

Review

From the Universal Primary Education (UPE) to Universal Basic Education (UBE): Implications for counseling in primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria

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The Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in 1999 to reduce the level of illiteracy, accelerate national development and improve the fallen standard of education as against the crises that besieged the implementation of the erstwhile Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme that was launched in 1976. The UBE was a major strategy of the government to achieve Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015 as part of the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This study therefore, highlights the problems that hampered the successful implementation of the UPE and the need for a proper implementation of the UBE. To realize the objectives of the UBE and the dividends of EFA by the year 2015, it was suggested that guidance services are sine qua non and that government must show more commitment towards this end.

Key words: Universal Primary Education, Universal Basic Education, counseling, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to rehabilitate the educational system and the quest for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) as part of the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in Nigeria, the Federal Government launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Sokoto, Sokoto State on the 30th of September, 1999. The launching was against the strides militating against improving educational developments in Nigeria. It aims at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, as well as stimulating and accelerating national development, political consciousness and national integration.

Obasanjo (2006) in his presidential address on the state of Nigerian educational system affirmed that educating a child is the closing of the prison gate to such child.

The implementation of the programme launched by former President Olusegun Obasanjo was hampered initially by lack of enabling law. The UBE Bill was signed into law in 2004 (UBE, 2004), while the programme itself commenced in 2000/2001 school year (Okugbe, 2009). The UBE was preceded by a very similar educational programme, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) with the major aims similar to that of the UBE at providing

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basic educational skills for children and all citizens to be useful citizens in their communities, country and the world at large. Every child, from the age of six was encouraged to attend school and remain there for the next six years. UPE was also free and funded by both the Federal and State governments. Both programmes are in line with the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), which stipulates that a child should receive primary education between the ages of six and eleven, to gain fundamental skills, knowledge, feelings, thoughts and actions. Primary education, according to the National Policy on Education is geared towards necessary and wholesome development of the Nigerian children, regardless of the Nigerian educational system (FGN, 2004). Therefore, the pertinent questions are:

What are the problems which the former UPE had which militated against it?

What strategies were involved in the implementation of it?

What strategies could be put in place to further help the implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria so that it could achieve the desired goals.

This paper, therefore, focuses on the highlights of the implementation problems of the former UPE, the need for a proper implementation of the UBE and most importantly, the need for efficient guidance and counseling practices as entrenched in the NPE (FGN, 2004; Major and Ominabo, 2013). It indicates guidance and counseling processes as efficient strategy for a successful implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria. The importance of guidance and counseling services as pivotal of operation to assist the Nigerian child to attain functional literacy and acquire life coping skills was also a focused.

The problems with the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the need for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria

The UPE had a good start and spectacular success between 1976, when it started and 1980, when the population of primary school pupils increased from six million to twelve million. By the middle of 1980s, a lot of unavoidable and unforeseen problems confronted the programme. For instance, the large increase in the primary school population could not be readily accommodated. Schools were not enough. Insufficient funds from the government for the required expansion of schools, scarcity of trained and qualified teachers and the political instability in the country were among the problems which rendered the UPE programme unsustainable as noted by Obanya (2000), Achuonye (2004), Nwachukwu (2007) and Nwanekezi and Onyekuru (2012).

The obvious need for the launching of the UBE arose from the afore-mentioned and from the fact that since the 1990s, there has been most unfortunate decline in the education sector. Realizing the statistics of the decline, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Nigerian government were of the opinion that if the situation is not arrested, the Nigerian child would not be adequately prepared and informed to step in and live in the 21st century (FGN/UNICEF, 2003). The Nigerian government, through the UBE has, therefore, taken up the challenge to save the declining and decaying educational sector with a view to improving and expanding upon the UPE, and thus strategizing for the achievement of Education for All (EFA), a part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Federal government has since reviewed national needs and decided to give the UBE a broader focus to take care of children in the primary school up to JSS3 in the secondary school, covering children between the ages of six and fifteen. Much emphasis has been placed on teacher training programme, provision of enough schools and equipment for eligible children, paying attention to comprehensive adult literacy programme and focusing on the teaching of standard and traditional components of knowledge, citizenship, religion and morality. If the Nigerian child must have opportunities of good education in a variety of forms as espoused by the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), the government needs to review her strategies and show more commitment to the implementation of the programme.

Implementation of the Universal Basic Education Programme: The Guidance and Counseling approach

To make a success of the UBE, assistance of private organisations and individuals is essential. Most importantly, matters relating to cognition, affection and psychomotor domains in the individuals benefitting from it and the need for professional counsellors are essential for its success. Ipaye (1983) explained that trained guidance counsellors provide physical, social and psychological atmosphere and setting within which they (counsellors) can provide help to others educationally, vocationally and socially. Educationally, they develop awareness about the educational world, one's educational strengths and weaknesses, and also help one to gain useful information about one's self in relation to education and its future benefits.

