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Subject: **Conference Article**

Please receive here attached, an article titled "Meeting educational and social goals through assessment and certification: The case of the universal basic education scheme in Nigeria" written by Prof. A. M. Wokocha and Elder Bassey Ubong. The article has also been sent by surface mail. The paper will be presented within the time limit set for us. Further information on our travel arrangements will be mailed to you. We have also contacted the Nigerian representative of Umalusi, Prof. David Awanbor of the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) of which the undersigned is a board member. Meanwhile, information from internet has it that your website is "still under construction."

We look forward to meeting you at the conference.

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MEETING EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL GOALS THROUGH ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION SCHEME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Assessment in education is generally focused on people, covering activities such as examining, grading, examining and certifying. Certification is thus a component, and to some extent, the initial end-point of assessment in the education system. One of the ways in which the present Federal Government of Nigeria wishes to impact on the lives of citizens is through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme as a policy instrument. The scheme is to cover young persons in formal schooling from primary school up to the junior secondary school level wherein free, compulsory education is offered. It will also cover school drop-outs and adult learners in a non-formal framework as well as provide a special programme for nomadic populations. The effort in this article is to review the scheme briefly, then focus on the assessment and certification components and indicate whether the approaches to assessment and certification to date, will meet the Federal Government's educational and social goals.

Introduction

Societies from antiquity have always had one form of government or the other. Each was, and is expected to have goals or targets of achievements, hopefully in the utilitarian spirit of the greatest good for the greatest number. The goals include political, economic, social, educational and relationship with neighbours. Recently, given the local and global importance of the environment, governments have also articulated environmental objectives because without the earth, man has no business surviving anyway.

The social and educational objectives of the Nigerian nation are woven around the citizen. Though the national philosophy of education as enunciated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 1998) gives the impression that the primary goal of education is national development, there is no doubt that development of the individual is the pedestal on which national development is possible and practicable.

Even before independence in 1960, education had been regarded as the thrust of individual and national development in Nigeria. Basic, free and compulsory education had been the primary focus, with the government of the Western Region taking the lead in 1955. The Eastern Region followed in 1957. The latter did not fare very well while the former has been sustained to date, reason the South West of Nigeria is far ahead of the rest of the country educationally and by extension cum implication, economically, socially and politically.

The Federal Government adopted the free and compulsory education at the primary school level in 1976. However, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been neither free

nor compulsory as various levies and the laxity in administration have combined to keep some children out of school. The present Federal Government, realizing the critical nature of a basic education, launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme in September 2000. The new scheme is an extension of the UPE, the latter having covered to Primary Six while the former will cover to junior high school. The UBE is expected to enhance the chances of the Federal Government achieving the national goals including the social and educational goals which are people-oriented.

Nigeria – Country Briefs

Nigeria is situated on the West Coast of Africa on the shores of the Gulf of Guinea. The total land area is 923,770 square kilometers. The country came into political existence in 1914 under British administration, became politically independent in 1960 and a republic in 1963. Since independence, the country has been governed under the parliamentary system for 5 years, 3 months; under military rule for 27 months as at May 1999; and under the presidential system for 7 years, 4 months as at June 2003 (Wokocha, 2003). The current democratic experiment started in May 1999 while the current administration started in May 2003.

On demography, the census figure accepted and in use is that of 1991. The population was said to be 88.5 million people. At an average annual growth rate of 3.3% (1990-98) according to the World Bank (2000), the population was estimated at 121.3 million people by 1998. Of this, the World Bank estimates that 64% were in the age bracket 15-64 years (for purpose of determination of labour force) while Onyenike (1999) estimates that 50% of the population is under 16 years of age. The school going population may be beyond 60% since Nigerians attending schools hardly have a first degree before the age of 30 years. The official age for retirement from employment is 65 years for most public organizations.

