

**QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION DELIVERY AS A NECESSARY FOUNDATION  
FOR A STANDARD EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

This paper highlights the identified socio-economic problems facing Nigeria as a nation and advocates that the solution can only come through a good education system. Good education is what people acquire from teaching and learning institutions that could guarantee the ability to create wealth, better leadership, moral uprightness, good character, good conscience, and a high sense of humanity in all endeavors. Against this background, a serious observation is noted that the Nigerian education system is not reflecting the implicit national values and potentials of a standard education system as concerns inclusiveness, equality of opportunities, learning effectiveness, and holistic development of individuals who go through it. In this connection, the author has pointed out that the failures of the entire Nigerian education system are a fallout from the processes and educational practices at the basic education level. For this purpose, critical details on the Nigerian basic education policy are presented and discussed including how it started, blueprint, implementation effectiveness and challenges faced as the astute foundation of the entire education system of the nation, noting that a good national education is a veritable tool for fostering sustainable development, breaking the cycle of poverty, and achieving global and national development goals. The paper has made some recommendations regarding girl-child education, school-feeding, and the posting of female teachers. The paper concludes that though a reasonable level of improvement has been witnessed, a lot still needs to be done for the total benefits of the programme to be actualized.

**Keywords:** Global, Education, Nigeria, Development, Foundation

**Introduction**

A major task of education is to transmit the cultural values and behaviour patterns of the society to its young and potential members. This is the conservative function of education. It is by this function that a society can achieve basic social conformity, ensuring that its traditional modes of life are preserved. But apart from preserving and transmitting the culture of people, modern society also needs critical and creative individuals who are able to make inventions and discoveries. People who are willing and able to initiate social change. This is what Bola (2003) says is ‘the creative function of education in societies’.

Nigeria, for example, has a social landscape troubled by unsettled issues. The whole social tradition is in fact undergoing the process of dissolution due to reports of corruption, poverty, starvation, and of course, terrorism. The Nigerian society is passing through a phase of rapid change and fundamental reconstruction, the outcome of which is uncertain even right now, as focus is being put on elections scheduled to hold in 2027. Everywhere, people are saying that there is a need for change. It is through the use of quality, relevant education that these can be reconciled. Therefore, our educational system, particularly the foundational level, should be organized and fine-tuned to meet the demands of Nigerians. It remains to be seen to what extent the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is presently meeting our educational needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as found out by Omoraka & Ifie (2001). As of now, it is notable that the Nigerian education system encompasses three different levels: basic education (nine years), post-basic/senior secondary education (three years), and tertiary education (four to six years, depending on the programme of study). The focus of this paper is on Universal Basic Education. The discussion dwells on UBE as a timely policy reform at the time it was launched and the laudable goals it was designed to fulfill. Let us begin by presenting its conception and blueprint.

### **Background and Blueprint of the Universal Basic Education Reform Scheme**

What conception do the members of the public, including distinguished scholars, hold concerning the phrase “Basic Education”? And why does it have to be “universal” in aggregate? Before the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in September 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto, the officially accepted level of education regarded as “Basic” was the Primary School Leaving Certificate, as clearly noted by Omolewa (2001). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme was introduced in Nigeria as a reform programme to provide greater access to, and ensure better quality of basic education throughout Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999). In its true structure, it was meant to provide free, compulsory, and continuous education to an appreciable level of socio-economic functionality. The programme was structured to run for nine (9) years in two levels: six (6) years of primary school and three (3) years of junior secondary education for all children of school age. This was the fundamental structure that was indicated at the time of its practical commencement after the necessary legislative back-up in 2004. Essentially, therefore, the programme was designed as a reform to the 6-3-3-4 education system, and not a separate education model as such (Obanya, 2001).

The Universal Basic Education focus was on ensuring an uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education for school children. To facilitate this aim, the programme is operated by providing free and compulsory basic education for every child of school-going age. Therefore, the Universal Basic Education was envisioned to be able to tactically reduce school drop-out and improve relevance, quality, and efficiency at the lower scale of the Nigerian education system. Ultimately, from the primary level to the junior secondary level, pupils and students are to be groomed to acquire literacy, numeracy, and life skills/values for lifelong education and useful living. Thus, education was expected to produce ‘school leavers who are literate, numerate, and self-reliant’ (Omoraka, 2020). In subsequent years of implementation after it was established by law, the scope of the programme began to receive relevant expansion and emphasis. It became more inclusive of other segments and beneficiary characters in its structure and methods.