Vocationally, trained guidance counsellors would develop awareness about the world of work in individuals, help in acquisition of useful information and social skills which will help in getting and retaining a job and facilitate adjustment in the world of work. Socially, they help individuals in developing ways of socializing, interacting, creating awareness of the social environment, acquiring

skills for social interaction, facilitating and modifying adjustment to social environment (Owuamanam, 2007). Guidance is needed at the primary school level to be able to screen and group children into various groups for maximum acquisition of knowledge. Guidance counsellors, therefore, provide various services which concern individuals, keep records concerning individuals and act as liaison officers between individuals and significant others in their lives. Arhedo et al. (2009) affirm that school counsellors by virtue of their training and profession, are strategists in the implementation of educational policies. In recognition of the important role of guidance and counselling in the implementation of UBE, it was clearly stated in National Policy on Education that guidance and counselling will feature in teacher education programme (FGN, 2004). Since acquisition of functional literacy by individuals is one of the aims of the UBE, successful counselling geared towards a successful implementation of it is a sine qua non. To achieve a success of this programme, the following guidance and counselling services should be employed and emphasized.

Guidance and Counselling services in schools in relation to the UBE programme

Information service: This is an aspect of guidance and counselling practices in schools which provides useable educational, occupational, personal and social information. Such information helps clients to make the most appropriate choice and at the most appropriate time. Akinade et al. (1996) affirmed that this service is the totality of data gathering that are presented to the clients to facilitate awareness, knowledge, appraisal, decision-making and evaluation. Since the UBE programme will involve two certificate classes (primary six and JSS III) decisions/choice making, and educational information given during these critical periods of primary and early secondary education will help pupils to be aware of educational opportunities and courses available to them at any point in time and in the future. Also, information from appraisal service will help the JSS students to make their choices in the area of subject choice and in relation to their future vocational aspirations. This will also help them to relate their interest at a tender age to their ability and future aspirations and realities.

Towards the acquisition of life skill training as stipulated by the National Policy on Education (FGN, 1981; 2004), occupational information, when efficiently and effectively handled by trained guidance counsellors in the programme, will make pupils and students become aware of the demands and requirements of various occupations and careers. Children need occupational information to know what to study, knowledge of the future field of work and the duration of study. During their formative years,

students need occupational information to help them know their ability as regards various occupations. Personal and social information at the primary and junior secondary levels is useful to help children adjust effectively to the new environments. For instance, socio-personal information about clubs and school societies like the Boys' Scout, Girls' Guide, Young Engineers and Young Farmers, enlighten them about how such clubs are beneficial to them and societies in the future. It should be noted that this aspect of guidance and counselling practices in the UBE programme require the establishment of a good resource centre and library in each school. Brochures, magazines, journals, video recorders, calendars, handbooks, bulletin and bill boards, and other information documents that contain entry requirements into various occupations, institutions of higher learning, and display forum are essential items to make this service rewarding for the students and children.

Counselling service: This service is often regarded as the core or the backbone of any guidance service in schools (Owuamanam, 2007). Counselling is concerned with creating opportunities and suitable environments for the personal, social, educational and vocational growth of the individual (Ipaye, 1983). Counselling services help individuals learn to maximize benefits of living and to be exposed to their affective domain to maximize the gains of cognitive and psychomotor domains. It is an essential programme that needs to be incorporated into both the primary and secondary school systems. Students in the JSS level encounter a series of problems and concerns such as problems of adjustment, delinquency, breaking school rules and, adjustment to societal and home rules among others in their early adolescence. During counselling service, pupils/students are given personalized attention and are assisted to resolve their various educational, vocational and socio-personal challenges. If counselling service is well established in the primary and junior secondary school levels, it will help in creating values in education, understanding roles and values of work, deciding and choosing of careers and relevant school subjects and understanding of the psychological, social and physical environments in schools. Ultimately, pupils and students will understand themselves, their environment, and thereby become better adjusted and more functional individuals in their respective environments. Efficient counselling in the UBE will therefore, achieve in the entire citizenry, a strong consciousness for education and strong commitment to its promotion as one of the objectives of the programme (Olatunji, 2000).

Consultation service: Consultation service involves consultation within and outside the school system. Parents of children could consult with the school

counsellor on rules and other aspects of the school and on particular areas that relate to their children's school or life behaviours. The counsellors also act as consultants to parents on the growth and development of their children and wards (Owuamanam, 2007). School counsellors should impress on the parents to live up to their responsibilities by providing their children with necessary materials that will make them more effective in schools. Workshops could be organized to involve other school personnel on how to handle children. In the UBE programme, consultation service will help in rendering more effective services to parents, teacher and outsiders in early and late childhood care, socialization and education.

Co-ordination service: This service involves the school counsellor putting together for relevant use by children, all relevant information, records and related issues. It is an invaluable service for UBE because it could coordinate for the purpose of helping children, other school personnel, parents, agencies and others. It involves co-ordination of scores and activities, retrieval of information on individuals, co-ordination of actions of other people or groups concerning individual pupils to facilitate the provision and promotion of basic education to all.

