

Financing Universal Basic Education in Junior Secondary Level and Its Impact on Nigeria's Economic Development

Augustine Ele Asor, Chinonyerem E. Asor and Edward Bassey Ele

Abstract

Education undoubtedly is a priority sector in every well-meaning society since it is the most fundamental tool for development and growth. In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced in 1999 to ensure that children of school age have access to basic education. This study investigates how the UBE programme has fared in enhancing schooling in the junior secondary schools (JSS). With a sample size of 130, the questionnaire was the instrument used to generate data which was analysed by the use of the mean and rank statistics. The paper reveals that a lot still has to be done in terms of infrastructure noting that schooling in the Junior Secondary level is not still universal after all. It recommends among other things that the government should increase the funding of the programme.

Keywords: Education, Development, Infrastructure, Funding, UBE.

Introduction

There is no doubt that education is a priority sector in every well-meaning society as it is the most important tool for development in all modern economies. Ochoyi and Danladi (2010) asserted that education is generally concerned with transmission of worthwhile values such as skills, knowledge and planned activities that can develop learners' potentials for national development. Fabunmi (2014) stated that basic education can be viewed as fundamental education or formation education or bottom line education upon which every other education whether formal, informal or non-formal can be built and without which any educational structure erected will have chances of success. In Nigeria, Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a fundamental component of her educational policy, designed to provide free and compulsory education for all children at the primary and junior secondary school levels. The program, established through the UBE Act of 2004, aims to eliminate illiteracy, enhance skill acquisition, and foster national development by ensuring equitable access to quality education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Despite its noble objectives, the financing of UBE, particularly at the junior secondary school level, remains a significant challenge due to inadequate funding, mismanagement of resources, and disparities in allocation across states (Okeke & Eze, 2020). The effectiveness of UBE financing directly influences enrollment rates, retention, and the quality of education, which in turn has far-reaching implications for Nigeria's economic development.

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Investing in universal basic education therefore is critical for sustainable economic growth, as it equips the youth with essential skills needed for productivity and innovation. According to the World Bank (2018), every additional year of schooling can increase an individual's earnings by up to 10%, thereby contributing to poverty reduction and economic diversification. In Nigeria, where a significant proportion of the population is under 18 years old, ensuring adequate financing for junior secondary education can help harness the demographic dividend by creating a skilled labor force capable of driving industrialization and technological advancement (Adeyemi & Akpotu, 2019).

The essence of education according to the Nigerian National policy on Education (2004) is for the following:

- a. To develop an individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen.
- b. To integrate the individual in the immediate community, the Nigerian Society and the world at large
- c. To inculcate in the individual national consciousness, unity and values
- d. To develop for the individual appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities/competencies and empowerment to live in and contribute positively to society.

In view of the above, there is a need to make basic education compulsory if the nation hopes to reduce illiteracy, underdevelopment, ignorance and poverty while energizing and speeding the pace of national development, political awareness and national cohesion. However, insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, and teacher shortages continue to hinder the program's success, limiting its potential impact on national development (Obioma & Salau, 2021).

This paper examines the financing mechanisms of Universal Basic Education at the junior secondary school level and evaluates its impact on Nigeria's economic development.

The work would be guided by the following research questions

- a. Has financing UBE in Junior Secondary improved infrastructure?
- b. Are the teachers in the UBE schools well trained and qualified?
- c. Has financing the UBE programme tackled the issue of dropouts in Junior Secondary Schools?

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004

The Universal Basic Education bill was an executive sponsored Bill sent to the National Assembly to give a legal backing to the Universal Basic Education (FRN 2004). The 1st and 2nd reading of the Bill were on 26th and 27th August, 2003 respectively and the 3rd reading was on 28th August, 2003, the Bill was passed into law by both houses of the National Assembly on 28th August, 2003. The president Olusegun Obasanjo, signed the Bill into law on 12th May, 2004 the Bill according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2003) seeks:

To provide a compulsory, free Universal Basic Education (UBE) for all Children of primary and Junior Secondary School age, it further seeks to provide punishment for parents for failing to comply with its provisions”.

The new legal status of the scheme according to Iheonunekwu, and Nkemakolam, (2006) has the following far reaching implications.