In light of the above, the state and local governments began to get involved in nursery education activities. With the help of international support agencies, Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) became increasingly recognized as an integral unit of focus in the basic education structure. Also, the education of the girl-child and other disadvantaged groups began to receive greater attention than ever before.

Let us be reminded that the launching of UBE in 1999 was not the first time that universal education was introduced into the Nigerian educational system (Akinbote, 2002).

(1.) The first was in 1955 and 1957. The Civilian Western Region and the Eastern Region, pre-independent governments, respectively, launched their Universal Primary Education (UPE). But the effort was short-lived because the two Regions soon found out that the financial burden for such a venture was too enormous.

(2.) In 1976, the Federal Military Government, headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo, declared that Primary Education (of six years duration) was to become universal as well as free. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme, however, ran into early problems such as the non-availability of reliable educational data.

(3.) States under the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) mostly of the former Western Region later also launched a Universal Education programme.

(4.) The latest is that in 1999, the Civilian Government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education in Sokoto as stated earlier.

It should be noted that the concept of universality means that no section of the community is to be excluded; in other words, all persons, in all manner and conditions, will have to benefit from it.

As stated above, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria was launched in 1999 but it was not able to take off immediately because it did not have a legal backing. Five years later, the SUBEB Act was signed into Law in May, 2004. This provided the legal framework for the programme and an indication of its effective take-off. That was when the Blueprint was also released.

The blueprint on Universal Basic Education states the goals and objectives of the programme to include the following: (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999).

- i. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness of education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- iii. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency);
- iv. Catering for young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling as well as other out-of-school children/adolescents, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- v. Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative, and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a social foundation for life-long learning.

It should be noted that it is the submission of UNESCO (2001) that a nation needs about a 60 percent literacy level among its citizens for sustained economic and socio-political growth. Without doubt, the above objectives of UBE are consistent with the provisions of the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, and 1998 versions) and in the Nigerian Constitutions (1979, 1989, and 1999) from which they have been derived as portrayed by the Federal Ministry of

Education (2004). They were not new to the educational system. The only difference is that they were being given new emphasis. However, the Basic education in Nigeria is a much more all-embracing concept. Note that its first objective emphasizes the people (consciousness and commitment in the entire citizenry). The Universal Basic Education programme is, in fact, conceived as a people-oriented programme.

From the above objectives, it can be stated that the fundamental concerns of the Universal Education programme in Nigeria is:

- a. Ensuring free access to education.
- b. Reducing dropout to the minimum.
- c. Enabling those who had dropped out to drop in.
- d. Making education relevant to the survival needs of learners.
- e. Making education a life-long enterprise.
- f. Making sure that Education For All is the Responsibility of All.

Indicated below, I think it is important to note that some major components of the UBE scheme:

Freeness of the programme, i.e., the beneficiaries shall not be charged fees or levies in any guise.●

Transition from primary to junior secondary. Children are to progress●  
automatically from primary to junior secondary (Basic 1-9).

The 9-year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC). This implies that the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) is not necessarily a combination of six-year primary and three-year secondary curricula.●

Disarticulation of junior secondary from senior secondary. This implies an almost fusion of primary and junior secondary.●

Production/Provision of School textbooks because of the freedom as well as the reworking of the curricula.●

Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE).•

Adult literacy and occupational skills acquisition programmes. •

### **Establishment of the Commission**

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was established immediately after the Scheme was launched in 1999 as a Federal Government's Monitoring Agency saddled with the responsibility for coordinating all aspects of the Universal Basic Education programme implementation. The commission works through close collaborative partnerships with State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), and Basic Education Stakeholders at all levels (Obasanjo,2001).

The Commission functions to progressively improve the capacity of the various partners to ensure the provision of unfettered access to high-quality basic education in Nigeria. This is done by advising the government on the development of basic education throughout the country, especially by managing the affairs of teaching and non-teaching staff, upholding of children rights to education, and ensuring that learning is taking place efficiently in the schools.

As a regulatory agency, the federal government depends on the commission to continuously work out the promotion of uniform, qualitative, and functional basic education throughout Nigeria.

### **The Challenges of Universal Basic Education**

Some researchers have made attempts to identify current problems of the UBE.

From findings, these include: poor funding; poor motivation of teachers; improper supervision and monitoring of the UBE programme; inadequate teaching and learning facilities; inadequate lesson supervision, Insufficient professional development programmes for teachers; and poor management of school time, as pointed by Jackaden (2006); Obaje (2006).

