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Education for Social Transformation

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EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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Repositioning Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme in Nigeria: Implications for Social Transformation

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Abstract

Nigerian Government had long realized that people needed the right attitudes for the country to achieve the desired development. To this end, the Government committed a huge sum of money to programmes designed for the purpose. Education is a powerful instrument for social transformation. UBE as an education programme was inaugurated seven years ago but still at its impact is yet to be felt. Certain constraints which impeded successful implementation of similar programmes in the past should be identified and realistically tackled in an effort to reposition the present UBE programme. This paper examined the state of UBE scheme and its drive towards health and social transformation. The discussion focused on values of education, UBE and health transformation as well as UBE and social transformation. Effort was made on how to reposition UBE to make it play its role as a tool for health and social transformation.

Introduction

Over the years, education has remained an effective instrument of social change. Social change involves change in the structure of the society and the way people think and act. Changes are necessary in a society as they bring with them improvement in ways of doing things. Changes usually come from within the people and manifest in attitudes and behaviour of people. The National Policy on Education (2004) stated that any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. The need to reposition the UBE scheme therefore becomes compelling.

Repositioning is used to mean to place in a better way in order to give new direction to a particular programme. According to the Longman Dictionary (2003) transformation is a complete change in appearance, form or character of something especially in a way that improves it. Education is a foundation for development. Obanya (2003) noted that there can be no meaningful socio-economic development without the right type and appropriate quality of education.

Attempts at health and social transformation had been made by past and present Nigerian Governments. In this regard, agencies and organizations put in place include MAMSER, NOA, DFFRI, Better Life for Rural Women and Family Support Programmes. However, Nigerians have not been transformed. For instance, corruption in high places as a result of the desire for self aggrandizement is a clear indication that the individual is parochial in outlook. Also, prevalence of communicable diseases is a consequence of poor sanitary practices of the people. Poor reproductive health behaviour and drug abuse among the youths in the country indicated that they lacked relevant knowledge about health. Poor attitude to work and vandalism of public amenities indicate that the love for the country is non-existing. Considering the number of agitations, complaints and

conflicts the country experienced in recent times, one can say that the Nigerian society is yet to be a stable and viable one.

According to Ajayi in Oyekan (2000) education is a human right with immense power to transform. Education involves physical, mental, social and moral transformation in such a way that will make an individual useful to himself/herself and the society. Therefore education must be focused to have the required impact on the attitudes and behaviour of the people. The Universal Basic Education is an education scheme that has been planned to keep children in school for nine continuous years. It includes adult and non-formal education for special groups like nomads (FGN, 2000).

The UBE programme is yet to take-off after seven years of planning. Educational facilities and services meant for the implementation of the programme at primary and secondary levels are substandard. No feasible provisions have been made for the nomads, out-of-school youths and a host of school-age children not in school, particularly the Al-majiris who beg for alms as a means of livelihood.

It is doubtful if the UBE in its present form and structure can perform the onerous task of transforming Nigeria. This background informs the need to reposition UBE for it to be able to play its role as a prime mover of health and social transformation.

Value of Education

Education is essentially about the training of an individual for effective integration into the society. This training process comes about through study and instruction. Education is a human activity which is concerned with preparation and development of an individual in a way that makes him/her intellectually, psychologically able and disposed to promote his/her welfare and that of others in the society (Bamisaye, 1988).

One of the crucial steps in the development of a nation is the provision of education. This is because education provides basic knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for the development of nation's wealth through productive manpower development, economic growth and social upliftment. This is probably the reason why the National Policy on Education (2004) insists that education shall continue to be highly rated in national development.

Nigeria's quest for development politically, economically and technologically calls for the production of healthy citizenry through education. This is borne out of the axiom that 'it is only a healthy population of a nation that has the physical and intellectual capabilities to subdue their environment and free resources for the development'. Health and functional education ensure acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and increased capacity for work which are required for national development. Adesoji (2001) stated that education plays critical roles in the areas of production of goods and services, health development and reinforcement of society's sense of meaning and purpose. Also, Ajibade (1993) observed that education is the key, with which the door to literacy, technological emancipation, industrialization and urbanization could be opened, while simultaneously closing the gate to ignorance, poverty and more importantly, diseases that could plague any nation.

The government of Nigeria has expended huge human and material resources in the fight against poverty across the country. However, according to the World Bank, the greatest priority should be given to basic education. This is because Basic Education has become the most significant factor in poverty alleviation (Omolayole in Adesoji, 2001). Besides, empirical evidence exists to show that education increases peoples' capacity to work, economic productivity, and financial and social stability (Ajayi in Oyekan, 2000).

Objectives of Universal Basic Education

The UBE has been described by the Federal Government of Nigeria as the foundation for sustainable life-long learning. Basic education is given at pre-primary, primary, junior secondary and nomadic educational institutions. Pupils in these schools, and out-of-school youths and adults are to benefit from the programme, which aims at equipping an individual with knowledge, skills and attitudes which would enable him to:

- Live a meaningful and fulfilling life;
- Contribute to the development of the society;
- Derive maximum social economic and cultural benefits and discharge civic obligations competently (UBE Scheme Implementation Blue Print in Obanya, 2003).

Obanya (2003) listed the following as specific objectives of UBE based on the implementation guidelines released by the Ministry of Education:

- Development in the entire citizenry of a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian of school age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education and;

- 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 solid foundation for life-long learning.

UBE and Health Transformation

The goal of education in any nation is the achievement of good life for the citizenry. Therefore, the focus of any educational programme must be seen as one that is directed at improving the health and social well-being of the citizens.

