



Basic Education and Youth Empowerment: Imperative for Stable Sustainable Economy in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper looked at basic education as a veritable education policy in Nigeria. The paper opines that universal basic education as an educational policy in Nigeria, if well implemented will equip the Nigerian youth with relevant social skills that will empower them economically, thereby, creating a stable and sustainable economic system in Nigeria. The paper observed the Nigerian educational system as inherited from the British colonial masters cum missionary was said to be very bookish, very theoretical and of no relevance to the environment and needs of the youths in Nigeria. Consequently, several educational reforms had taken place after Nigeria gained independence from the British colonial masters, aimed at repositioning the Nigerian education system to meet the needs of the youths at graduation. One of such educational reforms was the Universal Basic Education programme, launched in Nigeria on the 30th of September 1999. However, the paper observed that the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is far from actualizing its lofty objectives due to several gaps in the implementation of the policy. The paper identified amongst others, poor funding and limited manpower and infrastructure as major challenges, limiting the UBE programme from actualizing its lofty objective. Consequently, the paper recommends inter alia: deliberate concerted effort by the government, the involvement of Voluntary Agencies and Local Initiatives, Community Based and Non Governmental Organization, Foster Parenting approach by well-to do families etc., as avenues and method to effectively implement the Universal Basic Education programme to actualize its objectives and thereby empowering the Nigerian youths and consequently creating a stable economy for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education (UBE), Basic Education, Youth Empowerment, Sustainable Economy

Introduction

The universal basic education in Nigeria is a response to the 1990 world conference on education for "ALL" in Jomtien, Thailand. During the conference representatives of the countries present in the conference pledged to provide amongst others:

- compulsory education and free, but relevant primary education for all children.
- Massively reduce adult illiteracy. This was informed from the evidences which showed that primary school enrollment in several parts of Africa, especially around the sub-Saharan-Africa, dropped drastically in the 1980s, following "structure adjustment programmes" (SAP) and other man-made natural disaster. More so, given the consensus view amongst nation of the world at the conference that :
 - education facilitates development
 - education empowers citizens to harness resources in their environment for improved quality of life

- education is necessary to make progress in such areas as health and population. Hence, world leaders at the conference pledged commitment to the basic education policy and to implement the education programme base on the culture, environment and relevant basic needs of the specific country and people concerned. Okorosaye-Orubite (2022) ^[10], maintains that the Universal Basic Education, UBE programme in Nigeria is part of Nigeria's effort to sustain and respond to its commitment to the promotion and provision of basic education for all as required by several protocols and covenants to which Nigeria is a signatory. According to Okorosaye-Orubite, these protocols and covenants were the outcome of the 19 world and 6 African specific conferences and summits that were held in the decades of summits; 1990-1999.

The Jomtien Declaration and Framework of action on Education 1990 states inter alia, that Basic Education is not just limited to the number of years of formal schooling. Rather education is viewed holistically to include the formal, the none formal and informal method of learning for an all-round development and awakening of human potentials. "The broad aim is to lay the foundation of life –long-learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning to –learn, self awareness and like skills". (FRN1999). The "Implementation Guideline for the UBE programmes" as provided by the Federal Ministry of education stated the objectives of the UBE in Nigeria as:

1. to develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its rigorous promotion
2. to provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian of school age.
3. to reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
4. to cater 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 provisions and promotions of basic education.
5. To ensure the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communication and life skills as well as the ethics, moral and civic values needed for laying solid foundations for life-long learning. Obanya (2003) ^[8] maintains that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is a monumental national education development enterprise, which should be fully embraced by all Nigerians.

The Universal Basic Education programme according to Okorosaye- Orubite (2022), has a wide scope which includes:

1. programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development
2. Programme and initiative for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above)
3. Special programmes for nomadic populations and out- of school children, none-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left before acquiring the basics needed for life-long –learning.
4. Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for

adolescents and youths who have not had the benefit of formal education, the formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school

From the stated objectives, the Universal Basic Education programme is a broad spectrum and an omnibus scheme that accommodates all shades of persons in the society with a view to providing numeracy and literacy for all; but specifically targeted at young adults, adult learners, and youth who for one reason or the other missed the regular school education.