The bottom line effects of all the challenges listed above, one can say, are that the basic education schools are so far largely ineffective.

**Some key standards for determining the effectiveness of Basic Education Delivery in  
Nigeria**

Schools can be measured against four key standards as captured by the following questions presented in the UBEC Training Manual of 2020:

1. How effective is classroom teaching?
2. How strong is school leadership?
3. How well does the school plan for its own improvement?
4. How well does the school work to meet the needs of its pupils?

Arising from the above, it can be seen that there are four main elements involved:

the quality of the teaching;→

the quality of leadership;→

the quality of the planning for the use of resources available in the→  
schools;

The degree to which pupils' needs are met.→

Studies conducted in 6 States of Nigeria in 2019-2020 found (among many other things) that:

1. 93% of teachers' time during lessons is not used for teaching and learning;
2. 62% of the Head Teacher's time during the school day is wasted doing nothing for the school.
3. 1% of Head Teachers' time is spent planning for school improvement;
4. approximately 40% of school-age children do not regularly attend school.

The purpose of schools is to “develop literate, numerate, and self-reliant pupils”. Each of the four areas (teaching, leadership, planning, and meeting pupils’ needs) is a standard that schools are working towards. Schools that meet the standards are effective; schools that do not are termed ineffective.

### **Pathways to school improvement in Nigeria**

From the foregoing expository presentation, we can conclude that the basic education schools are currently ineffective. The major problem is in connection with the weaknesses inherent in the school leadership function. Thus, school improvement efforts, as I perceive it, must begin with capacity building for those responsible for school leadership in every local government area in our country. If the quality of teaching and learning is low in the schools, it is a result of the poor quality of leadership. Schools with good infrastructure that are not meeting the needs of all pupils require that the teachers, together with the Head Teacher, are not performing their expected duties very well. Hence, there is a need to renew the drive for quality basic education delivery across communities in Nigeria.

In this regard, the following suggestions are hereby offered:

1. The school Head Teachers should be made more effective as leaders. He should ensure that teachers deliver competent lessons. Teachers should organize their pupils in different ways during lessons and use teaching aids. Moreover, the Head Teacher should be mandated to hold several professional development meetings each term, and the school should open on time for learning, while more strategies are developed to promote teacher attendance.
2. School development plans should be made, used, and followed up on regularly. The authorities concerned should do this in partnership with the Head Teachers and stakeholders from the communities. A school system that does not develop and regularly review plans can hardly live up to expectations. The effective use of a School Development Plan is invaluable to raising learners' achievements.
3. School Support Officers recruited, trained, and assigned to regularly visit the schools will be very useful. They will establish rapport with teachers and Head Teachers and bring useful reports to SUBEB over the kind of support needed by schools at each point in time. Thus, the needs of the school would be promptly brought to the attention of the relevant authorities for solution and support. This can be made more effective with the use of various social media

platforms that are now available, such as WhatsApp, to transmit videos from school locations to SUBEB Offices.

#### 4. Increase in the amount of learning time in Schools

In this regard, it is interesting for us to take a look at the following amazing lesson time statistics (UBEC, 2015).

Lesson time statistics

Term 1: 12 weeks of 5 days each = 60 days

Term 2: 12 weeks of 5 days each = 60 days

Term 3: 12 weeks of 5 days each = 60 days

Total days in a school year = 180

Each day = 7 lessons of 30 minutes each = 3.5 hours

Total lesson hours in a school year = 630 hours

Approximate international comparisons:

UK lesson hours = 900 hours

US lesson hours = 900 hours

French lesson hours = 920 hours

Japanese lesson hours = 880 hours

Reductions in Time: If school starts lessons late in a week each term, 52.5 lesson hours are lost.

If each school day ends 10 minutes early, 30 lesson hours are lost.

If a pupil is 10 minutes late each day, 30 lesson hours are lost.

If each lesson begins 5 minutes late, 105 lesson hours are lost.

Revised total lesson hours = 413 hours

Head Teachers need to work harder. They should do their job very well. They must be effective as Head Teachers and ensure that the amount of learning time is increased in their schools.

Strategies should be worked out to promote teachers' attendance, and efforts should be made to ensure that more than half of the school lessons begin and end on time.

5. Head Teachers and teachers should be encouraged to use social media platforms and online resources to keep in touch and be abreast of current developments on teaching and learning, as well as school leadership and management. In each term, there should be at least one professional development meeting in each school. It should be a mandatory and continuous activity for all schools. Professional Development meetings are school-based practices whereby the teachers and head teachers meet to share experiences on how to improve teaching and learning. This is seriously lacking in the current school practice.