Nigeria is a developing country, which is confronted with many health and social problems. Several diseases, such as malaria, diarrhea, tuberculosis and cholera have continued to take their toll on children and adults alike in this country. The appearance of sexually transmitted infections, including AIDS, with their attendant dehumanising consequences has further rendered the health situation poor in Nigeria. Living standards remain poor as people continue to suffer from malnutrition and congestion. Public amenities like portable water, regular supply of electricity, health services, good roads and communication system are on the decline. As a matter of fact, the root cause of these problems can be traced to the actions and inactions of the government at various levels as well as the activities of individuals in the society. There is now an increasing need to turn inwards to garner whatever help can be mustered to solve these problems. The orientations of the people must change through education. The UBE programme must be repositioned to give new direction in such a way that attitudes and behaviour of the people will change to allow for good health practices.

UBE and Social Transformation

The rate of social change being witnessed by the world in the twenty-first century is unprecedented. These changes, according

to Jegede and Balogun (2002), have brought with them an array of illnesses. In the same vein, Saunde in Jegede and Balogun (2002) argues that social and cultural behaviour are important factors in the etiology, prevalence and distribution of many diseases. How people live, what they eat, what they believe, what they value; and what technology they control are all significant determinants of the individual and collective health. This is a pointer to the fact that most new age diseases result from social behaviour and lifestyle. The improvement of health must depend on attitude and behaviour change through knowledge provision.

The social needs of the youths in this country have long been neglected, resulting in a collection of mal-adjusted youths with anti-social behaviour in our society. In order to sustain our nascent democracy, there is need to develop a sense of group consciousness and co-operative living. Qualities, such as courtesy, sympathy, truthfulness, fairness, honesty, respect for authority and abiding by the rules will help considerably in the promotion of social efficiency. The necessity of good leadership and followership should be stressed as an important issue of national interest. It should however be realized that whether children will develop social values which will improve their health and contribute to the development of the society will depend on the quality of training they receive from school. In this wise, UBE should be revitalized to ensure the right guidance to our youths who are leaders of tomorrow.

Repositioning the UBE Programme

In the process of repositioning UBE for health and social well-being, the following key areas of the programme must be revitalized:

- the curriculum
- teacher

- infrastructure
- out-of-school individuals
- funding

Curriculum - It is the core area of education that provides the content and means of imparting knowledge, attitudes and skills for human development.

The objectives of UBE as presented by Obanya (2003) include:

- laying the foundation for life-long learning
- inculcation of appropriate level of literacy and numeracy
- developing an attitude for practical work and creative activities
- the acquisition of socially desirable life skills.

In order to make the curriculum to be responsive to the demands of UBE, the existing curriculum initiatives must be reviewed. The curriculum that will meet the needs of the people in the 21st century must lay a greater emphasis on:

- individual enhancement, competency, efficiency and self-esteem
- health education for healthy living and safety consciousness
- increased communication skill
- social and life skills
- computer literacy and application

Regular assessment of the learner must be incorporated into the educational system. Henceforth, assessment must be total, including the cognitive domain, the affective domain and the psychomotor domain.

The Teacher – Teachers are in the forefront of the execution of any educational programme. Therefore, they must be part of the conception and planning. Teachers must be exposed to training and retaining to improve their skills.

Teachers must have access to information technology to be current. They must be well remunerated to boost their morale. Teaching should not be an all-comers affair. Efforts at professionalising teaching should be intensified so that teachers can enjoy the benefits other professions do enjoy.

Infrastructure – Infrastructure includes classrooms, hostels, libraries, laboratories, workshops, playing fields, school farms, health centres, water and waste disposal systems. These facilities when provided to meet with modern standards will promote teaching and learning.

The dilapidated buildings under which the present UBE programme operates are not boosting the morale of teachers as well as the pupils. Buildings put in place as far back as 1955 should be replaced with modern ones. Primary schools environment should be made to be health promoting through provision of health facilities. In this way, health hazards in the form of accidents and communicable diseases will be eliminated.

Out of School Youths – The provisions of the UBE programme is presently on the segment of the Nigerian population that is in school. However, the out-of-school youths constitute a larger percentage of the total number of youths in the country and are capable of frustrating the efforts of any educational programme if they are not involved. Most out-of-school youths are disadvantaged in one way or the other; therefore, Government must cater for their health and social needs through educational provision.

This segment comprises:

- children who are never enrolled in school
- the abused
- street children

This category of people is usually illiterate and poor. The UBE should strive to empower them educationally, economically and socially, so that they can be useful members of the society.

Funding – Huge sums of money will be required to implement any educational programme. Government alone cannot fund education adequately. Therefore, government at all levels must intensify efforts to improving their income generating activities to include Parents Teacher Association (PTA) collection, community taxation, grants, voluntary donations from individuals, families, groups, associations and religious bodies and the education tax from profits of companies. The community can contribute labour and skills free for use in building schools and repairing educational facilities. Government can also reach out to international agencies but they must show genuine commitment to the implementation of the UBE programme. The school administrators must make judicious use of the funds collected and ensure the safety of educational facilities put in place.

Conclusion

In order to keep abreast of the political, economic, social, health and technological challenges that accompany the 21st century, our educational system must be put in proper shape. UBE is an educational programme designed to develop in an individual the basic cognitive and social skills for living. The programmes, if well implemented, is capable of solving health and social problems in Nigeria.

In the past, similar programme were marred by poor planning, over politicisation of education, poor funding, inadequate personnel and poor supply of educational services. To avoid the shortcomings of the past, all the key factors most especially the curriculum, the personnel, infrastructure, out-of-school youth programme and funding system must be reviewed.

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