

Towards Eradicating Illiteracy among Nigerian Children in 2015: Guidance Needs of Parents

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Abstract: This study examined the efforts and possibilities of providing basic education for all school age Nigerian children. The most recent of these efforts is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme launched in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. This study examined the state of literacy of Nigerian children and identified the various obstacles to the acquisition of Basic Education for all school age children in the country. The attempt to overcome these obstacles and achieve the global goal of basic education for all in 2015 calls for the commitment of the parents. The parents would need a change of orientation to realise that their roles in the education of their children should go beyond the level of providing feeding, writing materials and uniforms to that of controlling late enrolment, absenteeism, withdrawal, gender disparities and poor attitudes to education. They would have to assist in the development and maintenance of school infrastructures, formation of functional Parents-Teachers Association and monitoring of their children's school work after school hours. For the parents to have a genuine change of orientation and function in the above dimensions, there is need for the professional intervention of Guidance Counsellors. This study is, therefore, concluded by soliciting for the provision of community Guidance and Counselling services that would make the parents realise their roles in making the UBE a reality, particularly in the rural areas of Nigeria where the density of illiterate children is still high.

Key words: Eradicating, illiteracy, guidance, needs of parents, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Antecedents in the eradication of illiteracy in Nigeria:

The attempt to eradicate illiteracy among Nigerian children of school age is not a recent development. Universal Primary Education (UPE) had been launched in Western Nigeria in 1955 and in 1957 in the Eastern region for the purpose of universalizing at least, primary education in the regions. When the glory of the regional UPEs started dwindling, the Federal Government then launched a national UPE programme in September 1976. This national programme increased primary school enrolment from 6.2 million pupils in 1975/76 session to about 14.8 million in the 1992/93 session with the majority from the Southern regions (Okoro, 1998). However, the UPE programmes were unable to meet their targets due to financial, administrative, infrastructural problems and lack of parental and community cooperation (Basse, 2002). On this, Okoro (1998) reported that the low female enrolment in the Northern Nigeria could be due to lack of mutual trust between the school and the community. For instance, if parents suspect the school of directing the child from true path of Islam or Catholicism or of persuading the child from acting according to a revered

cultural tradition or moral conduct, that parent cannot be persuaded to enrol his or her child at school. It has also been reported that in a predominantly Muslim population, access to Western-style education has been inhibited by parents' perceptions of the education given in such institutions. Many parents, especially in rural communities, would prefer sending their children to Koranic schools. About 60% of such children were girls (UNICEF, 1997). Hence research findings have reported low grades in learning achievement during the UPE programme. In 1997, the literacy achievement level in Nigerian primary schools was 25.2% (UBEC, 2005). UNICEF (1997) also reported that primary school enrolment rate was under 35% with high drop out rate from schools in Northern Nigeria, particularly at the secondary school level.

The current struggle for mass literacy in Nigeria: The problems of the past notwithstanding, Nigeria is determined to eradicate illiteracy among all her school age children in 2015. Hence, she has joined other civilised nations in the struggle to mobilise local and international efforts and participation in order to make Education for All (EfA) by year 2015 a reality. Since, the Jomtien Conference

of 1990, Nigeria has actively participated and remained a signatory to all international deliberations towards Education for All (Okoro, 1998; UBEC, 2005).

The most recent practical demonstration of the commitment of the Federal Government of Nigeria towards the provision of basic education for all is the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999. The UBE is a nine-year free and compulsory basic education programme covering the 6 years of primary education and the 3 years of Junior Secondary School education. This was designed to increase enrolment, retention and completion of basic education; to reduce gender, access and equity disparities in basic education and to strengthen partnership in the provision of basic education.

The signing of the UBE Bill into law on 26th May 2004 further reinforced and fully legalized the UBE initiative. Among other things, the UBE Act 2004 made the provision of basic education the responsibility of state and local governments with adequate funding and supervision by the Federal Government. The Act also prescribed punishments for parents and guardians who would keep their wards away from school (UBEC, 2004).