Nigeria is classified by the World Bank (1999) in group of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as well as Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs). The Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is about $300.00. This grew at –1.7% per annum between 1997 and 1998, two of the most depressing years of the last military administration. The country is however blessed with mind-boggling wealth – from agricultural land (50% cultivable), adequate rainfall, fishing waters (rivers and seas) to crude petroleum in which she is the world's 5th largest exporter (NNPC, 2001).

With respect to education, the adult illiteracy rate was put at 49% for females and 31% for males above 15 years of age in 1997 (The World Bank, 2000). This should not be a

surprise, given that public expenditure on education stood at 6.4% of GNP in 1980 during one of the democratic administrations and declined to 0.9% in 1996 during the last administration (The World Bank, 2000). Meanwhile, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) of Nigeria has indicated that in contrast with the recommendation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that a minimum of 26% of annual budget be allocated to education, the Nigerian government has been allocating far less. Allocations actually declined from 11.12% in 1999 when the current Federal Government came to power, to 1.83% in 2003 (Fashina, 2003).

The country operates a system of 14 years of formal schooling excluding pre-primary and post-graduate work, that is, 6 years of primary, 3 years each of junior and senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education (6-3-3-4). There are variants within the system such that students can stop at the point they wish. The UBE scheme however makes it mandatory for every young person to have a minimum of 9 years of formal schooling, that is, primary to junior secondary.

Assessment – Meaning, Philosophy, Purpose and Approaches

Perhaps the most difficult issue in the concept of assessment in education is not so much the practice or the relevance as the definition. With terms such as evaluation, tests, measurement and examinations used sometimes synonymously or interchangeably, much of the literature on assessment in education is a forest of definitions some of which are practically unintelligible.

Payne (2001) streamlines the concept by stating that educational testing and measurement have a narrower focus than educational assessment because the former refer only to quantification or student responses to questions (say, in examinations) whereon scores are assigned. Assessment in his opinion involves measurement, evaluation and interpretation of data in order to make judgements about progress as well as diagnosis and prescription. Data and other information beyond scores have to be used. He therefore defines educational assessment as "the collection and interpretation of performance information relative to a defined set of student objectives" (p. 713).

Dwelling on the purpose of assessment in education, Fegbemi (2001) defines it as "a method of using a variety of tests designed for diagnosis, monitoring and evaluation" (p. 82). This definition underscores the fact that evaluation is a sub-set of assessment.

To further highlight the fine points between the terms, Husen and Postlethwaite (Eds.,1985) indicate that assessment should be reserved for application to people while

evaluation should be reserved for application to abstract entities such as programmes, curricula and organizational variables. Assessment in their opinion "covers activities included in grading (formal and informal), examining, certifying and so on" (p. 1747). Evaluation on the other hand implies a general weighing of the value or worth of something. The usefulness of evaluation is much felt in the area of comparison of programmes, curricula and organizational schemes. These however still put evaluation in the parish of assessment.

The philosophy of assessment is derived from the philosophy of education. Education should be seen from its broad perspective as an activity aimed at the development of the human potential (Wokocha, 2000). This was the thrust of the 1990 Jomtien, Thailand World Conference on Education for All. The conference co-sponsored by UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA all organs of the United Nations, and the World Bank, had an "expanded vision" of looking beyond enrolment figures, to learning outcomes and vocational training for essential skills so as to prepare young people to lead productive lives in a rapidly changing world (The World Bank, 1999).

Payne (2001) brings out the philosophy of educational assessment by linking it to the definition of education. In his opinion, "education is the process of creating changes in the cognitive, affective or psychomotor characteristics of individuals" (p. 716). The construction of assessment should thus according to Payne, be designed to measure whether the process is achieved or the objective has been met. Educational assessment should therefore aim at assisting the society in determining whether educational goals have been met or not. This is the diagnostic aspect of assessment, which should have as its concomitant, the prescriptive activity so as to improve or develop the system.