Placement service: This involves helping to place individuals in educational institutions, vocations or jobs. The school counsellors has a lot to do in this area in the UBE programme as espoused in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 1981; 2004). During transition from the primary school to secondary school and from the JSS classes to the senior secondary classes, the counsellor makes use of the relevant information available through information and appraisal services for placement purposes.

Planning Service: Planning in this sense relates to vocational planning and involves planning to make pupils and students benefit from the UBE programme. It could provide adequate resources and opportunities in terms of relationship between subjects and various vocations. Alternative opportunities from which they could choose from within the school system and in the world of work would be adequately provided through trained and experienced guidance counselors. This aspect of guidance service is viewed with much emphasis and regard as it cares for the proper outlining of all the other aspects of the school programme.

Follow up service: This service allows the counsellor to get familiar and up-dated with the progress of individuals who have passed through the various guidance services. In the UBE, counsellors' activities in terms of follow up will be most rewarding because the efforts of the nine

years of study through primary and junior secondary would be monitored to assess the efficacy or otherwise of the services. It is only through this action that the beneficiaries of the UBE will be empowered to fend for themselves and pursue self-improvement through life (Ifidon, 2000).

Orientation Service: This service generally aims at introducing and orientating pupils, students and teachers to guidance services and adjustment to specific new environment. It is geared towards stimulating, motivating and arousing the interest of individuals. It helps the individual to feel emotionally and mentally secure in his or her environment (Akinade et al., 1996). Towards the implementation of the UBE, the school counsellors should help make pupils and students adjust as rapidly as possible to the basics of school programme and environment. This would facilitate easy acquisition of knowledge and quick familiarization to the physical environment. Rules and regulations of schools that would help pupils and students to be attitudinally attuned to both physical and psychological environments would be brought into focus during the orientation programme. Also, the social and psychological environments would be brought into focus during orientation programme. Also, the social and historical environments of the school would be highlighted. Study habits and effective use of the school library towards realization of the aims of the UBE programme would be learned.

Referral service: To have an all-round and total development of the Nigerian child, the referral service, which the school guidance counsellor employs to seek the assistance of other personnel in various fields, to solve problems and concerns is invaluable. Since the school guidance counsellor is and cannot be everything on his own, he refers pupils and students to sources, experts and centers where adequate assistance could be got. It is important to note that with the referral and consultation services in the UBE programme, the Nigerian child will be exposed to being better able to cope with the complexities of the 21st century.

SUGGESTIONS

For a successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, guidance and counselling practices in the primary and junior secondary school systems must be intertwined with the instruction programme and administration of the school. However, according to Hill and Luckey (1969), the school guidance programme should be planned effectively, led reasonably and rationally executed and be assessed from time to time to determine its effectiveness. The launching of the UBE was Nigeria's practical and most courageous response to

the call for Education for All (EFA) in the year 2015 (FGN, 2001) and a lot of cooperation and collaboration from within and outside the country were needed to make it successful. The resolution adopted at the conference between Nigeria and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the re-enforcement of co-operation (UNESCO, 1998) and the striking of the deal already adopted at the commission level, to tap the technical resources available at UNESCO to make the UBE programme a success should be upheld. Frequent teachers' strikes and cult clashes of students should be handled with a multifaceted and methodical approach so that such do not hinder the success of the UBE programme. Enough funds for effective implementation of the programme, learning and teaching resource centers and libraries equipped with textbooks, information books teaching aids and materials should not be overlooked. Nigeria authors should not be left out towards the successful implementation of the UBE programme by encouraging to write for the Nigeria communities. All colleges of Education and faculties of education in universities should review educational theories, methodologies and professional focus towards counsellor training. The Federal Government of Nigeria should review teacher and counselor training programmes to make them meet the needs of the 21st Century.

CONCLUSION

This paper has a number of implications for counsellor education and proper implementation of guidance and counselling practices in schools in Nigeria. Adequate funds should be made available for additional counsellor training workshops and programmes. Such should be intensified and with a focus towards the aims and objectives of the UBE programmes. There is the need to make counselling education programme a contributive factor towards the successful implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the present Nigerian primary school system does not have trained counsellors posted to school solely to administer guidance and counselling programmes. If it continues in this way, it means six out of the nine years for the UBE programme will not have the professional touch of trained counsellor. For the total development of the Nigerian child, the Federal and State Ministries of Education should start posting guidance counsellors to primary schools. At the secondary school level, many schools need one or two more guidance counsellors to be able to cope with the enrolment and render other services. The situation of not having counsellors in the primary school is not the best for the Nigerian environment. So, adequate guidance and counselling personnel and practices should be made available in both primary and

secondary schools if the UBE programme is to be successfully implemented in Nigeria.

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