The UBE Act in Nigeria also provided for the establishments of a Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to coordinate the implementation of the programme at National level and States Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) to complement at the State levels. The UBEC immediately took over from the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) which had coordinated the UBE programme till 7th October 2004 when the UBEC was formally established. The UBEC now has coordinating offices in the states of the Federation (UBEC, 2004).

In the search of community participation in the provision of basic education, the UBE Commission flagged-off the community self-help projects scheme throughout the country in February 2006. This made the commission to release counterpart funds to the States in order to enhance community participation, mobilization, support, advocacy, partnership, management and ownership of basic education schools. The initiative was also to aid in the identification of education problems and solutions through the use of the self-help funds by the communities involved (UBEC, 2006).

So far, one would appreciate the achievements of the UBE in the following areas:

- There is renovation of schools and establishment of few new ones, particularly in the urban areas. By year 2001, Nigeria already had over 41,000 primary schools nationwide (Salawu, 2001).

- There is increase in enrolment leading to high literacy rates. The primary school enrolment moved from about 14.8 million in 1993, to over 17 million by 2001 (Denga, 2002). Also by 2004, 60% of Nigerian children age 6-11 had attended primary school. The distribution revealed that 38% were males, 33% were females, 46% were from urban areas, while 29% attended school in rural areas. The record showed that 35% of youths also attended secondary schools by the same year (NPC and ORC Macro, 2004).
- There is emphasis on the access to education by all, leading to the high rate at which female children now attend school.
- The conditions of service of teachers have improved. Among others, Ekiti State for instance, promoted some teachers to the level of permanent secretaries and rewarded some with cars in the year 2006.
- The rate of private schools partnership in the provision of basic education in Nigeria is now high.
- The effort to supervise basic educational practices in Nigeria is geared up. The Universal Basic Education Commission was established and legalised for this purpose.

However, any individual conversant with the Nigerian educational system will not deny the following constraints against the efforts to provide basic quality education for all school age children. These include:

Poor quality: There is a fall in the quality of education in Nigeria and this has been attributed to various factors which include poor motivation of the teaching force, insufficiency of textbooks and instructional materials, poor learning environment, overcrowded schools especially in southern Nigeria, inadequate and poor quality of teachers, poor supervision and poor management of educational funds (Udokang, 2002; Adelere *et al.*, 2005; UBEC, 2005; Ajibade, 2005; Obanya, 2006).

Poverty: If equity involves equal access to good quality schooling, one cannot claim that all Nigerian children are exposed to good quality basic education. Majority of those starting to attend school over-age or those not attending at all are from rural areas (NPC and ORC Macro, 2004).

Gender disparities: UNESCO (2002) reports that only 23.99% of the expected girls in Sokoto State attended school in year 2000. Some boys also dropped out of school due to economic pressures especially in the Eastern States of Abia, Enugu, Imo and Anambra with

higher trends at the primary school level. Some parents still believe that boys should benefit from western education than girls (NPC and ORC Macro, 2004).

The private schools dilemma: Nigeria is currently witnessing a rapid upsurge of private primary and secondary schools in her towns and cities. However, this development has grossly contributed to the intake of non-professional teachers into the education industry, disparity in school curriculum, increasing cost of basic education-a situation leading to many learners being driven out of school over non-payment of fees (Gbadamosi, 2005). Yet the search for quality and prestige has made many parents abandon the renovated public schools for even the worst of the private schools.

Non-challant attitude to the education of disabled children: The enrolment of pupils with impairment is still late and their training still lacks parental support (Olofintoye, 2005).

Poor level of partnership between schools and parents: As at year 2004, only about 41% of parents and guardians made one or more contributions to the education of their children. Only about 27% of the parents contributed to teachers development. The report from NPC and ORC Macro (2004), revealed that about 61% of such contributions came from those in urban areas. This is probably because such parents hitherto believe that education is absolutely free and a sole responsibility of the government.