- Its policy objectives aim to provide universal free and compulsory education at the primary and the first three years of secondary school and to provide functional literacy for adult illiterates.
- Universal Basic Education (UBE) has now become everybody's obligation including governments, civil society, and organized private sector, the formal and informal sector, Parents Teachers Association, students and parliamentarians.
- The problem of poverty being an impediment to schooling has been eliminated.
- There are sanctions for parents who failed to send their children and wards to school.
- UBE is inclusive education since it embraces both the formal and the non-formal settings.

UBE in Nigeria

Preece (2006) submitted that education is a proven contributor in the reduction of poverty level and with the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration in May 1999, the belief is that development of the country will be accelerated because of the intrinsic value in education.

The UBE scheme was brought up to improve on the shortcomings of the universal primary education (UPE) of the 1970s which ironically was also introduced by the same Olusegun Obasanjo as military head of state. The Federal Ministry of Education (1999) came up with specific objectives for the scheme; these are

- a. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- b. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying solid foundation for lifelong learning.
- c. Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- d. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop outs from the formal school system (through relevance, quality and efficiency) and
- e. Providing free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.

According to Fabunmi (2014), the program was developed as a response to the level of consciousness and general education of the populace. The large population of the disadvantaged groups, the rural community, the girl child, the nomadic, the disabled, the almajiri and the crisis of boys dropping out were all taken into consideration when the UBE scheme was introduced. Also taken into consideration were the issues of facilities and infrastructure to make the school environment learner friendly thereby recognizing the freedom of teachers and school administrators.

The UBE is conceived to be tuition free from the primary to the secondary level which Ukeje (1991) likened to the first nation-wide tuition free primary education scheme launched in September 8th 1979. The rationale being that it is a prerequisite for the equalization of educational opportunities across the country.

To emphasize the need of the UBE, Obanya (2000) threw light on the international and national antecedents of the scheme drawing attention to the following:

- a. The 1948 universal declaration on human rights which stressed the right of every one to education with special reference to basic education
- b. The establishment of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was a fallout from an international conference on the educational crisis in Paris in 1968.
- c. The Jomtien (1990) world conference on education seeking a universal precise definition of basic education.
- d. The Ouagadougou (1992) declaration on the education of girls and women.
- e. Recife (Brazil) declaration on the pursuit of the New Delhi (1991) goals on massive reduction of illiteracy.
- f. Social development summit Copenhagen (1996)
- g. The Beijing conference on women and development (1997)
- h. The Dakar (2000) recommendation on the pursuit of Jomtien goals.
- i. OAU decade of education (1997-2006).

However, from all the international context the most important lesson from the Jomtien goals of 1990 which came up with a declaration and framework of action on education for all (EFA) presenting basic education in the following words:

- a. Basic education is that groundwork level that underscores literacy, innumeracy, basic life skills and most fundamentally learning-to-learn skills.
- b. Basic education is a process and not a package
- c. Basic education is a question of skills acquisition and not a question of years of formal education.
- d. Basic education de-emphasizes drop outs and repetition while placing much importance on learning.

UBE and the Junior Secondary Schools (JSS)

Basic education worldwide is the platform for sustainable development and lifelong learning which is intended to provide essential skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. In Nigeria, the basic education covers primary, junior secondary and non-formal education (Adu 2018).

The junior secondary education involves three years of schooling after six years of primary education. It entails junior secondary (JS) 1, 2 and 3 which makes the UBE culminate in a 9 years of uninterrupted schooling whereby transition from one class to another is automatic through assessed through continuous

assessment (CA). The junior secondary education is quite fundamental because the three years involved is used for grooming the students towards different careers. The potentials of the students are identified and are being tailored towards that direction. Those who show interests in the sciences, engineering and technology are identified, some who can excel in the social sciences, arts and humanities are also fished out while those who show traits in the vocational are equally given tutelage.

Economic Development

The concept of economic development in itself is broad-based and multi-dimensional in nature. According to Kene (2017), economic development means a qualitative change in what or how goods and services are produced through shifts in resource use, production methods, workforce skills, technology, information, or financial arrangements. Thus, development involves a process of economic, political and social change in a progressive direction towards a better social wellbeing for the members of the society (Okobiah and AbdulRaheem, 2018).