6. Facilitating good rapport among the teachers. This is a kind of Peer-Peer Support activity. Within the school system, a good rapport should be established among teachers. This will build trust and create an atmosphere of acceptance to disclose information and ask for help. It is also important for teachers and head teachers to work together as a team, thus building a community of practice where they can work together to find solutions to both individual and collective challenges that they might be facing in the workplace. All this should be aimed at empowerment, encouragement, and building motivation within the staff.

6. School-Community linkage is essential. School-Community linkage is a process that can bring together the school and the community to address challenges of quality of teaching and learning, access, and equity in schools. It is indeed essential for the school management to establish strong relationships with the rest of the stakeholders in the community. Through this relationship, the school and the community can collaborate better to provide more support for learners, families, and staff.

7. Use of school-Based Management Committees (SBMC). School-based management committees (SBMCs) should be well constituted with community involvement and participation.

Membership should be made of voluntary representatives from across the local community, committed to ensuring that schools make the best use of available resources so that learners can learn well in a safe and secure environment. A good and sustainable relationship between the School and the Community is a sure way to facilitate and improve learners' enrolment, attendance, and achievement. The community definitely has a role in improving punctuality among learners and teachers.

8. Parents-Teachers Associations. As useful formal organizations, Parents-Teachers Associations

can bring about school improvement. They should be well composed of parents and teachers who have a great interest and who are committed to making plans that contribute to school improvement. They should foster and facilitate harmonious relationships among parents and staff to ensure active parental participation in school matters. Other groups that are linked to this function can be mentioned as follows:

Old students: This refers to a body of students who graduated from a school. Philanthropists: these are people who donate generously either in cash or in kind for the promotion of schools.

Faith-based organisations in the form of religious bodies could also render immeasurable assistance to the schools.

9. Building the Ego / Image of the Teacher. This is an important requirement for the success of the basic education programme in Nigeria.

The following welfare packages will go a long way in helping to motivate teachers to put in their best into the teaching service in our country, Nigeria. On appointment or transfer to schools in remote areas, appropriate accommodation should be provided for teachers. They should be paid for removal and travel expenses for themselves and their families.

Particular importance should be attached to prompt and regular payment of teachers' salaries in appreciation of the importance of their function, as is done to other comparable professions. In areas where there is a scarcity of medical facilities, teachers should be paid travelling expenses necessary to obtain appropriate medical care. Moreover, certain infectious diseases prevalent among children should be regarded as occupational diseases when contracted by teachers who have been exposed to them by virtue of their contact with pupils. At that point, some allowances should be approved for them as recently done to medical workers in Nigeria, as demanded by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, TRCN (2013).

10. Intensifying efforts for girls' education remains crucial. The number of out-of-school girls is still high in the communities. Most generally affected in this are girls and women from Northern Nigeria and rural communities. There should be more social mobilization efforts to encourage parents to send girls to school. Traditional and religious leaders in various

communities should increasingly drive this effort. Empowerment of women needs more attention. There should be more support given to literacy centres and the provision of equipment for vocational training. The increasing awareness of girls' education nationwide should be sustained. In this regard, building institutional capacity for promoting girls' education with respect to gender sensitivity and sexuality is of paramount value. Moreover, more female teachers should be deployed to the rural areas. Promoting the employment of more female teachers in the rural areas is a necessity at this time. They are most needed there to serve as role models to the girls. They are needed to assist in the mentoring of out-of-school girls.

11. School-feeding programme. The school feeding programme initiated by the federal government must not be allowed to stop. Many of the children come to school with little or no food in their stomachs. Therefore, giving them some food at lunch time goes a long way to get them ready to actively participate in the learning process.

## **Conclusion**

The turnaround intention of the Universal Basic Education programme as an educational reform scheme was received as a welcome development in Nigeria. The structure of its curriculum components and features carried essential developmental colouration. Twenty-one years after the launch, a reasonable level of improvement has been witnessed. However, a lot still needs to be done for the total benefits of the programme to be actualized. In this regard, we realize that the key operators of the scheme would need inputs from scholars and other stakeholders that will further the school improvement implications of all the steps in the journey so far.

It is in the light of the above that several suggestions have been advanced towards the drive for quality Universal Basic Education delivery in Nigeria as a prerequisite condition for achieving an education system that can effectively promote functional, developmental benefits for Nigerians.

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