There are several approaches or methodologies to educational assessment, some reflecting the peculiar circumstances and situations of the locality. However, the two common approaches as posited by Payne (2001) are: -

(i) Criteria referenced measurement (CRM) – which is used to ascertain an individual's status with respect to a defined assessment domain (absolute interpretation).

(ii) Norm referenced measurement (NRM) – which is used to ascertain an individual's status with respect to the performance of other individuals on that measurement (relative interpretation).

It is evident from the two that assessment focuses on people rather than on abstract entities such as programmes.

Certification

The Chambers dictionary (1999) defines a certificate as "a declaration, official or formal, of some fact; a printed statement of qualification(s) or recognized professional status" (p. 267). This definition emphasizes the fact that a certificate is a formal document. Thus, a verbal statement irrespective of the status of the maker, cannot be regarded as a certificate.

When an institution grants a certificate to a student, the institution *certifies* or confirms that the holder of the document possesses the qualification stated therein and by that fact, can function or carry out certain duties or meet certain expectations in line with the level or status of the certificate. Certification is the act of certifying or granting a certificate or is an attestation to the fact that the holder of a certificate has acquired capabilities and attitudes expected of holders of such a certificate. 'Attitude' here can be extended to include character. Character training is an important component of education. Thus, during the convocation ceremonies of the University of Nigeria, it is usually stated that graduands "have been found worthy in *character* and in *learning*" to be granted the certificates of the university.

The word certification even in academic circles is sometimes used synonymously with words such as licensure and credentialing (Husen & Postlethwaite, Eds., 1984). According to Husen and Postlethwaite (Eds.), the word certification in the USA is used mainly in reference to teachers while licensure and credentialing are used in the other professions such as law, medicine, architecture and others.

To obtain a certificate, a student is expected to go through the process of acquiring knowledge or a skill in line with a defined curriculum. The process, in the formal and modern sense, is expected to terminate at a level with a qualifying examination. Elliot (1981) states that a qualifying examination certifies, for those that are successful, that the examinee has achieved a certain standard and is therefore regarded as qualified or be competent at that level either to be employed in certain jobs or to advance further in the school system.

Examination is an aspect of educational measurement. It has a history dating back to antiquity. Min and Xiuwen (1981) in Ojerinde (2001) record that examinations were conducted in China for prospective civil service employees in the 1st millennium BC. Thereafter, it developed slowly, taking the form of oral tests or *viva voce*. The University of Cambridge is said to have held written examination in the 18th century along with *viva voce*. Standard written examinations in public schools however, is traced to 1845 when the Boston School Committee in the USA used printed tests for the first time in world history. Certification according to Ojerinde is a declaration by an examination body which can assist prospective employers and higher school operators to decide whether a prospect has attained

a level of knowledge or skill that is considered necessary for performance in the absorbing establishment.

In the Nigerian society, certificates play decisive roles in employment and admissions into higher institutions. This is in spite of the misgivings about the excessive emphasis placed on certificates because of the negative impact such has on education (Obayan, 1985; Cojehs, 1994; Mkpa, 1994). Ivan Illich for instance, called for "deschooling" and canvassed for a system of "educredits" in which people are granted credits for life-long education which they 'cash' and use as the need arises rather than obtain a once and for all document (Elliot, 1980).

Maduka (1994) agrees with the "free school" model in which certification is totally abolished. He sees certification as the cause of wide-spread examination malpractices as well as the view of education as a means to the good life via a certificate. He submits, "certainly, the time has come to abolish examination and certification completely or at least turn them over to employment agencies and others who believe they need the services of those who possess certain desirable skills" (p. 174).

The Universal Basic Education Scheme (UBE) – Highlights

It has taken Nigeria nearly a quarter of a century to launch an expanded version of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the Federal Government. Whether by accident or by design, the same person who launched the UPE at Sokoto on September 6, 1976 as a military Head of State also launched the UBE at Sokoto on September 31, 1999. The principal difference between the two schemes is that of duration. The UPE terminated at the Primary School level, giving children 6 years of compulsory education free of tuition fees. The UBE goes 3 years further to terminate at the Junior Secondary School (JSS III).