It is generally argued that economic development increases the capacity of a nation's economy to create wealth for local residents. For this reason, development depends upon the development of a nation's building blocks such as labour, financial capital, facilities and equipment, know-how, land, other physical resources such as public and private infrastructures (Kene, 2017). Chambers (2020) views economic development as shifting from ill-being to well-being. From the foregone definition of economic development, it is clear that the process of economic development involves growth and other social, cultural

Basic Education and Economic Development

Economic development means different things to different authors, on the bright side, anything a nation does to foster and create a healthy economy can fall under the auspices of economic development. It is the process by which the economic well-being and quality of life of a nation is improved according to targeted goals and objectives (Preece, 2016)

Todaro and Smith (2011) emphasized that education is a basic objective of development; it is an important end to itself. They stressed that education is essential for a satisfying and rewarding life and is fundamental to the broader notion of expanded human capabilities that lie at the heart of the meaning of development.

For a developing nation like Nigeria, education plays a key role in the ability to absorb modern technology and to develop the capacity for self-sustaining growth and development. Thus education is a vital component of growth and development- as input to the aggregate production function. This input role gives education its central importance in economic development. Basic education all over the world is the bedrock for sustainable development because it equips our young people with attitudes and skills like literacy, numeracy and ICT required to sustain our future economic and social development. It is this functional education according to Ali (2012), which will lead to the production of food for the people, create jobs, provide services and lead to an enduring democracy.

The output derived from the education industry shows clearly that the school is knowledge which is desired for the economic improvement it brings to people who have it by way of access to jobs and entrepreneurship. The UBE policy is that there will be free education at the primary school level and first three years of

secondary, but it seems only the primary education is somehow tuition free while fees are still being paid in the junior secondary section. The basic requirement here is to expand classroom space annually to cope with expected students' enrollment, employ and train more staff, etc. these government activities as stressed by Ibe (2012) no doubt play a key role in economic development.

Challenges of the UBE in Nigeria

- a. Inadequate Funding: The funding of the programme is abysmal as noted by the UBE planning and implementation document (Nigeria 2000) which pointed out that the sum of five million dollars estimated for the renovation of existing structures and building new ones has not been disbursed. The implication is dilapidated structures and ill equipped facilities.
- b. Insufficient/Inaccurate Data: Whereas insufficient data looms, our population figures are so politicized as attested by Dare, Onekata and Auwal (2000). This means accessing reliable data for educational planning would be difficult.
- c. Insufficient and Incompetent Teachers: Insufficient teachers mean that a teacher is assigned to more than sixty students whereas the UBE scheme recommended at most forty pupils to a teacher. Lack of training by the government also question the competency of most of the teachers.
- d. Poor Motivation of Teachers: The teaching profession is most relegated to the background in Nigeria. Salaries are not paid as at when due, arrears kept piling and hardly are there incentives for motivation.
- e. Lack of Monitoring/Evaluation: There is no visible activity from the body set to monitor the scheme since its inception in 1999. In this case what the programme is set to achieve and/or whether it has been well implemented cannot be ascertained. Therefore the benefits of the scheme and what should be done to improve and sustain the programme is lacking.

Methodology

The area of study for this work is Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State and the population of study is all the teachers in the government secondary schools in the metropolis. A random sampling technique was used and thirteen teachers were picked at random from ten secondary schools to make a sample size of one hundred of thirty (130). The measuring instrument used by the researchers for this study was the four-point Likert-type questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; section 'A' had to do with respondents' personal information while section 'B' is a nine item four point Likert-type questionnaire.

The data collected was analyzed using mean and rank order statistics. To arrive at a criterion or cut off mean, the weighted options were added up as follows:

SA + A + D + SD; where SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, SD = strongly Disagreed, D = Disagreed.

Which is $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10/4$

= 2.5

Therefore the 2.5 is the criterion mean score. Any item whose mean score falls from 2.5 and above is accepted while the item whose mean score falls below 2.5 is rejected.

Results and Findings

In the presentation of results for this work, the data were represented in the three research questions with the tables.

Research Question 1

Has the financing of UBE in Junior Secondary improved infrastructure?