Guidance needs of nigerian parents towards the education of their children: A consideration of the previous policies, practices and problems of education in Nigeria has revealed that parental factor occupied a central place. Parents are, therefore, expected in addition to providing food and clothing, to assist in the following ways towards the education of their children. These include:

- Ensuring timely registration of their children.
- Informing the school about the problems of their children.
- Aiding the child in doing his take home assignment
- Assisting in the purchase of textbooks.
- Assisting the child to be punctual in school and prevent absenteeism.
- Giving both boys and girls equal access to education
- Avoiding unnecessary change of schools.
- Encouraging the education of the disabled child.
- Pursuing quality rather than quantity education.

- Maintaining purposeful visits to schools, e.g., attending Parent-Teacher Association meetings and celebrations and meeting with teachers and head-teachers.
- Making contributions to schools. This could be in form of money for construction and maintenance of school properties. Materials such as planks, iron sheets, stones and sand could be given to the schools. Donations of labour by bricklayers, carpenters, painters, printers and furniture makers could also be made to help schools. Books and writing materials could be donated to school libraries.
- Developing academic orientation in their children by encouraging good studying habit, motivation for learning, skills in reading and comprehension and promoting good examination habit.

For Nigerian parents to function adequately in the above dimension, there is the need to change their present disposition concerning their roles in the education enterprise. This desired change could best be brought about by the intervention of professional guidance counsellors. A guidance counsellor provides services geared towards making a group of persons gain awareness of themselves, their environments and issues in order to be useful to themselves and adjust to the demands of their society. The guidance services to bring about these changes could be rendered through PTA meetings, communal meetings in villages and the mass media such as radio, television and newspapers. These recommended guidance services include:

Orientation services for parents: Guidance orientation services include all efforts to make people familiar with and adjust to new situations through organised group procedures. An effective use of group guidance techniques to inform parents on the UBE programme would reduce their levels of ignorance on the programme, enhance enrolment and prevent absenteeism. Informing parents about school rules and regulations and the content of the UBE Act could prevent unnecessary withdrawal of pupils. Information about the needs of the school could also raise the level of contributions and donations by parents. This orientation programme could also focus on changing the previous orientation of parents concerning their involvement in the education of their children. For instance, some Nigerian parents are still not committed to the education of their children, but still hold tenaciously to all those doubtful “free this, free that” promises that keep recycling in our educational policies. There is the need for parents to have meaningful input to the education of their children if quality is to be enhanced

particularly with the overwhelming population in Nigerian schools. Also the orientation programme should focus on educating parents against forcing their vocations on their children. Most of the rural dwellers are still of the opinion that their children should inherit their farms, cattle and trades and so could not perceive much need for schooling.

Educational guidance services for parents: Services here refer to a group of activities to facilitate entrance into educational institutions and making progress there. Parents need to be systematically educated on the type of school to place their children, particularly in this era of proliferation of private schools. Help could also be given to parents on how to develop in their children good academic orientation, such as: Good study habit, motivation for learning, skills in reading and comprehension, attending to home works and attaining and maintaining good academic performance level. This would enable parents assist their children to achieve the purpose of schooling.

Personal-social guidance services for parents: Issues attended to here include undesirable personal experiences that affect the functioning of the individual and his interpersonal relationship. Personal problems may arise from parents' perception and anxiety on the quality of education, value of investment in education in the face of lingering mass unemployment, bias about female education, unhealthy attitude to the education of the impaired child and the challenges of training a gifted child. Guidance services would help parents resolve these crisis and make them relate well with their children in maximising the benefits of education.

Training in follow-up activities: The focus of follow-up services in guidance is evaluative, that is, a critical appraisal of the services already rendered. Parents could be sensitised to assess their children and give adequate feedback to the school concerning the academic and social development of such children. The feedback to the school could be given by parents through brief follow-up letters, timely personal visits and telephone calls. This will aid parent-teacher partnership in the spread of basic education.

CONCLUSION

The UBE in Nigeria is currently facing some constraints capable of blasting it off like the educational programmes of the past. A genuine involvement and commitment of parents in the education of their children

could help in preventing most of these problems. Adequate provision of Guidance Counsellors to implement the parental guidance services needs recommended in this paper would go a long way in making the universalisation of basic education in 2015 a reality in Nigeria.

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