The UBE has a broader vision. It embraces plans for youths who dropped out of school, life-long education and programmes for nomadic populations. The Implementation Guidelines from the Federal Ministry of Education (FRN, 2000) shows the following outline:

- Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills especially for young adults (persons aged 15 years upwards).
- Special programmes for nomadic populations
- Out-of-school, non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning.
- Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents who have not had the benefit of formal education.

At the launching of the Scheme, President Obasanjo observed that the scheme is fundamental to the future development of Nigeria. He stated:

> The new UBE is an ambitious programme, and a very costly scheme indeed. But it is the firm belief of this administration that any amount of money wisely spent on education is a legitimate investment in our future. For without a solid educational foundation, nothing else that we do could prepare this country adequately for facing up to the challenges of the coming years (p. 209).

There is no doubt that the UBE is an ambitious scheme and that it has several national implications. The fear however lies in the depth and breadth of its planning and the possibility of its implementation falling into the same Nigerian malady of great ideas, miserable carry through. Ubong (2001) has questioned the hurry in commencement (the scheme officially commenced in January 2000, barely three months after it was launched). He recommended a 3-year planning horizon. Ajayi (2000) has expressed fears on the success with respect to implementation. One hopes that the coincidence of launching dates does not extend to outcomes.

Nigeria – Education Goals and Social Goals

A country or nation is a geo-political entity with the primary aim of providing for the welfare and protection of its component regions, groups, associations and citizens. It is indeed an expansion of the city states and communities of old. Usually, the component parts are expected to share some common affinity with respect to ancestry and culture or the nation is put together by reason of geographical propinquity or political propensity. Usually, the component parts have to agree to live together for a nation to exist.

Nigeria was brought together as a nation in 1914 from groups of disparate nationalities of diverse tribes, tongues, cultures and religious persuasions. The evidently forced union has survived several political crises and even a civil war, apparently because of the role of crude petroleum.

The political, economic, social, educational, foreign policy and environmental objectives of the nation are expressed through the objectives of government as enunciated in the Federal Constitution (FRN, 1999) which is currently under review, having been put together by a military administration. Specifically, the social and educational goals (where goals and objectives are used inter-changeably in this context), are expressed in the Federal

Constitution under Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy. Social objectives are outlined in Chapter II, Section 17 while educational objectives follow in Section 18.

Social Goals – Anderson, *et al* (1991) regard the word social as relating to life in an organized community and to the welfare of persons and associations within such community. The social goals of Nigeria as stated in the Federal Constitution are geared towards maintenance of social order on the platform of the ideals of freedom, equality and justice. The government is expected to provide the right environment for all citizens to have the opportunity of securing a reasonable level of living including employment. Health, safety, family welfare, work conditions and generally, equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law are specified. How is the UBE expected to position the nation to meet such social goals?

The UBE is an educational programme. The social objectives are derived objectives. It is expected that with acquisition of a basic education every citizen should be better positioned to handle issues of health for instance. However, one of the key social indices is employment. Educated persons under the UBE scheme are expected to "acquire life skills" which should, in line with the National Policy on Education (NPE), make them self-reliant. The certificates obtained from the programme, particularly for a certificate conscious society like Nigeria, should place the graduates on a footing for employment that will ensure a minimum standard of living. The catch however, is that the UBE is expected to provide for opportunities for life-long education in that those who drop out of school at any stage could be encouraged to resume at any point in time.

Educational Goals – These are stated in the Federal Constitution in Section 18 under 3 sub-sections as follows: -

(1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

(2) Government shall promote science and technology.

(3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy.

To ensure that these goals are achieved, the constitution provides for free, compulsory and universal primary education as well as free secondary, university and adult education.