Table 1 Mean and Rank Order Scores of Respondents' opinions on financing and infrastructure N = 130, X = Mean.								
S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Rank	Remarks
1	UBE funds have been properly utilized	10	12	53	55	1.82	1 st	Disagreed
2	The school authority divert UBE funds for other purposes	6	10	30	84	1.52	3 rd	Disagreed
3	UBE funds has helped in building more structures and renovating old ones	8	15	43	64	1.74	2 nd	Disagreed

Source: Authors' computation

From Table 1 above, the mean scores of 1.82, 1.52 and 1.74 all fall below the 2.5 criterion mean score; this implies that respondents disagreed on all the items. That is: UBE funds have been properly utilized, the school authority diverted UBE funds; and UBE funds have helped in building more structures and renovating old ones.

Research Question 2

Are the teachers in the UBE schools well trained and qualified?

Table 2 Mean and Rank of Teachers' response on how qualified the teachers in the UBE schools are, N = 130, X = Mean.								
S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Rank	Remarks
1	Teachers are employed based on personal relationship and not based on professionalism	10	12	28	80	1.63	1 st	Disagreed
2	Teachers are being employed for the purpose of the programme	5	15	30	80	1.57	3 rd	Disagreed
3	Teachers are trained periodically	10	10	33	77	1.59	2 nd	Disagreed

Source: Authors' computation

From Table 2 above; all the mean scores fall below the 2.5 criterion mark which imply that the respondents disagreed with all the items that state: Teachers are employed based on personal relationship and not based on professionalism. Teachers are being employed for the programme and teachers are trained periodically.

Research Question 3

Has the UBE program tackled the issue of dropouts in junior secondary schools?

Table 3		Mean and Rank order of teachers' response on the UBE programme tackling the issue of dropouts in junior secondary schools						
S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Rank	Remarks
1	The teacher-student ratio is low	60	18	25	27	2.85	1 st	Agreed
2	There is increase in students' enrollment	8	18	33	71	1.71	3 rd	Disagreed
3	Truancy has declined	17	12	42	59	1.90	2 nd	Disagreed

Source: Authors' computation

From the table above the high mean score of 2.85 is above the criterion of 2.5 and therefore means that the respondents agreed that teacher-student ratio is low. On the other hand the mean scores of 1.71 and

1.90 fall below the 2.5 criterion implying that respondents disagree that there is increase in students' enrollment; they also disagreed that truancy has declined.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Countries all over the world seek and desire development in all ramifications and to achieve this, the human resources must be developed through education. The launching of the UBE in Nigeria was to provide a qualitative basic education for all children of school age from primary to junior secondary level.

Although the scheme was conceived to be tuition free, there are cases where the junior secondary level still pays fees (UNESCO 2005), this put a serious question mark on the universality of the programme amidst severe under funding by the government. Nevertheless, if the programme is well implemented and funded appropriately the country will begin to experience a steady economic development and growth. It is against this backdrop that the following recommendations are made.

- The Government Should Increase The Funding Of The Scheme And Adhere To The UNESCO's Standard Of 28% Budgetary Allocation To Education
- The Various States UBE Boards Should Be More Proactive And Seek Assistance From Foreign Partners Like World Bank, UNICEF, Etc. In The Areas Of Story/Text Books And ICT Facilities
- The Government Should Ensure Strict Adherence To The Universality Of The Programme By Ensuring That It Is Completely Tuition Free; Especially In The Junior Secondary Level.

- d. More Classrooms And Desks Should Be Provided And The Issue Of The High Teacher-Student Ratio Be Addressed By Employing More Competent Teachers.
- e. Salaries, Promotions, Trainings And Incentives Of Teachers Should Not Be Toyed With So As To Motivate The Teachers Adequately
- f. Corruption Should Be Tackled Head On So That The Little Funds Allocated To The UBE Would Not Be Embezzled Or Diverted For Other Uses.
- g. School Challenges Like Sports, Debates And Quiz Competitions Should Be Awakened; This Would Create Competitiveness Amongst The Students And Increase Their Zeal To Learn.
- h. There Should Be A Proper Monitoring Of The Programme So As To Ensure That The Goals Of The Scheme Are Not Derailed.

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