSS in a common location. This implies that items 9 and 10 are unimportant for effective implementation of UBE scheme. Strategies to be adopted by Government include all the items except 9 and 10. The Rank order of the strategies to be adopted by Government are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Rank Order of Important Strategies to be Adopted by Government

S/N	Items	Rank order
1.	Make Universal Basic Education compulsory for all school age	1
2.	Equip laboratories and workshops	1
3.	Provide a system of regular maintenance of equipment	1
4.	Provide buildings	1
5.	Provide laboratories	1
6.	Provide workshops	1
7.	Provide quality control services more regularly and effectively	1
8.	Provide incentives for teachers (e.g. Housing loan, car refurbishing loan)	1
9.	Encourage pension board to pay teachers' pension regularly	1
10.	Pay teachers' salary as and when due	10
11.	Ensure that all teachers for UBE have professional teaching qualifications	11
12.	Equip quality control services to make them functional or perform	12
13.	Centrally locate pre-vocational workshop for schools within short distance locations	13
14.	Use all schools for UBE programme	14
15.	Select some existing Primary and JSS schools to be used as experimental schools	15
16.	Put students in Primary and JSS in a common location	16

As can be seen in Table 2, items that ranked high can be categorized as provision of educational facilities (items 2,4,5,6), quality control services (item 7), teachers welfare package (items 8,9,10) and professional development of teachers (item 11).

The analysis in Table 3 shows perception of respondents on strategies to be adopted by administrators. The nine items enumerated were considered important for effective implementation of the UBE scheme.

Table 3

Responses on Strategies to be Adopted by Administrators

S/N	Items	% RESPONSE			
		Highly Important	Important	Highly Unimportant	Unimportant
1.	Modify curricula for JSS so as to be more functional	65	35	-	-
2.	Review JSS curricula for terminal and continuing programmes	25	65	10	-
3.	Integrate library services into the schools	75	25	-	-
4.	Educational counselling should start from the primary school	43	43	5	9
5.	Expand and reinforce guidance and counselling services for JSS students to reduce frustration at any point	47	43	-	10
6.	Re-invigorate and expand school supervision and inspectorate division	55	45	-	-
7.	Organise in-service training for teachers on management of large classes	55	45	-	-
8.	Encourage teachers for acquisition of professional skills	52	48	-	-
9.	Encourage teachers to improve through sandwich courses	45	30	15	10

Table 4
Rank Order of Important Strategies to be
Adopted by Administrators

S/N	ITEM	RANK ORDER
1.	Modify curricula for JSS so as to be more functional	1
2.	Integrate library services into the schools	1
3.	Re-invigorate and expand school supervision and inspectorate division	1
4.	Organise in-service training for teachers on management of large classes	1
5.	Encourage teachers for acquisition of professional skills	1
6.	Expand and reinforce guidance and counselling services for JSS students to reduce frustration at any point	6
7.	Review JSS curricula for terminal and continuing programmes	
8.	Educational counselling should start from primary school	8
9.	Encourage teachers to improve through sandwich courses	9

The acceptable strategies for administrators were ranked as shown in Table 4. Items that rank high are grouped under major clusters such as curricula (item 1), library services (item 2), quality control (item 3) and training of teachers (items 4 and 5). Strategies that ranked low were on counselling (items 6 and 8) and improving teachers through sandwich courses (item 9).

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that 23 strategies rated as important should be adopted in implementing the UBE programmes by the Government and administrators. This stems from the fact that each of the 25 items was rated as important with responses above 50%.

On the part of the Government, items related to infrastructural

facilities and equipment obtained the highest scores. This is an indication of the level of importance which the subjects placed on these.

Akpobi (2000) has declared that 500 additional primary schools are needed to boost the UBE programme in Delta State. There is the need to build new classroom blocks because the existing primary schools in the state cannot accommodate all children of school age in the UBE programme.

Provision of quality control services had 100% score. There is the need to maintain a standard for high quality education. This can be achieved by providing equipment and materials to facilitate the work of the inspectorate division. An essential need of this division is vehicles to move around for supervisory work. This implies that the Government will increase resource allocation for the UBE programme.

The need to provide incentives for teachers cannot be over-emphasized. Amiebenomo (2000) asserts that teachers' welfare is fundamental to the success of the UBE programme. Teaching will not improve unless the reward system for teachers is improved upon. It is beneficial to

give housing loan, car refurbishing loan and other incentives to teachers.

The findings on responsibilities of the administrators towards effective UBE programme showed that all the nine items rated as important should be adopted. Furthermore, the findings showed that in-service training of teachers, integration of library services into the school system and rejuvenation of school supervision obtained 100% rating among other items. Teachers need training on management of large classes which are to be filled with pupils having mixed abilities, and techniques of motivating pupils to learn science, vocational and technical skills. Provision of library services in each school is a way of boosting learners' literacy and basic education.

Analysis of the result showed that educational counselling was given moderate rating. Even though counselling services was ranked low, it is the opinion of the researcher that counselling services should be given priority place in this programme. Guidance is as important at the elementary school level as at the secondary level. School guidance services assist the pupil in understanding himself, his present situation and planning

his future in the light of his needs, interests, abilities and limitations.

Conclusion

The critical importance of Universal Basic Education cannot be over-emphasized. It has economic, social, holistic and political goals. The strategies identified as important in this study represent what the administrators in Delta State considered essential for successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education.

The findings of this study have important implications for the Federal and State Governments, the administrators, the teachers and students of the UBE programme. The study identified strategies to be adopted by Government. Based on these, the Government and policy makers will have better understanding of the challenges ahead. The findings could certainly serve as an initial input into the development and implementation of functional UBE programme for all Nigerian children in primary and junior secondary schools.

The findings from this study also have implications for curriculum planners and school administrators. There is the need to implement the identified strategies at the school

system for a meaningful take off of the programme.

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

1. The Federal Government should provide infra-structural facilities (e.g. classroom buildings, workshops, laboratories), equipment, tools and a system of regular maintenance.
2. Official vehicles and relevant quality control materials should be made available to the Inspectors of Education and Local Government Education Authority Secretaries to facilitate their work.
3. The Ministry of Education and State Primary Education Board (SPEB) should provide in-service training for teachers on management of large classes.
4. The curriculum planners need to modify the curricula of Junior Secondary Schools so as to be more functional and practical for the acquisition of basic education and pre-vocational skills.

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