The NPE (FRN, 1998) states the national education goals as follows: -

(a) The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.

(b) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.

(c) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.

(d) The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (p. 8).

The goals which evidently emphasize national interest are derived from the national philosophy on education; to wit: -

(1) The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.

(2) The full integration of the individual into the community.

(3) The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

The philosophy in turn is derived from the national goals of Nigeria which the NPE adopted from the country's 2nd National Development Plan (1970-74). The national goals are the building of

(a) a free and democratic society

(b) a just and egalitarian society

(c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation

(d) a great and dynamic economy

(e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

Is the concept of UBE set to realize the national goals which reflect the social, educa-tional and other goals? With respect to educational goals which also affect social goals, is the content, teaching and learning, and certainly, methods of assessment and certification such that the national goals can be met? We shall return to these presently.

Nigeria – Educational Assessment and Certification Procedure

The pervasive role and impact of assessment and the collorary – certification – can be seen from the position taken by Carew and Hamman-Tukur (2001):

> The assessment of educational achievement is probably the most important event in the Nigerian educational system. It haunts the child from the day he enters a nursery school and culminates in his adulthood as oral examination for a Ph.D. It has been shaping the destiny of Nigerians and Nigeria. How it is practised is therefore of concern to every Nigerian (p. 102).

From the first day of entering school, parents, guardians, the teachers, the education authorities and the general society understand that the end product of effort is the acquisition of a certificate following a terminal examination in one form or another at a certain stage or stages. The growing child also knows this as soon as he or she reaches the right cognitive age. Competence is evidently secondary, apparently to be determined by employing organizations if and when the graduates get jobs. Carew and Hauman – Tukur believe that the Nigerian system of assessment is summative and norm-referenced, with a shift in goals of education to passing examinations and obtaining certificates. "Learning or competence has become incidental to examinations and award of certificates" (p. 104). The meeting of national educational goals is therefore suspect.

Educational assessment in Nigeria starts from the nursery school. Progress through 'transition' class into primary school is by oral examination which attracts a 'result' and in a private kindergarten, a 'graduation' ceremony with pomp and pageantry. At the end of the primary school years, the First School Leaving Certificate used to be awarded to successful examinees who sat for the external examinations conducted by Ministries of Education in the states. Grades of certificates were Pass, Merit, Credit and Distinction.

At present, states conduct common entrance examinations to 'screen' pupils for admission into secondary schools. At the Federal level, the National Examinations Council, NECO, (hitherto called National Board for Educational Measurements) organizes common entrance examinations for admission into Federal Unity (secondary) schools.

In secondary schools, aside from annual internal examinations which determine progress to higher classes (some states in Nigeria give all students 'automatic' promotion to senior classes every year), a state-wide examination is administered at the end of the 3rd year of the junior secondary school for the award of the Junior Secondary School Certificate (JSSC). At the Federal level, the examination is conducted by NECO. The JSSC marks the official termination of the UBE scheme.

For students who wish to go further, the senior secondary school lasting 3 years, terminates with an external examination conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and recently, NECO. WAEC was set up by the British colonial administration in 1952. It had the sole responsibility for conducting the SSSC examination for nearly half a century in Nigeria. WAEC covers 5 West African countries – the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

At the tertiary level, internal qualifying examinations measure progress till different levels of certificates are awarded up to the Ph.D. It is at the tertiary level that continuous assessment (CA) becomes more effective and operational.

The over-emphasis in examinations though not restricted to Nigeria, is fingered as one of the major causes of examination malpractice (Maduka, 1994; Maduabum and Maduabum, 1998). It is pertinent to point out that the colonial past might have an influence on Nigeria's pre-occupation with certification and the high incidence of examination frauds. Studies by Prof. S. Newstead on Britain and Prof. S. Davis on Britain and the United States in Fegbemi (2001) have shown strong attachment to certificates as well as high incidence of examination malpractice which makes students in Japan, Nigeria, India and Australia look like novices. Fegbemi also quotes Prof. Tunde Bajah as calling on the Ugandan National Examinations Board Test Development Staff in 1990 not to allow the "examination tail" to wag the curriculum dog. As in Nigeria, teachers in Uganda concentrate on examination syllabus in teaching, thus severely limiting the learning scope of students.