Basic Education and Youth Empowerment

The Universal Basic Education aims at providing relevant skills and apprenticeship for the youths so that they can be meaningfully and gainfully engaged economically to enable them contribute meaningfully to economic development in the society. The Universal Basic Education with its objectives if truly implemented will equip the youths with requisite relevant skills that will enable them harness resources in the environment that can stimulate stable economic development and thereby increasing the quality of life in the society. However, the reverse is the case with the Universal Basic Education implementation in Nigeria. Many Nigerian youths graduate from the junior secondary school without receiving/acquiring the relevant requisite skills that would have enabled them to be self employed, self reliant and consequently stimulating the economy for stable economic growth for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Akpan and Udoh (2014) ^[4], further aver that the inability of the school system to equip the youths with the required necessary skills to enable them to be self reliant at graduation has resulted to lack of productive and employable youths that will make a positive impact on the economy.

In a study titled "Empowering Rural youths for maximum societal impact through skill acquisition programmes in Ogoni Area of River State" Deebom and Okwelle (2016) ^[5] in a field survey, observed that 100% of the youth possess mastery of the literacy skills which is obtained from formal education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, but a very low achievement of technical skills which are marketable and necessary for employment. Oviawe (2010) ^[11] affirms Deebom and Okwelle's findings and collaborates that students scarcely receive the necessary skills that will enable them become self reliant citizens and workers before leaving school. This he argues, is based on the fact that most Nigerian institutions in contemporary time are focused on teaching and learning theories instead of emphasizing on practical and environmental based education that will produce marketable skilled graduates. Yakubu (2012) ^[12], in his submission also maintain that many Nigeria youths especially school leavers cannot provide services that can generate sustainable income given the fact that they are unemployable due to lack of productive and marketable skills that has rendered them unemployable and unfit for the productive sector of the economy.

From the foregoing argument, it is clear that there is a serious mismatch between the Nigerian educational output and the very requirement by the business offices, industries and public sector. This mismatch in the school graduate production of unskilled youths has created a Serious void in the economy for sustainability in Nigeria, given the fact the youth constitute a major work force of the population.

Consequently, the unemployment occasioned by lack of relevant skills by the youth has led to a situation where many youths are engaged in many vices in attempt to make a living and negatively affecting the economy. This anomaly must be corrected through deliberate determined effort by the three levels of government at ensuring that the Universal Basic Education objectives of equipping the youths with relevant practical environmentally based entrepreneurial skills before their graduation is a reality. This of course, has to be backed up with a special trust fund for the implementation of such and a task force to oversee youth skill acquisition at all levels of the education system.

Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Economic Development Stability in Nigeria

Given the fact that the youth constitute a very significant percentage of the population of any nation and consequently, an important segment of the workforce because of their creativity and kinetic energy. It becomes mandatory that the youths energy be properly harnessed and properly engaged for meaningful productive engagement for stable sustainable development in the nation. Akpakpan (2016) ^[3] maintains that youths play a particularly important role in national development. Akpakpan(2016) further maintains that youth between the age bracket of 18 and 35 as defined in the Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy document (2009), are important on both supply side and the demand side of national development. Youths within the age bracket stated above are very imaginative, creative and daring; and on the supply side can stimulate the national and economic development by the ideas they generate, and the activities they carry out. It will be recalled that most of the Nigerian youths that brought laurels to the nation and made Nigeria proud and popular through arts, music, entertainment games, football, other sporting activities and international academic competition are all youths within the age bracket of 18-35 with relevant requisite skills that such activities demanded at that material time. The likes of Fela Anikulakpo Kuti, Sony Okosun, in music, J.J. Okocha, Kanu Nwankwo, Taribo West, Rahidi Yekini etc, in Football, Ajuwa, in sports etc. the list goes on; all these mentioned here contributed to the pride and economic development of Nigeria with their skills in their hay days.

On the demand side, Youths with their sentiment, activities and demand can stimulate the government to investment (in programmes economic venture that are targeted at the youths), good governance, or practices that produce transforming effects on the environment. The #END-SARS protest that reduced police brutality on the citizens, the #END- BAD – GOVERNANCE, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), that protested against the imposition of (#100) one hundred Naira Tuition Fees on University students, by General Muhamed Buhary as the Nigeria Military head of state in 1984.etc. are some of the demand activities of the youths that has impacted positively on the Nigerian people and economy generally. Akpakpan(2016) ^[3] argues that the youths whether on the supply or on the demand side, were able to impact their environment because they possessed the knowledge, information and skills that were galvanized into positive actions in the environment they found themselves.

Akpankpan(2016), further posits that the possession of the relevant skills and knowledge that enabled the youths to impact their environment is described by development

experts as empowerment. Consequently, he argues that the empowerment of the citizens is a major factor to national development. Ogeh (2020) ^[9] furthers the argument on youth empowerment and sustainable economic development by positing that the fast evolution of today's societies, and more specifically the labour markets require new skills from individuals. To be relevant in the contemporary society and make meaningful contribution to stable sustainable national development, the educational curriculum need to be reorganized and refocused and reemphasized as follows: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. This requires the curriculum to focus on the youths attaining a stated number of clearly defined environmentally relevant defined skills and competence at graduation.