Assessment and Certification in the UBE Scheme

Specific guidelines on assessment and certification under the UBE scheme has not been articulated and made public. The thinking therefore is that the UBE will make use of the existing system. The system essentially has the following features: -

(i) Continuous Assessment (formative tests) during the school year as a component and determinant of (ii) below,

(ii) Annual assessment (summative tests) at the end of the academic year as a basis for promotion to a higher class and as a component of (iii) below,

(iii) Final or terminal assessment at a particular level (achievement tests) to determine the performance of a student as a pre-requisite for certification and progress to a high level as in primary to junior secondary; junior secondary to senior secondary and so on.

In Nigeria, diagnostic tests are hardly a feature of the system at any level. Continuous Assessment (CA) is not common below the tertiary level.

In a study by Awotunde and Ugodulunwa (2001), it was found that most teachers in Nigerian secondary schools are not familiar with the use of CA. A majority of those surveyed had not attended any workshop on the use of the tool, and worse still, there is neither a uniform operational plan on use of CA in secondary schools nor is the use of it being monitored by the educational authorities.

What may turn out to be the UBE's weakest aspect as a policy instrument is that of certification. Currently there are 2 levels at which certificates should be issued under the scheme. These are: -

- Primary six, at the end of six years of primary education. The six years do not include pre-primary as a majority of Nigerian parents cannot afford the cost because it is provided almost exclusively by private proprietors, or if by government departments, then at commercial cost.
- Junior Secondary School III at the end of 3 years of secondary education.

The Primary 6 examination leads to the award of the FSLC for pupils who stay till primary 6. The method of assessing products of primary schools in Nigeria is to a large extent now through common entrance examination conducted in states by Ministries of Education and at the Federal level by NECO. It is pertinent to emphasize that common entrance examination cannot be classified as summative evaluation. It should rather be classified as a placement test because it is aimed at securing opportunities for pupils who intend to go into secondary schools. If properly structured, it can also be regarded as an aptitude test in that pupils are expected to be "streamed" into the different types of secondary schools (grammar school, or technical school) after the examination. Many pupils sit for common entrance examination from primary five.

At the junior secondary school level, graduates are expected to be awarded the JSSC. The problem here is that to-date, the certificates are yet to be awarded. Students receive statements of results which are used as a basis for 'streaming' into different types of senior secondary schools. Again, a placement test is used as a synonym for summative test.

To compound issues, the JSSC, if it were awarded, is hardly of worth for purpose of employment which is the dream of some of the youths who would like to end their education at that point. No known scheme of service in any known organization – public or private – makes provision for recruitment of holders of the JSSC (Ubong, 2001). Nigeria has reached the stage in which "front office" staff in banks, hitherto dubbed "receptionists," are holders of at least a bachelors degree. "Cleaners" and "Messengers" must have the Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSSC) before being employed in certain organizations. Certification in the UBE therefore requires serious attention.

UBE – Assessment, Certification and National Goals

Are the national goals with reference to social and educational goals being met within the UBE scheme as currently articulated and implemented? In the first place, it is important

to state that the real first products of the UBE are expected in 2008, if year 2000 intake is regarded as the commencement group. In that situation, the impact of the scheme on social and educational goals cannot be empirically verified now. In the second place, it is important to reiterate that the commencement was hurried because of its political flavour. Proper planning was therefore not carried out.

As a concept, the assessment procedure of the scheme is faulty *ab-initio* for the basic reason that it has not been well articulated. The role of continuous assessment has not been formalized and commonized. For instance, some states such as Lagos, allow students to go to higher classes without passing examinations.