A competence based approach to education in Nigeria will definitely empower the youths to contribute meaningfully to economic growth and national development. Discussing the 21st Century skills and national development, Njoku (2023) ^[7], maintains that apart from initiative, 21st Century skills places demand on students to learn about productivity, understanding productivity will enable students to be well informed about productive strategies in the 21st Century that will help student complete their task in a suitable amount of time creating atmosphere for employment sustainable development.

The Challenges of Basic Education and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

Although Nigerian representatives at the jomtien conference pledged to provide the Universal Basic Education scheme as specified at the conference. However, the challenges of implementing the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is enormous and very daunting. Ahmed and Awodoyin (2016) ^[2] maintain that it is crystal clear that the image of the old system of education still reflects in the approach to the academic content of the present education system in Nigeria. It is still observed that despite the emphasis on educating the youth to receive relevant skills to enable them to be economically self reliant and apprenticeship training in the Basic Education programme, the Nigerian education system still educate job seekers. It is still difficult to implement all the lofty ideals of the UBE scheme as to empower the youth to stimulate economic growth that will subsequently enhance sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Nigerian education system is still very theoretical and bookish in approach and lacks the necessary ingredients that will actualize the Universal Basic Education scheme due to the numerous challenges facing the programme. The challenges ranges from poor funding, lack of adequate infrastructure for the programme to lack of qualified teachers that will teach specific relevant skills that can empower the youths to be self employed and self reliant thereby, stimulating economic growth for a sustatainable developed economy. The desire by parents and students to obtain certificates that will offer white collar jobs instead of blue collar jobs has seriously place a great setback on the successful implementation of relevant skills that will make the youth self reliant at graduation.

The Way Forward

In educating and equipping the youth with relevant skills through the Universal Basic Education to enable the youth contribute meaningfully to stable economic development

demands a deliberate concerted effort by the government at wholly implementing the lofty objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme to achieve the desired result of stimulating stable economic growth and national development. However, sometimes the colossal task of educating the people as to achieve “Education For All” as stated in the objectives of the Universal Basic Education may not be fulfilled by the instrumentality of the government alone. Ahluwalia and Bais (2010) ^[1], maintains that a programme of such magnitude of educating the masses and empowering the youth with relevant skills to enable the youth to be meaningfully engaged economically will require all hands on deck if stable sustainable economic development can be achieved through empowering the youth. By all hands on deck, he maintains that voluntary agencies and local initiatives must augment the government effort for a stable sustainable economic development to be accomplished through empowering the youth through education.

Youth empowerment through Education For All, will require public spirited individuals, Community Based Organizations, (CBOs) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Voluntary institutions to invest into the project. Ahluwalia and Bais(2010) ^[1], further maintain that a note worthy voluntary scheme known as “Foster Parent Scheme” (FPS) can be encouraged in Nigeria to achieve youth empowerment through education for all. By Foster parent Scheme, Ahluwalia opines that many well-to-do families can be contacted by local social workers and head teachers and principals of the various arms of the Basic education programme to assist or adopt indigent students as foster children and donate specific amount for their education or possibly have them trained for specific skill to enable them be economically empowered. It is believed that concerted effort by the government and the voluntary initiatives at educating the youth, mostly some gifted indigent students without reliable parenthood, can make a great difference in our society at empowering the youth, thereby creating a stable reliable sustainable economy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This essay maintains that Youth empowerment is very vital for a stable national economic growth for sustainable national development. The Universal Basic Education scheme in Nigeria amongst other objectives is expected to equip the youths with relevant requisite environmental skills that will enable the youths to be self employed, self reliant, retrain other youths and possibly be gainfully employed by institutions, companies, agencies and offices that requires the skills possessed by the youths. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case; rendering many of the Nigerian youths idle and unemployable and consequently wasting the most important, useful and productive age roaming the streets thereby, denying them their contribution towards sustainable economic national development. Since the youth constitute a significant workforce of any population, the time has come to gainfully engage and empower this group of individuals through skills transfer through the Basic Education scheme and other “out of school” skills transfer programmes. It is Hoped that if the youths are correctly guided, adequately empowered with skills and subsequently mobilized and integrated into the fabric of the society’s mainstream productive sector, with their creativity and dynamism, the

Youth force will subsequently bring about the needed sustainable national economic development in Nigeria.

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