Given the level of articulation of the assessment procedures as a pre-requisite for practice, it is doubtful whether the national social goals will be met by the scheme. How could for instance, a child become self-reliant if "life skills" have not been proved to have been acquired? If the citizens are not self-reliant, how would the nation become self-reliant? If the individuals and the nation are not self-reliant, how would a dynamic economy be established whereon would be built the principles of democracy, egalitarianism, strength and bright opportunities?

Nor are the educational goals likely to be met through the UBE scheme. National consciousness and national unity are not being encouraged in the UBE by way of multi-ethnic schooling. In the unity schools, a majority of the students are from the locality or state of location because of the 'catchment area' principle.

The UBE does not appear to be inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for survival of the individual and the nation. Firstly, the idea of mass promotion to higher classes in some states does not foster the spirit of hard work and healthy competition among peers as well as a sense of personal achievement. One however must agree that absence of a useful qualification may make further education more attractive.

The social goal of *adequate* opportunity to secure *suitable* employment is interesting. Firstly, employment in Nigeria pre-supposes a qualification. UBE does not appear as at now, to provide the suitable qualification for employment even at a very low level. Secondly, adequate opportunity means availability of jobs. This is not the case, as there are a lot of unemployed graduates of tertiary institutions who would be ready to accept jobs below their qualification. Persons with low qualifications have difficulty securing jobs other than blue collar ones. Thirdly, the word suitable likely implies level of qualification instead of socio-economic welfare. Being a Cleaner may be what is suitable for the holder of JSSC but it may not meet the social, economic and psychological needs of the individual.

Recommendations

The UBE is a crucial programme given the fact that basic education is very important in the lives of individuals and nations, for as Campbell (1964) in Maduewesi (1998) observes, the *leading* nations are the *reading* nations. For the UBE scheme to meet the national social and educational goals, the orientation on assessment and certification has to be reviewed. The following are recommended: -

(1) The primary school level is basically introductory. The content reflects the cognitive level of the pupils and is such that not much life skills can be inculcated so as to position the pupils for self-reliance in adulthood. An acceptable certificate is therefore needed at that level. For purpose of employment, the grade of employment should be such that a minimum descent level of living can be ensured. It is pertinent to emphasize that some children are not intellectually equipped for higher education. The situation becomes more poignant in a country where multiple intelligence activities are virtually non-existent.

(2) Controlling assessment at the junior secondary school level is a desideratum. There is need for uniformity with allowance for local peculiarities as for example, cultural and religious biases. The idea of automatic promotion in primary and secondary schools should as a matter of policy, be discontinued.

(3) UBE has to go beyond political rhetoric and policy articulation on paper only. The aspect of life-long education and provision for school drop-outs need to be properly articulated and implemented. An illiteracy rate of 31% for males and 49% for females in 1997 (The World Bank, 2000) is too high for a resource – rich country hoping to make an impact in the world of the 21st century. Nigeria's illiteracy rate is above the average of 30% and 47% for males and females respectively, for low-income countries of which the country is one.

(4) In the long-term, in all, there is the need to place less emphasis on certificates as the pedestal for launching the individual into the world of economic and social bliss. There should be more emphasis on vocational training at the primary and junior secondary levels.

Conclusion

The Universal Basic Education Scheme in Nigeria in the opinion of the Federal Government holds the key to the future development of the youth population and the country in general. It has several features which distinguish it from its antecedent – the Universal Primary Education Scheme.

Two of the key features include the development of life skills as well as life-long education. The programme is expected to enhance the chances of the country meeting her social and educational goals as enshrined in the Federal Constitution. In spite of the false start, particularly, the inadequacy in planning, poor articulation of the assessment and certification, it is expected that the programme will position the country for a good play in the world of the 21st century, socially, politically and economically. However, there is the critical need for further planning and proper implementation particularly in the areas of assessment and certification.

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